

Task and Finish Group on Participation in the Arts in Wales

Inquiry into Participation in the Arts in Wales

Response from Head for Arts

1. What organisation do you represent?

Head for Arts

2. Which groups of people participate in your organisation's arts activities?

People living in Heads of the Valleys East, particularly from CF areas, areas where there is low participation in the arts, people of all ages and with disadvantaged groups (eg. NEETs, economically inactive)

3. Do you think that budget changes have affected participation in the arts, either positively or negatively?

We have welcomed WG support of the arts via the Arts Council of Wales and we realise that in many ways we are luckier than our colleagues in England. However, we have all felt the effect of the reduction of lottery funding to the arts over the past few years and hope that the situation will improve after the Olympics. The recession has meant that less participants are able to contribute towards sustaining arts activities meaning that we have to find alternative ways of finding ways of addressing this. Most of our participatory projects have to fit in with other overarching agendas so we have had to become adept at devising work that fulfils many different agendas and deliver a range of non-arts outcomes that all have to be properly monitored and measured. This takes up a lot of time so means that we can't run as many participatory arts projects as we might like to.

4. Do you think that certain groups of people have been affected more than others?

Funding is more readily available for the "difficult to reach groups" as long as it delivers specific outcomes, it's sometimes really hard to fund participatory arts activities for people when there is no other agenda. People with low incomes certainly can't afford to travel far for activities and need things to be locally based.

5. Are there gaps in provision for people to participate in arts activities, either demographically or geographically?

Head for Arts was set up to address gaps in provision. There are lots of areas where it is really difficult to find suitable venues where the arts activities people

want can take place – eg. trying to find a community dance venue in North Torfaen (that isn't a school).

6. Are there enough funding sources available other than the Arts Council for Wales? Are alternative funding sources accessible?

ACW is definitely our main funding source. We can sometimes persuade other agencies to fund us, but usually only if the arts activities help deliver specific non-arts related outcomes. We have to do a lot of ducking and diving and persuading. It's always much easier to get capital funding when the real need is for revenue funding. Equipment is only useful when there are skilled amateurs using it and engaging participants. We see lots of expensive equipment in communities that is never used. HOV/HARPS funding is a good example of this. There are some amazing arts practitioners that could do some fantastic projects for relatively little money – and much of this needs very little in the way of equipment. Eg. we have dance mats but we need dance tutors!

7. What role does the voluntary arts sector play in promoting participation in the arts in Wales and how can this be supported?

The voluntary arts sector is particularly active in areas of multiple deprivation like Merthyr Tydfil but though laudable, the quality of work is often poor. It's difficult to persuade someone to pay a professional practitioner when there's a willing volunteer who "knows a bit". We only employ highly experienced community arts practitioners, often finding ways of getting them to work alongside volunteer tutors to help raise the quality – and demonstrate the difference that it can make having someone who really knows what they are doing. The availability of revenue funding as well as capital from HOV would help this enormously.

8. Is the strategic relationship between the Welsh Government and the bodies that distribute arts funding effective in increasing participation?

With the shift in emphasis towards outcomes-based projects we sometimes have to be extremely selective about which clients we can work with (each, Reach the Heights, targeting "NEETs"). This means that we are now working with less participants than we did three years ago. We sometimes have to turn potential participants away because they don't fit the profile of the target group (too old, too young, too "engaged" or they have already been included in a previous project so can't be registered again). The revenue funding agreement we have with ACW is very clear about ensuring that arts activities are made accessible to all, but sometimes the funding streams we work to don't allow us to be as accessible as we would wish. The current emphasis is on working more intensively on sustained projects with specific client groups so that outcomes are delivered, rather than increasing participation generally.

9. All public bodies in Wales will have published a strategic equality plan by April 2012. Do you think that these new public sector equality duties will help to increase participation in the arts among under-represented groups in Wales?

They may help to increase participation from certain groups but often these groups are quite small, so it could mean a decrease in overall participation figures. This is fine as long as arts organisations delivering these projects don't feel they will be penalised because they have targeted priority groups.