

Communities and Culture Committee

Inquiry into the Accessibility of Arts and Cultural Activities in Wales

Response from Arts Connect (local authority partners)

This response to the Communities and Culture Committee call for evidence on access to the arts is being submitted collectively by the Arts/Cultural Services within the following local authorities:

- Blaenau Gwent CBC
- Bridgend CBC
- Caerphilly CBC
- Merthyr CBC
- Monmouthshire CBC
- Rhondda Cynon Taf CBC
- Torfaen CBC
- Vale of Glamorgan CBC

These local authority partners have been working together since 2008, on a change management programme known as **Arts Connect** and which is supported by WAG *Making the Connections* programme, the WLGA and the Arts Council of Wales. The purpose of Arts Connect, which is led by RCT CBC, is to explore the options for local authority arts services to work collaboratively in order to deliver more effective and efficient arts services for the people of the South Wales Valleys, Monmouthshire and the Vale of Glamorgan.

It is to be noted that the net local authority **arts** service budgets within Arts Connect, as an allocation of each local authority's overall budget, is currently £3.6m. External funding, including from ACW, as well as other Council services' resources, is secured in addition to this.

1. Is the investment provided by WAG for arts and culture effective in ensuring cultural experiences for all?

1.1. If by "**investment provided by WAG for arts and culture**" we mean primarily the resources which are given to Arts Council of Wales for distribution across Wales, then yes, it is effective.

1.1.1. As local authority arts service officers we are aware that ACW, as the organisation best placed to effectively distribute this investment, currently funds a range of arts activity across the whole of Wales. These ACW funded arts experiences are provided for individuals and communities at a local level

including those living within C1st areas, by both locally based arts organisations and by national arts organisations. This happens through their community and outreach programmes, as well as on a regional/national basis for local people and visitors alike.

1.1.2. Within the Arts Connect partners ACW funding is currently awarded to a number of our local authority managed and operated theatres and associated participatory arts programmes, including:

- the Beaufort Theatre and Ballroom managed by Blaenau Gwent CBC and the Blackwood Miners' Institute managed by Caerphilly CBC, although this revenue funding will come to an end for both of these theatres in March 2011 and will need to be replaced from other sources in order to ensure the accessibility of high quality artistic product in these South Wales Valleys areas.
- *RCT Theatres*, managed by RCT CBC and consisting of the Coliseum Theatre in Aberdare, the Muni Arts Centre in Pontypridd and the Park & Dare Theatre in Treorchy and which will continue to receive revenue funding during 2011./12 onwards as part of the proposed new portfolio of revenue clients, although the level of that funding is not yet confirmed.
- the *TakepART* participatory arts programme in RCT which builds audiences for the RCT Theatres' programme and introduces local people to new arts experiences both within theatres and community settings
- *Head for Arts*, the new community arts organisation in the Heads of the Valleys area which receives WAG funding via ACW and is managed by Blaenau Gwent CBC, albeit at arms length.

1.1.3. Although Torfaen CBC does not currently receive any direct funding from the Arts Council for art provision or the venues in its area, Llantarnam Grange Arts Centre, a separate independent charity funded by the TCBC Leisure & Culture Team, is in receipt of ACW revenue funding for textile/craft based gallery and arts education work.

1.1.4. It is unfortunate that ACW investment is not currently spread across all of the partner authorities in the Arts Connect region, as outside the Valleys areas, funding is particularly poor. For example, in the Vale of Glamorgan, very little Arts Council funding is currently available to promote arts and culture locally.

1.1.5. ACW revenue funding also currently goes to a number of 3rd sector arts organisations within the Arts Connect area, for example:

- Valley and Vale - Bridgend
- Spectacle Theatre, Valleys Kids and RCT Community Arts – RCT.

(RCT Community Arts is a separate independent charity not connected to, although funded by, RCT CBC Cultural Services to deliver a community arts contract for the Council).

1.1.6. In addition ACW project funds a number of community based arts activities, including those delivered by specific Communities First partnerships, schools and youth groups. Accessibility of arts and culture is integral to local community regeneration and the arts experiences provided at a very local level and range from visual arts projects to carnivals/festivals for example Porth Carnival delivered by SWICA on behalf of a number of RCT Communities First partnerships.

