

## **Communities and Culture Committee**

### **Inquiry into the Accessibility of Arts and Cultural Activities in Wales**

#### Response from Clwyd Theatr Cymru

Clwyd Theatr Cymru. Led by Terry Hands since 1997, Clwyd Theatr Cymru (CTC) is the largest producing arts complex in Wales. At its heart is a world-class drama company staging eight productions each year, some of which tour, mostly within Wales. This is augmented by a programme of visiting drama, dance, classical music, comedy and family shows in our two theatres and other performance spaces. CTC has a full-time studio cinema, three galleries, several function rooms hosting many community activities, bars and a restaurant. We have a lively education department which delivers an extensive programme of weekly workshops and summer schools as well as an expanding social-inclusion programme. Clwyd Theatr Cymru is also home to a separately-funded Theatre for Young People.

In 2009-10, 195,268 people bought tickets for 1,912 events but many more, (for which we do not have figures), visited our galleries, attended conferences and community classes or made use of the restaurants and bars for meetings and social gatherings.

CTC is wholly owned by Flintshire County Council (FCC) and its gross annual turnover is around £5m. FCC provide 22% of this and 34% comes from the Arts Council of Wales (ACW). The remaining 44% is generated by CTC, mostly from ticket sales.

CTC tours many of its productions to the Welsh mid-scale circuit of theatres with annual residencies in Cardiff and Swansea, as well as occasional visits to London and New York – to showcase the best of Welsh new writing, for example Jonathan Lichtenstein's *Memory* in 2007, and Hywel John's *Pieces* in 2010.

The New Plays Initiative at CTC exists to bring brand new plays to our audiences locally, nationally and internationally, to promote the work of new and established playwrights, to be a beacon for Welsh playwrights and to develop new audiences for a wide range of work.

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?

Schemes such as the Welsh Assembly Government's *Arts Outside Cardiff* scheme (AOC) have been instrumental in realising this objective. AOC was announced by

the Arts Minister in 2003 (it came onstream in 2005) and was designed to complement the work of Cardiff's soon-to-open Wales Millennium Centre. It would "enable people across Wales to gain enhanced access to high quality performing arts which reflect the scale and ambition of the programmes offered at WMC".

CTC applied in 2006 to use AOC to part-fund our New Plays Initiative, allowing us to commission additional work from new and established Welsh writers and present them to our audiences. AOC funding has enabled us to commission 11 new plays, 5 of which have resulted in productions (*Memory* by Jonathan Lichtenstein, *Two Princes* by Meredydd Barker, *A History of Falling Things* by James Graham, *Pieces* by Hywel John and *Blackthorn* by Gary Owen) with a further 4 in pre-production. The New Writing Initiative has also included a number of stand-alone development projects, for example 'Write to Rock' aimed at a younger audience – and 'The Aeroplanes Project'. In the latter, WAG money helped lever important first-time sponsorship from a key local and national industry, thus making CTC's AOC grant more cost-effective and reach a wider audience. AOC funding has enabled CTC to enhance our relationships both with Welsh writers and Welsh audiences.

The Welsh Assembly Government has further enabled wide-ranging access to cultural experiences through their funding of ACW's client portfolio. A major building-based revenue client, CTC has a wide catchment area and our patron data for performances in Mold shows that we present a range of arts experiences to a large population. We believe our audience figures demonstrate that we provide good value for money in terms of number of audience members per pound of subsidy. In 2009-10, the total countable audience (ie not including visitors to our art galleries, and other non-ticketed events) was 195,268 people, attending 1,912 performances, screenings and participatory workshops. The figures have been broadly constant across the last three years.

Additionally, we promote a number of access schemes as a result of WAG funding: examples include our Teen Tickets (£1 tickets to all CTC performances for 13–19 year olds); Pay What You Can Nights (£1 for under-30s to selected performances) and the Theatre Shuttle Bus (see below for details).

The map on the following page (p3) shows CTC's Catchment Area, taken from the most recent Audiences Wales *The Knowledge* report (2010), which includes patron data for the period 2003-10.

