

Pre-appointment hearing

The preferred candidate for Chair of the Arts Council of Wales

March 2023

1. Introduction

Pre-appointment hearings

1. Welsh Ministers make a range of public appointments across all aspects of public life. These appointments are high profile and offer the opportunity to shape and inform many of the public services accessed by the people of Wales. Welsh Ministers must make regulated public appointments in accordance with the principles set out in the **Governance Code on Public Appointments**. The **Commissioner for Public Appointments** is responsible for providing independent assurance that appointments comply with the Code.
2. Welsh Ministers and the Senedd have agreed to introduce pre-appointment scrutiny by Senedd committees of certain public appointments which are of significant public interest or which will have a significant impact on the public. The aim is to further improve the scrutiny and transparency of the public appointment making process. Pre-appointment scrutiny generally takes the form of a public pre-appointment hearing with the preferred candidate. For appointments to these agreed roles, it is for the relevant committee to decide whether or not it wishes to carry out a pre-appointment hearing.



3. A list of ministerial appointments that may be subject to pre-appointment hearings has been approved by the Welsh Government, and will be reviewed regularly. The Chair of the Arts Council of Wales is included on that list.

Chair of the Arts Council of Wales

4. The Arts Council of Wales was established by Royal Charter in 1994. The Arts Council funded largely by grant in aid from the Welsh Government. It is also a registered charity subject to Charity Law and is one of the four Lottery Distributors in Wales. The Council's aims as set out in its Royal Charter are:

- a. to develop and improve the knowledge, understanding and practice of the arts;
- b. to increase the accessibility of the arts to the public in Wales;
- c. to advise and co-operate with the Welsh Government and relevant bodies; and
- d. to carry out the objects through the medium of both the English and Welsh languages.

5. The Chair is accountable to Welsh Government Minister(s) and may also be held to account by Senedd Cymru / Welsh Parliament. Communications between the Council and the Minister must, in the normal course of business, be conducted through the Chair. The Chair must ensure other Council members are kept informed of all such communications. The Chair is responsible for ensuring the Council's policies and actions support the Minister's wider strategic policies, and the Body's affairs are conducted with probity. Where appropriate, the Chair must make arrangements to communicate and disseminate these policies and actions throughout the Body.

6. The Arts Council of Wales has a **corporate plan** which runs from 2018-2023.

7. Detailed information on the role, along with the person specification for the role, is available in the information pack **that was published for job applicants** in November 2022.

2. The recruitment process

8. The role of Chair of the Arts Council of Wales was advertised on both the Welsh Government and the Cabinet Office websites between 14 November 2022 and 3 January 2023. The closing date for receipt of applications was extended

from 12 December 2022 to 3 January 2023 to generate a greater number of applications.

9. The vacancy was promoted by through the Arts Council's social media channels and website. In addition, the Welsh Government circulated details of the appointment through stakeholder lists held by the Public Bodies Unit (PBU) and posted the vacancy on the Welsh Government public appointments website and the UK Cabinet Office website.

10. The vacancy was promoted by the following social media channels and advertised through the media listed below:

- Safle Swyddi
- Golwg 360
- Diversity Jobsite Network
- Fish4jobs (JobsWales)
- Guardian
- Arts Professional
- Arts Jobs

11. Members of the Assessment Advisory Panel were:

- Jason Thomas - Director of Arts, Culture, Sport and Tourism Welsh Government
- Helgard Krause - Chief Executive, Books Council of Wales
- Aaqil Ahmed – Senior Independent Panel Member

12. A total of 15 applications for the new role were received. The sift meeting took place on 19 January 2023. Six candidates were recommended for interview although two withdrew their applications prior to the interviews taking place. A session with stakeholders was held between 9 and 10 February 2023 where candidates were asked to prepare to share personal thoughts on a topic (maximum 10 minutes), and then facilitate the discussion. Interviews took place on 14 February 2023. The Assessment Advisory Panel considered there to be two appointable candidates.

3. The Welsh Government's preferred candidate

13. The Deputy Minister for Arts and Sport, and Chief Whip's preferred candidate for the position of Chair of the Arts Council of Wales is Margaret (Maggie) Russell.