1.1.7. There are also other *non-arts* specific WAG budgets that go towards arts provision indirectly. The C1st Directorate previously part funded the Objective One sponsored *Creative Communities* programme in Rhondda Cynon Taf which led to local people living in C1st areas accessing arts and cultural activity in their local area. Within Arts Connect there is a proposal to roll out the current Head for Arts programme (as described above) to cover the majority of the Arts Connect area by accessing the C1st Outcomes Fund. This expanded provision would be known as Head for Arts Plus (H4A+).

1.1.8. The HoV programme has funded arts activity even though, other than being generically mentioned in the Turning Heads strategy, there is no specific arts policy/strategy within the HoV programme. It is to be noted that there is a HoV Public art Group which has produced a Public Art Strategy for HOV and drawn down funds from HoV to contribute to public art works sited in the development region. However the constraints are single financial year allocations, which make this process less effective than it could be.

1.1.9. In addition WAG funding was awarded through HOV to the 'V-Factor' arts education workshops for the performing arts which were delivered across the Arts Connect area as after-school activity and culminated in regional showcases.

1.1.10. There are also other WAG departments that indirectly fund the arts – the Wanless funding has previously been used within the Valleys for arts activity with young people in order to raise health standards and the Cymorth funding, distributed by the Children and Young People's Partnerships within the Arts Connect area, is used to commission arts activity with targeted groups of young people up to the age of 25.

For example –

- RCT Cultural Services is currently commissioned by *Fframwaith*, the Children and Young People's Partnership for RCT. to deliver a Youth Arts and related Youth Music Industry programme (branded as SONIG for ease of recognition by young people). These programmes encourage personal development, involvement in the community, healthier lifestyles develop pathways into the creative industries.

- In Blaenau Gwent it is used to deliver a junior youth theatre and to fund a boys' literacy project, building skills and confidence in both cases.
- In Torfaen, the same health/arts related funding was used to create a music project aimed at educating young people about sexual health, pregnancy and drug abuse.

1.2. In order to say if WAG investment effectively ensures **“cultural experiences for all”** it could be said that a local theatre is there to serve everyone in the locality, as well as visitors, with theatre programmes planned that are of relevance to local people as well as raising aspirations and broadening tastes.

1.2.1. However, from April 2011 a number of the smaller theatres in the Arts Connect area will no longer receive their existing ACW investment and alternative funding will need to be secured to ensure that high quality product can continue to be delivered locally.

1.2.2. There is also ACW supported provision in community arts participatory activity e.g. through Valley and Vale in Bridgend; Head for Arts in Blaenau Gwent, Merthyr Tydfil and the Northern end of Caerphilly and Torfaen; RCT Community Arts and Valleys Kids in RCT CBC, where there is delivery at a very local level.

1.2.3. It could also be argued that by investing in public art commissioning that WAG through the HoV programme and the ACW, as distributors of arts funding, is ensuring that we are all able to enjoy high quality artworks in visible and accessible places in our local communities, town centres and major highways.

1.2.4. HOV funding has also enabled capital funding for buildings such as Blaenavon Workingmen's Hall in Torfaen which is in the process of developing a more cultural programme of events.

1.2.5. Investment by WAG to local authority programmes such as Community Focused Schooling (and the E3+ programme of extra curricular activities, including the arts, in RCT) and funding through the 14-19 Learning Pathways is also used to ensure cultural experiences within the Arts Connect area. Within RCT the local authority arts officers have established a 14-19 Creative and Cultural Industries (CCI) Action Plan in partnership with other services and Careers Wales in order to effectively commission CCI work with young people.

2. How do arts and cultural venues (including museums, archives and libraries) promote access, attract new audiences and encourage participation?

