

## Background

Aberystwyth Arts Centre, a department of Aberystwyth University is recognised as a 'national flagship for the arts'. It presents a vibrant and ambitious artistic programme, both producing and presenting, across all art forms including drama, dance, music, visual arts, applied arts, film, new media, and community arts.

The 900 seat concert hall was opened in 1970, and the 300 seat theatre was added in 1972. Throughout the 80s and 90s the organisation put down strong roots, and gradually developed its facilities. The artistic programme developed with renowned companies and artists touring to the Centre. The exhibition programme in particular has become recognised internationally for its high standard and specialism in contemporary work, especially for contemporary ceramics. Exhibitions from the Centre regularly tour to galleries throughout the U.K. and also to Europe. The innovative Community Arts and Education programme was established in the 1984, initially in the visual arts and then developed to encompass all art forms as the Arts Centre strove to encourage people to discover a passion for the arts. A wide range of arts festivals have also been established across all the art forms as a key part of the Arts Centre's arts development strategy.

In order to house the rapidly developing artistic programme, a substantial £4.3 million award winning redevelopment was completed in April 2000 supported by the Arts Council of Wales Lottery and Aberystwyth University funding. This added purpose built workshop spaces, a 125 seat cinema, dance studios, studio theatre and a new Grade 1 gallery and photo gallery. This development underlined and greatly extended the Centre's role as the major regional arts centre for Mid and West Wales.

Key achievement in recent years have included:

- Growth of the Arts Centre in to a busy and vibrant cultural hub with over 700,000 attenders a year for the artistic programme of performances, exhibitions, film, festivals and community arts across all art forms.
- Development of the Centre's drama production capacity with new regular mid scale touring productions serving the main theatre network of Wales and large scale musical productions of the highest standard attracting audiences of over 10,000.
- Development of one of the most comprehensive and ambitious community arts and participation programmes in the U.K with over 90,000 attenders each year.
- A challenging and wide ranging exhibitions programme now attracting over 200,000 visitors a year.
- A double award winning 16 Creative studio complex home to artists, filmmakers, arts development agencies, publishers and new business and also home to a new major Artists in Residence programme for UK and international visual artists.
- Arts Centre contributes £10.65 million annually towards the Welsh economy up from £5.5 million in 2005 over the last five years. It also supports 175 jobs, making it a major player in the creative industry sector. For every £1 of public subsidy, over £10 of economic impact it generated by the Centre.

I attached a link to our annual report is attached

<http://issuu.com/aberystwytharts/docs/2007-2008?mode=embed&documentId=081218104235-b59627b81d884c76ba5db080fcb55393&layout=grey>

## What we'd like from you - consultation questions

1. Do you consider the Welsh Government to have achieved its commitment of ensuring that 'high-quality cultural experiences are available to all people, irrespective of where they live or their background?' How effective has its investment in arts and cultural activities been in realising this objective?

The development of arts provision across Wales has improved immeasurably over the last 15 years. There has been a major improvement of physical facilities, revitalising the network of theatres arts centres and galleries, many originally built in the 1970 's as well as adding a number of new key centres. The result is that within a reasonable travelling distance almost everyone has the opportunity to experience the arts, whether theatre, exhibitions or music.

The other area of improvement has been much more modest . Many of the arts facilities that have been improved or are newly built, operate on inadequate funding and because of that their cultural programmes represent a series of compromises in trying to achieve high standards. The funding in the physical infrastructure improvements was an excellent investment but the full value of that has been substantially impaired by the lack of investment in the operation of those theatres, arts centres and galleries . It is like building an excellent rugby stadium and asking the players to play without boots and with one hand tied behind their backs, making the chances of winning and achieving high standards of performance rather difficult. The modest investment of schemes such as the Arts Outside Cardiff scheme give an indication of the potential that could be achieved in quality of programme and collaboration and cooperation on innovative and exciting artistic projects.

2. How exactly are arts and cultural venues – including museums, libraries and archives – actively promoting access, attracting new audiences and encouraging participation in line with the One Wales commitment and the Arts Council's strategies?

Aberystwyth Arts Centre believes that offering a wide ranging and engaging cultural programme with a relevance to people's lives and experiences is the best way to attract new audiences and encourage participation. The arts venues need to make every visit to the theatre, gallery, museum or concert a positive and rewarding one. That is very much about the quality of programme, the welcome offered especially to first time visitors so they feel part of what they see or participate in and placing the customer, whatever age, at the centre of the experience. Making cultural centres the vibrant heart of communities needs to be mirrored by also taking the arts and cultural experience into the communities and reaching out whether in schools, parks, day centres and the high street. An integral part of the widening of participation and involvement in the arts and culture is the use of all the modern techniques of marketing including online ticketing, website, print, social networking, mailing lists and e-

flyers. Encouraging attendance can also be through targeting groups who for a variety of reasons would find it difficult to attend, whether because of finances, rural isolation or transport difficulties.. Offering a fully accessible physical environment is also vital as is making the cultural programme accessible through signed performances, hearing loops and other means of opening the experience to all.