14. It should be noted that on application, a conflict of interest was declared by the preferred candidate. Maggie Russell declared her husband, Dr. Aled Eirug, is chair of Coleg Cymraeg, the Welsh medium higher and further education body and her daughter, Holly Kalo, works as an administrator for the IRIS LGBTQ film festival. The Assessment Advisory Panel considered this declaration presented no conflict of interest.

15. Maggie Russell has over 35 years' experience at all levels of the arts, cultural heritage and creative industries in a Welsh, UK, and international context. She's previously been Head of Drama and a member of the BBC Wales senior management team, where she also held such roles as Head of Talent, Chair of The Training Committee, and Head of On Screen Diversity. Margaret has also worked extensively as a producer and executive producer on a number of programmes including Keeping Faith, Pobol y Cwm, Belonging, and High Hopes. Maggie graduated from Warwick University in 1984 with a degree in Theatre Studies and more recently (2012) completed a Post Graduate Professional training as a Psychotherapist.

4. The pre-appointment hearing

Before the hearing

16. In advance of the pre-appointment hearing, the Welsh Government's PBU provided the Committee with a **briefing** summarising the recruitment process and setting out **diversity data** of the candidates who applied for the post, and a copy of the **information pack** that was provided to candidates who applied for the post. The preferred candidate's application form, CV and personal statement was also shared privately with the Committee.

17. The Committee asked the preferred candidate to complete a **short questionnaire** in advance of the hearing to inform Members' questioning.

The hearing

18. The hearing took place on Tuesday 14 March 2022. The preferred candidate was asked a range of questions about how she intends to fulfil the role of Chair of the Arts Council of Wales. These questions explored in further detail the information provided in her written questionnaire, and covered matters including:

- her motivation for applying for the role of Chair of the Arts Council of Wales;
- her knowledge and experience;
- measuring the success of her future work as Chair of the Arts Council of Wales;
- the role's independence from the Welsh Government and scrutiny.

19. A full transcript of the hearing is available online.¹

5. The Committee's view

20. In line with the **guidance on pre-appointment hearings** agreed between the Welsh Government and the Senedd, the Committee's role is to set out its views on the suitability of the Welsh Government's preferred candidate.

21. We were impressed with Maggie Russell's obvious passion for the arts and culture in Wales, especially her enthusiasm for arts in disadvantaged areas. The job description states that the Chair of the Arts Council of Wales is accountable to the Welsh Government Minister(s) and can also be held to account by the Welsh Parliament / Welsh Parliament. This includes being held to account by this Committee. Therefore, we were, somewhat surprised by her lack of knowledge regarding the Committee's structures and working arrangements. However, Maggie's honesty in this matter and willingness to learn was welcomed.

22. Based on her written answers to the Committee's questionnaire and her responses during the pre-appointment hearing, we see no reason that Maggie Russell should not be appointed as Chair of the Arts Council of Wales.

¹ Record of Proceedings: Culture, Communications, Welsh Language, Sport, and International Relations Committee – 14 March 2023

23. Subject to the appointment of the preferred candidate by the Deputy Minister for the Arts and Sport, and Chief Whip, we look forward to inviting the proposed Chair to attend a future Committee meeting as part of the ongoing programme of scrutiny of statutory commissioners and public bodies that fall within our remit.

24. Finally, we were disappointed there was only one application from someone from a minority ethnic background. We've previously raised concerns regarding diversity in public appointments in our **report** on the appointment of the Chair of Sport Wales. In its **response** to that report, the Welsh Government acknowledged that more needs to be done to improve diversity across all public appointments in Wales, and that work was ongoing with its Public Bodies Unit to achieve this. We would implore the Welsh Government to revisit this promptly and provide an update on how it intends to improve diversity in public appointments in Wales.

25. We will also be sharing our report with the Senedd's Public Accounts and Public Administration Committee to inform its **inquiry** into Public Appointments.

Recommendation 1. The Committee recommends that the Welsh Government urgently revisits what it can do improve the ethnic diversity of candidates for public appointments in Wales and provide an update to the Committee as soon as possible.