# Clwyd Theatr Cymru 2009/10 Secondary Catchment Area



Clwyd Theatr Cymru Bookers 2009/10	Drive Time	Flintshire
500 to 1,000	120 Mins	Boundary
250 to 500	90 Mins	
100 to 250	60 Mins	
50 to 100	30 Mins	
10 to 50		
5 to 10		
1 to 5		

In our touring work, we extend our immediate catchment area to include other venues in Wales and beyond. In the last three years we have toured seven productions (*A Toy Epic*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *Memory*, *Great Expectations*, *Noises Off*, *The Glass Menagerie* and *To Kill a Mockingbird*) and visited the following theatres:

Aberystwyth Arts Centre (five times)  
Grand Theatre, Swansea  
New Theatre, Cardiff (three times)  
Sherman Cymru (four times)  
Theatr Brycheiniog (four times)  
Theatr Gwynedd (twice)  
Theatr Hafren (twice)  
Torch Theatre (four times)

Bath Theatre Royal  
Liverpool Playhouse  
Pleasance Theatre, London  
E59E Theatre, New York City

The Welsh Assembly Government directly funded Clwyd Theatr Cymru's Mobile Theatre from Autumn 2004, starting with our production of *Brassed Off*. The Mobile Theatre is CTC's most effective strategy for reaching audiences which are normally barred from accessing theatre, whether by reasons of geography, social deprivation or cultural factors. When the Mobile Theatre tours, we build an entire theatre – including raked seating for 200-250 – stage, set, lighting rig, dressing room accommodation and front-of-house environment – in a leisure centre or sports hall, allowing unparalleled access for community audiences. Not all towns in Wales have a theatre, but most have a leisure centre. The Mobile Theatre has often been erected in high school sports halls to ensure that we play at the heart of the community.

**Bringing the best to the most – yn dod â'r gorau i'r genedl** CTC toured six productions in the Mobile between 1998 and 2006 with the help of unprecedented levels of sponsorship from the private sector – along with support from ACW and Flintshire County Council. Because it involved the community in every step of the process of building and running a theatre, and because it entailed a week-long stay in each venue, with six performances, talkbacks, workshops and other outreach/community activities, the Mobile was an ideal way of bringing theatre to people and allowing real audience development to happen in a way that is impossible in a one- or two-night stand in a mid-scale venue. We consider that CTC's Mobile Theatre has been the best and most effective way of carrying out *the Welsh Government's commitment of ensuring that 'high-quality cultural experiences are available to all people, irrespective of where they live or their background* (quoted from Question 1, above)

Key facts and figures about the effect that WAG funding has had, enabling access to such cultural experiences in CTC's Mobile Theatre, can be found on the next page (p5).

## **The CTC Mobile Theatre, 1998-2006 – Key Facts and Figures**

- Six full-scale high-quality theatre productions, using mostly Welsh and Wales-based artists, performed to 23,144 people;
- Presented drama in areas without good access to theatre – either for geographical or social/economic reasons;
- Delivered integrated education and outreach work to 11,293 young people and community members;
- Award-winning partnership between the Welsh Assembly Government, commercial sponsors, local authorities and ACW – effectively making WAG subsidy go further;
- Since Autumn 2004, WAG funding enabled 12 tour weeks, 64 performances, situated in 8 Communities First areas, and serving a further 11;
- 10% of audience described themselves having a disability\*;
- 20% attend arts events once a year or less often\*;
- Low ticket prices (£7/£5) and specially-targeted reduced-rate community ticket schemes, child/school tickets at £3 (42% of normal price) and two-for-the-price-of-one reductions to Communities First residents.

\*source: Audience Profiling Research, Audiences Wales, May 2006

Key to ACW's strategy for ensuring a nationwide spread of drama has been its subsidy of the mid-scale venue circuit. Audiences at these venues suffer because not enough national quality touring work visits them – audiences get out of the habit of attending drama. There is a marked discrepancy between the audience numbers that CTC regularly attracts to productions in our theatres in Mold, and the much lower numbers attending the same productions on tour in the mid-scale venues.

ACW's complementary strategy of concentrating subsidy on non-theatre-based companies (for example Theatr Genedlaethol, National Dance Company of Wales, National Theatre Wales and the Welsh National Opera) means that national-remit companies have to rely on the contingencies of touring to the mid-scale venues.

CTC has argued that the subsidy would be more effectively spent supporting the companies directly and/or installing them in the theatres.

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?

### ***Promoting Access***

As an organisation CTC is committed to increasing our audience by attracting new attenders, tempting back previous visitors and ensuring excellent access for all.

**Physical access** CTC offers comprehensive facilities for people with disabilities, including wheelchair spaces, lifts access to all levels, level access to backstage areas, induction loops, lowered counters at box office and bar, &c. We continuously improve the amenities for people with mobility impairment, people who are Deaf or hard of hearing and blind or partially-sighted people. We regularly caption performances using Stagertext captions and provide audio description. We provide Touch Tours and offer various facilities to make the booking process easier for people with disabilities, including booking by Minicom, fax, website and email. We offer concessionary ticket prices on all shows. Our brochure is produced in large print, Braille and audio formats.