With over 200,000 to our programme of exhibitions, 90,000 to one of the most comprehensive community arts programmes in the U.K. and over 100,000 to the performing arts programme Aberystwyth Arts Centre like other key cultural centres in Wales actively delivers the Assembly and Arts Council strategies and brings enriching and rewarding experiences to the communities of Wales.

3. Is the current network of arts and cultural venues in Wales sufficient, and are there any geographic or other issues that continue to act as barriers to participation (eg in rural areas or areas of deprivation)?

There is an excellent network of arts and cultural centres in Wales and it is the lack of sufficient financial support for their effective operation that is the single biggest obstacle to their ability deliver the quality and range of cultural programme that their communities deserve.

4. What will be the impact of the Arts Council's Investment Review on the network of venues and cultural activities that take place across Wales? Do you consider that the Arts Council's decision to discontinue funding to 32 organisations, as a result of the Investment Review, will have a significant impact on the accessibility of cultural venues or activities? Does a concentration of funding avoid it being spread too thinly, and achieving little?

The decision to undertake a review of the arts sector in Wales was necessary to be able to make informed judgements about those organisation that are best suited to delivering the arts in Wales particularly in the current difficult economic environment. The model of funding fewer better has been discussed for many years and it is to the credit of the Arts Council that they recognised the reality of accepting that principle given that there was insufficient funds for it to adequately fund its existing portfolio.

Any impact of the reduction in arts organisation numbers will be more than made up for by the empowerment of the retained arts organisations and mark a more focused, more effective and more strategic approach to the arts in Wales.

5. The Welsh Government will not be announcing the Arts Council's budget for 2011-2012 until December 2010. What impact do you believe a reduction in the Arts Council's budget would have on the accessibility of arts and cultural activities in Wales?

Any reduction in arts funding would have a devastating effect on a sector already substantially under funded. It would attack the key issues of quality of artistic aspiration which is at the heart of a nations' view of itself, accessibility in all its many manifestations and squander the far-sighted strategic investment in the arts infrastructure over the last 15 years.

6. Do you have any concerns about the variation in range and quality of local authority cultural services and activities provided across Wales? Are local authorities adequately resourced to consistently fund and support cultural activities in the current economic climate?

Some local authorities do an excellent job in delivering ambitious and inclusive arts provisions, some do not take that role seriously. Some benchmarking of what should be considered to be an appropriate level of support for the arts would be very valuable in a strategic review of the arts in Wales. In the current climate it is unlikely that arts support will be maintained by local authorities and even efficiency savings will not mask the substantial reduction in accessibility of the arts to communities across Wales.

Recognition should also made of other significant funders of the arts in Wales. In Aberystwyth's case there is considerable support from the University. Across Wales other universities are similarly supporting and developing art provision not just for their own use but also as part of their responsibility to serve their regional community.

7. The Arts Council of Wales's 2008 [Omnibus Survey](#) suggested that people who were professionals, qualified or involved in non-manual work were more likely to attend an art event than those who were Skilled or semi-skilled manual workers, and non-working people. Is this consistent with your own experiences? Can you provide an explanation for this variation, and how can this variation be addressed?

The arts need to be an integral part of everyone's life and that needs to start at the earliest age. Our own experience at Aberystwyth Arts Centre is that an active and enjoyable experience of the arts and the breaking down of perceive barriers is key. Arts activity is available for babies and toddlers upwards through our Clwb 123 and from then to a whole range of arts activities. This engagement by children and often through the children, parents also become involved, means that their pattern for life is established and they will become active and willing participants in the arts for life and pass that love of the arts onto their children. Young children are open and honest in their approach to new experiences and challenges and this more difficult as patterns of behaviour become fixed. Investment in the arts for the young and also very young is investing not only in the present but also in the future.

8. The Arts Council of Wales's 2008 [Omnibus Survey](#) suggested that younger adults were more likely to attend an arts event than older adults. Is this consistent with your own experiences? Can you provide an explanation for this variation, and how can this variation be addressed?

Our experience is that younger adult are more likely to attend arts events than older adults. This is partly because the Arts Centre offers such a wide ranging and exciting experience of the arts because we believe it is vital for the future of the Arts in Wales that we do so.

9. The Arts Council of Wales's 2008 [Omnibus Survey](#) suggested that females were more likely to attend an arts event than males. Is this consistent with your own experiences? Can you provide an explanation for this variation, and how can this variation be addressed?

According to statistics this is our experience in Aberystwyth but we have not undertaken research at present as to why that is the case.

10. The Arts Council of Wales's 2008 [Omnibus Survey](#) suggested that Welsh Language Speakers were more likely to directly participate in the arts than non Welsh Language Speakers. Is this consistent with your own experiences? Can you provide an explanation for this variation, and how can this variation be addressed?

According to statistics this is our experience in Aberystwyth but we have not undertaken research at present as to why that is the case.

11. Are you aware of any other significant variations in the public's attendance and participation in the arts and cultural activities (for example based on ethnic background, disabilities, location in an urban or rural area)?

No

12. Are there any further comments you'd like to make about the accessibility of arts and cultural activities in Wales?

No

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