

Communities and Culture Committee

Inquiry into the Accessibility of Arts and Cultural Activities in Wales

Response from Federation of Museums and Art Galleries of Wales

The Federation of Museums and Art Galleries of Wales is the strategic body for museum and art gallery professionals in Wales, advocating for the highest standards of museum provision throughout Wales. We represent all types of museums – National, local authority, university and independent, - and their staff whether paid or volunteer. The Federation promotes good practice in museums and galleries and provides support, advice and a forum for discussion of museum issues affecting members.

The Federation would be willing to discuss its response with the committee.

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?

Museums in Wales are committed to providing high quality experiences and thus have a major role to play in contributing to the Welsh Government’s agenda. Investment to achieve this goal is provided via a number of funding schemes available to museums from CyMAL. These include Sharing Treasures as well as Innovation and Development grants.

Museums have been disadvantaged as there is no capital programme to support them, unlike libraries, perhaps because museums are a non statutory service. The introduction of the Cultural Legislative Competency Order may begin to change this. Museum infrastructures struggle to keep up. Museums need this capital investment as they are not a priority for local authorities (in general) due to their non statutory nature, and independent museums have very limited funding. But despite the lack of investment museums do give good service and widen cultural experiences. However many WAG programmes, such as the

Children and Young People's plan 2011-14, which museums try to link with, do not have any indications of funding for the museum sector.

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?

Free entry to the National Museum sites is a key indicator of the Welsh Assembly Government's commitment to museums, and certainly has widened access at National Museum venues. However whilst this is a blessing for the National Museum it can be a barrier for other museums that still have to charge to survive - understandably the public do not distinguish between the different museums. The Welsh Assembly Government does not support free entry outside of the National Museum. Current reductions in funding may mean more museums will introduce charges which will lead to fewer visitors especially locals (evidence from museums that have had to introduce charges).

Museums strive to attract new audiences and there are some good examples of how they have done this but projects are often limited in scope and almost entirely time limited. For example Pontypool Museum and Cyfarthfa Castle Museum are involved in recently announced HLF Community Heritage initiatives to extend their reach into the community. There is no revenue funding support for such activities in museums, unlike the arts.

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 (e.g. in rural areas or areas of deprivation)?

Existing museums struggle financially. Adding more is not an option. Most people can access a museum locally. Any investment must be in what already exists and not in any new museums – this policy should be mandatory for all funders – WAG, HLF, EU, and Rural Development Agencies etc.

The geography of Wales does make it difficult for people to meet professionally and to foster meaningful partnerships outside a limited area.

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?

Two museums - Rhayader and Newport - have lost their Arts Council revenue funding solely on the grounds, seemingly, that they are 'museums'. Yet museums provide a bridge (and much innovative work) between heritage and the arts. Withdrawing such funding makes the whole arts/culture/ heritage sector more divisive. It appears that there is no joined up thinking. Perhaps the Arts Council should reconsider. It is stifling innovation, abandoning cross sector work and means limiting new audiences not expanding them.

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 (such as the examples above) will inevitably impact on accessibility. This applies both to ACW revenue funding and also to ACW project grants that are available to museums to extend their audiences and reach.

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?

Museum provision has always been patchy and unequal - 2 local authorities have no museum provision at all and others are retrenching. Museums have slipped down the hierarchy of local authorities which has contributed to this decline. It is essential that the Cultural LCO is taken forward as a matter of urgency to give a degree of protection to all cultural services - otherwise they could be the subject of disproportionate cuts.

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?

We note the difference quoted within the report but feel that given the relatively small margins this research does not provide sufficient evidence of a problem at this stage.

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?

The experience of museums varies with different venues attracting different audiences. However, in very general terms the experience of museums is that they attract their largest audiences in the following groups: school age children, families with children and older adults. Museums are working to attract hard to reach groups such as younger adults although much of this work is funded on a short term programme basis and the gains may be lost if funding is reduced. There are some good examples of such inclusion work at Newport Museum and Art Gallery but this only has time limited funding. The 'On Common Ground' project run by the National Museum at a number of sites across Wales engaged with young adults outside the museum context, but this too has finished.

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?

As noted above the experience in museums varies from venue to venue. No one venue can expect to 'tick all' of the diversity boxes. The provision of a rich and varied sector across the whole of Wales can serve multiple audiences. This provision of over 80 non-national museums has been well supported by CyMAL with a mixture of funding, training, advice and work on standards. Whilst the Federation believes the OMNIBUS research raises interesting questions and suggests the need for further research, in practice, it is the priority of museums within a local authority, and the maintenance of the role of CyMAL, that will contribute most to encouraging cultural participation across the breadth of the Welsh people.

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?

The cultural tradition, as reflected in Eisteddfodau, means it is embedded within the Welsh speaking community. Ways should be found to extend this across all communities.

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)?

There are probably big variations across all cultural activities but different groups, ages, ethnicity means this will always be the case. We must concentrate in getting people, whoever they are, involved without being hamstrung by targets.

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

Accessibility will be affected with reductions in funding. However any changes to the current infrastructure must be done strategically and not piecemeal. There is a need for consultation and research across all cultural sectors.

We are disappointed that the role of museums is not appreciated in this consultation – is it an arts consultation or across all cultural activities? The term heritage is not used but this can be a big draw to access cultural activities. There is no mention of the economic value of culture / museums, which play an important part within the tourism sector.

The recently launched Museum Strategy for Wales includes much to encourage accessibility. However the abolition of the Museums Libraries and Archives Council (MLA) in 2012 could have a serious impact on Welsh museums, unless the consequences for Wales are identified quickly and acted upon.

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