**Access initiatives** We run a variety of activities and initiatives to ensure and encourage access for all, including weekly workshops directly targeted at young people with disabilities, an extensive social inclusion programme and our Teen Tickets (£1 tickets for 13–19 year olds).

**Transport** We participate in a theatre shuttle bus scheme with Flintshire, which provides audience members living in hard-to-reach places with easy and cheap transport to and from the theatre.

**Welsh language** We are committed to a bilingual Wales. All Front of House signage is bilingual as is all generic information in our print. Our website is fully bilingual and we developing a fully bilingual brochure.

**Market research** We regularly undertake market research to enable us to analyse and understand our audience's use of the organisation and increase the effectiveness of subsidy by increasing ticket sales, participation and use of the building.

### ***Attracting New Audiences and Developing Participation***

**New writing** Our New Writing Initiative provides particular challenges because audiences are less keen to take risks with the unknown – and because we are attempting to attract new attenders to new plays. Custom-made strategies include workshops and discussion groups with our New Plays Director and interviews with directors and cast on the web. A new kind of new writing event, *Write to Rock*, involved writers working with musicians, with a view to opening up new plays and the theatre building to a much younger audience.

**Community** Since our Mobile Theatre tours, we have established good links with the nearby Community First areas, which has led to increased attendance from those postcodes, with current sales of nearly 6,500 tickets per annum. Our social inclusion programme for socially and economically deprived areas and groups - young people leaving care, homeless people, single mothers, &c – has resulted both in workshop participation and attendance at shows at the theatre. We continually work to encourage greater community use of the building.

**Welsh Language Audience** We have been steadily building our Welsh language audience following the success of *Porth y Byddar*, a co-production with Theatr Genedlaethol Cymru in 2007, using a mix of programming and direct marketing. This has been effective, with an 80% increase in audiences for Welsh language productions over the last two years.

**Young people and family audiences** We have actively programmed more family work since 2009, which has more than doubled this audience sector – we are now building on this success to ensure this is sustained and developed.

**Dance audiences** Through our close partnership with Rambert Dance Company, we have developed a campaign to increase audiences for dance. A range of activities including telemarketing to schools and a postcard campaign meant that Rambert's 2009 and 2010 weeks sold 88% and 83% respectively. This has also impacted on audiences for National Dance Company Wales.

**New technology** CTC recognises the significance of e-marketing and web-based tools. We are integrating new technology whilst recognising the importance of our traditional print-based marketing tools and website. We are integrating SMS, Twitter, Facebook, YouTube &c into our marketing strategies.

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)?

Geography - A Network of Cultural Venues. It is important, especially in Wales with its diffuse population and mountainous geography, to balance the need for a national network of arts centres within reasonable drivetimes, with the need to

concentrate resources in centres of excellence. The network of mid-scale venues, developed in the 1970s, was an attempt to resolve this dilemma. Perhaps a more productive approach would be to strengthen the network of artists and theatre companies in Wales. We envisage that a network of venues run by resident companies – both dance and theatre practitioners – would function more dynamically and with a stronger orientation towards their audiences.

**Cultural Barriers.** We believe that cultural factors – giving rise to the idea that “theatre is not for me” – are more decisive than geographical or price issues. Again, the Mobile Theatre is a proven method of overcoming this cultural reluctance to participate, as is shown in the feedback that we collected and published after all six Mobile Theatre tours. A few examples:

Bob Baines, Chester Ave. Communities First, Kinmel Bay: For many this was the first time that they had seen a production other than perhaps the local panto, and they found the experience very powerful. A wide age range was able to attend due to the support package.

Alison Davies, Company Stage Manager (from CTC’s nightly Show Report from Pillgwenly Millennium Centre, Newport): We let in about 12 local kids in this evening, for a pound each... Not having been to a theatre before they were restless and the cast were distracted, but on the plus side they came out saying it was “wicked”.

Mike Hornby, Leisure Services, Flintshire County Council: We know full well as operators of the Sports Centre that many people in the audiences were users of the facility who would not have been to a theatre previously. These new attenders not only returned to the Mobile Theatre production each year and grew in number but also it is known that local residents attended the main Theatre in Mold in much larger numbers than in previous years.

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?