2.1. Within the Arts Connect partner authorities our theatres and Arts Development officer teams “*promote access, attract new audiences and encourage participation*” in the following ways:

- Specific ticket offers e.g. *Early Bird* offers, group discounts, workshop/ticket packages for groups wishing to work with certain professional arts companies and discounted tickets for regular attendees
- Programming events in theatres that are relevant to local people and yet also raise aspirations and widen horizons
- Consulting with customers to create participatory opportunities that meet need e.g. *Daytime Delights* daytime programming - including the delivery of a designated Afternoon provision targeted at older adults, including matinee performances of our most popular live programming. (linking to the Older Adults strategy development)
- Family-friendly programming offered across a number of our theatres and aimed at customers with young families
- Programming for disabled customers working with specialist companies such as Hi-Jinx
- Involving loyal customers in specific activity such as performance premieres and script-in-hand readings
- Newsletters for regular attendees subscribing to e.g. the Blues Club in Blaenau Gwent
- Welsh language provision and support for Welsh learners to access such provision through workshops, synopses and bilingual programmes
- Signed performances for adults and also children and their families e.g. Pantomime
- Providing professional platforms for voluntary art organisations – for example choirs
- Providing professional platforms for school performances
- Professionally marketing our theatres and their programmes through widely distributed print, an on-line presence (including on-line ticketing) and an ongoing planned media relationship
- Using many different ways of publicising events and activities so as to be as inclusive as possible – through web-sites and including Facebook and Twitter and text messaging for younger audiences
- Delivery of specific Youth Arts and a Youth Music Industry programme for children and young people aged 8 – 25 years, which is supported by the Children and Young Peoples Partnership: Fframwaith, in RCT and in particular promotes access to the arts with target groups, including young offenders, looked after children and disabled young people.
- Establishing holistic approaches to youth arts through the development of Youth Arts Strategic Partnerships in Blaenau Gwent and RCT (set up with investment from ACW)
- Contracting local community arts organisations, such as RCT Community Arts, Valley and Vale, to promote access to the arts at a

very local level, including working with target groups for example older people and disabled adults.

- Contracting 3rd sector businesses, such as Push 4 Ltd, to raise awareness of and promote bespoke industry standard access to the creative and cultural industries sector.
- Supporting and promoting the ACW *Night Out* community touring scheme, enabling professional productions to be performed within local communities.
- Collaboratively working with the Live Music Now scheme, promoting access to classical music within residential, day care, and special school settings.
- Promoting access to literature via the South Wales Valleys Literature Development Initiative, working in partnership with the Academi
- Promoting access to dance via the Valleys Dance Initiative, set up in partnership with Community Dance Wales
- Working with the Live Music Now Wales scheme to offer classical music performances in a range of settings, including residential homes and special schools.
- Create opportunities to identify and work with relevant targeted community groups, including Communities First partnerships, breaking down the barriers of access e.g. Community Panto Ticket.
- Time Banking Pilots in partnership with community organisations and Communities First, aimed at families and young people.
- Establishing partnership working and good practice with other key services e.g. Children's Services Carers projects and the Youth Offending Service
- Support Educational opportunities for key stage in the curriculum
- Working with Careers Wales and the Education Business Partnership
- Partnerships with specific Youth Service such as Duke of Edinburgh and Youth Accreditation teams.
- Offer guidance, support and advice to local artists, thus creating opportunity to produce relevant live product relevant to our communities.
- Master classes and opportunities to support professional artists in a variety of art forms
- Partnership working with relevant community arts organisations and with schools to offer unique participatory initiatives e.g. working with the National Dance Company of Wales.
- Arts workshops in hard to reach communities
- Intergenerational arts activities using the medium of film & photography ie. primary schools and sheltered accommodation
- Cultural events programme, using participatory workshops as part of music/dance festivals/carnival arts
- Developing talent through County Youth Theatres, County Youth Dance Companies and Youth Music Promoters schemes.

3. Are there enough arts and cultural venues in Wales? Are there any barriers e.g. geographic, rurality, deprivation?

3.1. Clearly there are issues of both geography and social-economic background being barriers to participation within the Arts Connect area, with transport issues and child poverty levels the key factors to take into consideration.

3.2. Barriers also include perceptions of the arts as elitist and “not for me” and the Night Out scheme is clearly a benefit in terms of bringing professional arts activity into remote communities and into communities where arts attendance is traditionally low.

3.3. It should not be underestimated how difficult it can be to engage community members from deprived areas in arts activities and if arts and culture were only available in Cardiff, for instance, this would be a great injustice to those living in many communities in the ArtsConnect area. Residents in these communities are often reluctant to travel out of their ‘comfort zones’ for economic reasons but also to lack of self esteem, self confidence and poverty of aspiration.

3.4. It could be argued that each town needs a performance venue but we must be realistic in the number that it is possible to sustain. Consideration must of course be given to levels of isolation and therefore “enough provision” is going to vary across Wales.

3.5. Within the Arts Connect area there are a number of theatres and one art gallery managed by the local authority arts services, and by community arts organisations, although there is no local authority managed theatre within Merthyr, Torfaen or the Vale. Although a small number of these venues have been refurbished, such as Soar Ffrwdamos in the Rhondda, many of them are ageing buildings in a poor state of repair. This in itself can be a barrier to participation.

3.6. Not each local authority is served by a performing arts venue however and in Torfaen, although there are cultural venues, the authority does not directly manage any of its own. Rather Torfaen CBC supports its two main cultural venues - Llantarnam Grange Arts Centre and the Congress Theatre - through grant support from its cultural budget. Through a service level agreement the arts service is able to ‘influence’ programming direction to a small degree.

3.7. The ownership of a 3rd venue in Torfaen, which is currently managed by a community based committee, provides access to a 2nd theatre space and small cinema but with limited access to develop ongoing art provision within it. However, Audiences Wales’ *Knowledge Reports* for the Congress Theatre indicate that many customers are also prepared to travel to some Valleys’ venues, as well as Newport and Cardiff venues, to experience art.

3.8. Essentially the venue stock outside the major conurbations in Wales is ageing and many iconic arts venues have not received any significant capital funding since the Welsh Office “Valleys Live” initiative of more than two decades ago. More recently, however, HoV funding has been used to

considerably improve the standard of lighting and sound equipment in a small number of the Arts Connect venues.

3.9. Whilst local authorities invest, as best they can and subject to constrained resources, in the maintenance of these buildings to keep them at a workable standard, a large amount of capital investment is required to bring them up to an ideal standard of quality. This would then enable the more rural Valleys venues in the Arts Connect area to match facilities in the major cities such as Newport, Cardiff and Swansea.

4. Are you concerned about the variation in range and quality of local authority cultural services and activities?

4.1. One of the objectives of ArtsConnect is to raise quality and standards, as required, within the partners' arts services across the area. At present the range and quality of these local authority arts services and the theatre programmes and arts activities provided vary for historic reasons. Not all partner authorities' arts services manage theatres or art galleries and an Arts Development Officer may work alone or as part of a larger team. In addition there may or may not be an established community arts organisation locally which can be procured to deliver arts activity of behalf of the local authority.

4.2. In addition arts services may be placed within a number of Directorates from Chief Executive's, Education and Lifelong Learning, to Environmental Services, Regeneration or Healthy Living with differing priorities and focus. Arts services may or may not be combined with Play, Sport Development Tourism, Libraries and Museums, Community and Leisure centres.

4.3. Within arts services there may or may not be joint arts action plans in place with external organisations and/or other Council services such as Independent Living Services; Youth Arts Partnerships set up with ACW funding exist in Blaenau Gwent and RCT only; some Arts Development teams are active within their Children and Young People's Partnerships (Core Aim 4 groups – Play, Leisure, Sport and Culture) whereas others may be more active within their Older People's, Health Social Care and Well Being or Community Safety Partnerships.

4.4. The Arts Connect partners' arts service officers are already experienced in working together to share expertise and developing new projects, for example through jointly approaching aspects of theatre programming and working together on receiving professional touring product and the Valleys Dance Initiative. It is fair to say that all arts services strive for the highest standards in their delivery working with the best artists available, subject to resources.

4.5. Arts Connect aims to address any variation in range and quality of local authority services by the smoothing of resources/services, sharing of specialist arts officer expertise and sharing best practice, thereby raising standards across the whole area.

5. Do local authorities have adequate resources to fund and support cultural activities in this economic climate?

5.1. It can be said that in general local authorities do *not* have adequate resources to fund arts activity enabling arts experiences for all. Within Arts Connect we rely heavily upon external funding from a range of sources, including other non-arts service budgets, the Arts Council, European funding, charitable Trusts and non-arts WAG budgets, to do so.

5.2. The intention is that the establishment of a single shared arts service, as Arts Connect, will enable local authority arts services to:

- share some of the existing resources
- avoid duplication in seeking external funding (including from WAG)
- eliminate developing similar but unconnected projects and
- speak to WAG, the Arts Council of Wales and other bodies with a stronger and more strategic voice, in order to secure additional resources for arts activity and enjoyment.