It’s too early to tell what will be the effect of the Investment Review, because ACW’s financial settlement from WAG is still pending. It was necessary for ACW to reduce its client base, and we hope that focussing the clients will allow them to function more dynamically. We hope that now ACW has approved the Business Plans of the remaining organisations, they will be able to mount a more vigorous defence of their strengthened and concentrated client base.

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?

Reducing ACW’s budget will have a negative impact on the accessibility of arts and cultural activities in Wales, although the extent of the impact depends on the size of the cuts. In any case, the audience would be the loser. Subsidy is for the



audience, not for arts organisations. Reducing arts subsidy ultimately affects ticket prices which affects access to the arts.

There would also be a considerable economic impact. Prof. Dominic Shellard from Sheffield University was commissioned by Arts Council England to compile a report on the economic impact of UK arts organisations on their localities. An Economic Impact Study of UK Theatre, published in 2004, is considered the standard work in the field. According to the economic impact formula contained in this report, with an annual ACW grant of £1.5 million, CTC contributes £12.8 million annually to the local economy.

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?

It is a grave concern that local authorities do not have a mandatory responsibility for Arts provision. Local authorities are not adequately resourced to fund and support cultural activities – they don't see Arts & Culture as their primary responsibility, and they have limited experience of running Arts organisations. There is also variation in the amount per capita that local authorities spend on the Arts. There are examples of Arts organisations and venues in Wales which have struggled and even closed because they fell between the two stools of ACW and local authority funding.

We would however like to put on record our gratitude to Flintshire for their staunch and faithful support of Clwyd Theatr Cymru over the years, particularly since 1997.

7. ACW'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 fifth report commissioned in 2010 by CTC from Audiences Wales/The Knowledge (covering 2003-2010) shows that attendance to the theatre is broadly in line with the demographic makeup of the surrounding region, which is to be expected and follows trends across the UK. The three main Mosaic types for CTC's bookers for all arts events are: 'Small Time Business' (7%), 'Close to Retirement' (7%) and 'Affluent Blue Collar' (6%). We believe that this last figure is a successful achievement in light of the Omnibus Survey. Further, analysis of the report shows that 3.9% of all households booking for events at CTC during 2009-10 are from Communities First areas. 45% of all bookers were first-time bookers.

We attempt to increase attendance at CTC events for all groups by undertaking research to understand our audiences and their preferences, by specifically-targeted marketing, strategic ticket offers and by providing a programme of events which is widely accessible to all.

8. ACW'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?

A wide range of ages attend CTC, but there is a preponderance of relatively comfortable people in middle-age, and a strong core of pensioners, which is contrary to the Omnibus Survey's findings. This will be partly because of our location, with good access from Cheshire and the Wirral, and partly because of the programme we offer – CTC is known for producing classic and contemporary plays – a 'mainstream' programme, attractive to this demographic. We energetically target young people and new attenders of all ages for CTC's own productions and visiting companies. The fact that our audience data shows new attenders at 45% of our total attendance suggests that we are addressing this.

9. ACW'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?

We don't collect patron data about the gender of bookers, but would note that women often attend in same-sex groups (ie with friends and daughters) as well as attending in mixed-sex groups; whereas men often attend in mixed, family or couple groups (except perhaps to see comedy, music and spoken-word events). It is also noticeable – but not statistically verified – that women tend to make the booking for a mixed group, so may appear to be over-represented. Modern methods of ticket sales and communication (on the web, by email, by services over mobile networks) are gender-neutral – ie, we don't know (nor should we care) the gender of the purchaser/attender.

10. ACW'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?

We don't collect data as to whether individual members of our audience speak Welsh, English or any other language. The question refers to 'participation in the arts' – attending and competing in Eisteddfodau is encouraged in Welsh-speaking schools and families, which may account for the difference detected here.

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)?

We make great efforts to enable access for people with disabilities, providing Stagetext-captioned performances, induction loop systems, audio described performances, Touch Tours, a Minicom number at the Box Office, soft subtitling in our cinema, wheelchair spaces in all auditoria and good access to facilities – front-of-house and backstage. All levels in the theatre complex are accessible by lift and we have increased the number of designated toilets and provided low-level access to the Box Office and the bar. There are designated parking spaces and a wheelchair entrance and ramp. CTC's quarterly brochure is available in Large

Print, Braille and Audio versions and we produce a bilingual brochure outlining our facilities for people with disabilities.

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

Government subsidy of the Arts is not for the artist, or the arts manager, or the arts organisation – it is for the people. Subsidy of the Arts enables arts organisations to charge less at the box office than the work costs to produce. Greater subsidy means cheaper tickets – and consequently greater access for the public.