6. How will the Arts Council's Investment Review impact the arts in your area?

6.1. Whilst it appears that this question is being asked of the arts sector, as Arts Connect we are clearly aware that RCT Theatres would be the only ACW funded theatres and Art central in Barry would be the only arts service run gallery outside Cardiff and Newport for the whole of the Arts Connect area.

6.2. ACW funding to the other arts venues in the area will have to be replaced from alternative sources e.g. the Lottery funding distributed by ACW, in order to ensure professional programmes to continue to be delivered – that enable citizens to engage with drama, dance, music, crafts or the visual arts activities and experiences that would otherwise not be available in their community.

6.3. There is also the potential that ACW's decision to cease funding Creu Cymru, the Welsh theatres development and touring agency may have an impact on how the theatre sector in Wales is able to develop over the next decade.

Creu Cymru has enabled theatres in the Arts Connect Region to develop their ability to programme and market more challenging work, for example through its *Inventive Promoter* programme which resulted in the development of "Family Friendly" initiatives.

6.4. Likewise there may be an impact from ACW ceasing revenue funding to Audiences Wales which provides important strategic arts marketing advice and detailed audience research for the Arts Connect theatres. The specialist team at Audience Wales has been an important resource beyond the capability most of our venues have within their own marketing officer team.

6.5. The withdrawal of ACW funding for community based arts organisations will also have a negative effect on participation within the Arts Connect area. In particular the loss of some of the *Theatre in Education* provision and funding for certain dance provision will need to be addressed including through the production of the new ACW Youth Arts Strategy for Wales, which has yet to be produced.

7. If there is a reduction in the Arts Council's budget next year, how will it impact accessibility in your area?

7.1. In the Arts Connect region any further reduction in the Arts Council's budget as a result of the outcome of the autumn 2010 budget, on top of announcements within the Investment Review, would have a major impact on access to the arts. As there is very little alternative funding to replace any reduction in the current level of investment there will undoubtedly be an impact on the long term future of our arts venues.

7.2. There would be reduced number and variety of events and activities and reduced scope for effective marketing of such events and we would be less able to compete with venues in other areas, especially Cardiff where research shows our attendees are regular visitors.

7.3. There will be also be considerably less resources to continue and develop special ticket promotions for our theatre programmes which increase access to the arts for disadvantaged groups within the community.

8. Are people with a professional/high qualifications background more likely to attend arts events than manual or non working people? If so, why, and how can this variation be addressed?

8.1. Within Arts Connect we would initially say that, yes – they are, but by how much depends on the composition of the geographical area in which a venue is operating. Key factors that are to be considered are: expendable income, available leisure time, travel issues, publicity reach and the events programme on offer as well as the location of the venue.

8.2. General arts attendance is denser amongst people with a professional/high qualifications background due to many possible factors:

- more opportunity to be exposed to the arts at a young age and so to become engaged in the arts from a young age
- more available earnings to attend the arts and to 'try' new performances/genres without the worry of not enjoying the experience i.e. not having "value for money"
- more peer group involvement (if your friends go, you are more likely to)
- more car ownership and less reliance on public transport (transport issues are a barrier to engagement in the Valleys)
- more likely to actively look for arts promotional material (publicity), including being more likely to pick up a brochure from public outlets

- less likely to have a pre-conceived idea about what attending an arts venue will be like.

8.3. In order to address the variance the following actions are identified:

- invest more resources in specialist arts marketing to enable targeted and appropriate special incentives for local people to *try out* a venue and then a 'journey' of incentives, to entice them back
- conduct research into how differing social groups spend their free time
- develop varied arts programmes and consider programme balance, in order to attract a more diverse audience
- sustain provision of local venues, as the expectation that people will travel to Cardiff, for example from the Vale, is likely to reduce rather than expand participation.

9. Are younger people more likely to attend an arts event than older adults in your experience? If so, why, and how can this variation be addressed?

9.1. We are not yet in a position to answer this question for Arts Connect as a whole but we know that within the area, as is the case in RCT for example, the most significant age groups attending regularly attending arts events in the venues are aged 45+.

9.2. This does of course depend on the genre of the arts event and, again within RCT as an example, rock and pop events, SONIG Youth Music Industry initiatives and the 'Child's Play' children's events programme have resulted in impressive development within attendance by younger age groups.

9.3. This is also seen within Caerphilly and Blaenau Gwent where *Family Friendly* programming is being developed. Within the Vale, Art Central regularly holds visual arts workshops and exhibitions by and for young people, which has attracted a significantly younger audience and has helped to open up opportunities that would not otherwise have existed.

9.4. Opportunities to attend 'taster' sessions in the arts and the opportunities for our Arts Development officers and local venues to work with schools, for instance, all help to attract children and young people to participate in artistic activity. Youth Theatre provision, as firmly established within Bridgend, is proven at engaging young people in participation the performing arts.

9.5. In order to increase attendances at arts events by young people more research is required into what arts events younger audiences would like to

attend, and are already attending. Such research is being embedded into the wider consultation that currently exists which is aimed at young people, for example the extensive Viewpoint Survey run by RCT CBC Services for Young People and which reaches thousands of young people on an annual basis.

9.6. Our arts venues need to be smarter at engaging in the appropriate forms of communication that younger people respond to, including social networking sites, in preference to traditional methods of publicising arts events such as printed arts programme brochures.

9.7. Regular, age appropriate events embedded within a venue's events programme, so they are not 'one off' events, give venues the platform to regularly engage with younger audiences and build a relationship. This is a smarter way of working and more effective than trying to 'find' a younger audience for infrequent 'one off' events.

9.8. Within Communities First programmes the community arts activities and events delivered draw in people of all ages and are often intended to be Inter-generational.

10. Are females more likely to attend an arts event than males? If so, why? and how can this variation be addressed?

10.1. We are not yet in a position to answer this question for the Arts Connect area as a whole but we know we would be able to provide further information based upon Arts Council of Wales surveys and the research conducted on our behalf by Audiences Wales.

10.2. Overall we are aware that historically females feel more ready to try and participate in the arts although in recent years we have each of us, as Arts Connect arts services, worked tirelessly to create opportunities for males to take ownership. In RCT for example this has happened through the *Make it* media initiative, the *Ya don't Stop* international Break-dancing event and the Gathering regional music events which provide platforms for local rock and pop music bands to showcase their talent. Other equally exciting arts engagement initiatives are delivered across the Arts Connect area, as referred to in 2.1., above.

10.3. When tracking attendances at arts events it should be borne in mind that it is often the case that females are responsible for booking events for friends/family and so they may well be booking for their male partner/friends/other family member too. If females are the ones that book tickets, are they then being over-represented as a percentage of arts attendees based on gender? If most of the arts audience research is based on theatre Box Office booking data and doesn't drill down to the composition of groups and couples purchasing tickets, then maybe there is a skew towards female attending arts even, more than males.

10.4. The arts genre is also important and within Arts Connect we have found that for certain types of music: older rock music events, folk and blues and for

comedy events that the booking pattern changes and can be 50/50 female to male. Indeed for some events in these genres, male arts events bookers sometimes surpass females. (N.B. 10.2. above regarding the difference between an arts 'booker' and an arts 'attender' and how data and research is collated that can affect the knowledge we have regarding gender attendance.

11. Are Welsh speakers more likely to directly participate in the arts than non Welsh language speakers? If so, why and how can this variation be addressed?"

11.1. There are traditions cultivated in Welsh speaking communities and Welsh medium education through events such as Eisteddfodau, which possibly makes arts and cultural participation more natural in these circles. However with the strong brass band, choir and operatic tradition in South East Wales, this seems less of an issue coupled with the increase in popularity of shows such as Strictly Come Dancing or Britain's Got Talent, as more and more people wanting to join in or *have a go* at something new.

11.2. Due to the spread participatory arts provision across the Arts Connect area and the number of schools and communities that access the arts we know that there are certainly non Welsh language speakers participating in considerable numbers.

11.3. On the other hand there is demand for the opportunity to participate in arts activities that are delivered through the Welsh language and within RCT, for example, we know that a shortage of Welsh speaking artists limits the number of arts activities that can be offered through the medium of Welsh.

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On behalf of the Arts Connect Leadership group
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