

Response from Theatr Powys

Theatr Powys is a deeply rooted, forward thinking, child centred, intensely productive community touring theatre company based in Llandrindod Wells in the rural heart of Wales. The company works in schools, theatres, arts centres and community venues in Powys, wider Wales and occasionally across the border. The company produces participatory Theatre in Education (TIE) programmes in both Welsh and English, community touring plays and offers a broad, professionally led youth theatre provision throughout the year. The company is a service provided by Powys County Council's (PCC) Arts and Cultural Service and is partnership funded by PCC and the Arts Council of Wales (ACW). Following ACW's Investment Review of its revenue funded clients Theatr Powys was informed that revenue funding from ACW would cease on 31 March 2011.

The following constitutes the evidence from Theatr Powys as a contribution towards the Inquiry. The statement is offered in the context of all public statements by ACW following the Investment Review and is also informed by statements made by ACW in letters to members of the public and Assembly Members since the declaration of outcomes.

- Despite a 37% reduction of its total revenue funding to Powys based arts organisations and the complete withdrawal of revenue funding to Theatr Powys, ACW continues to place great emphasis on its per capita investment in Powys
- Selective statistical data is being used in the public realm by ACW. This data seeks to evidence a significant reduction in the number of participants receiving TIE programmes from Theatr Powys in the past four years. The arguments used on the basis of these statistics leads ACW to challenge the company on the basis of 'value for money'.

In the constructing of these arguments, no recognition is afforded to the following:

- The totality of this company's provision, (a totality that is understood by ACW)
- The nature of the company's TIE work requires working with single classes (or small groups in smaller schools) for full days, or half days when appropriate
- Numbers of individual participants accessing the work will vary i.e. primary schools have fewer children in KS1 than in KS2
- A decades' long determination to sustain this model, policy and practice: to sustain a core company of appropriately skilled actors; to design an apparently 'high cost', 'labour intensive' artistic practice free at the point of delivery to schools
- ACW's historical support of this unique policy and practice

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- The reality that the necessary subsidy to sustain this theoretically driven model of provision has been shared in partnership by PCC, nor that the longevity and strength of that partnership is unique in Wales. Partnership funding has enabled a particular practice, based on a hugely committed and courageous approach to the arts of theatre, drama and to child development. ACW has never challenged this value.

- ACW's new vision for TIE provision in Wales in 2003 which attracted additional funding through WAG awarded Theatr Powys an additional £32,870 in revenue support as a first tranche. This additional funding was used entirely to enable increased activity by extending a TIE programme for primary schools into the autumn term amounting to an additional 48 sessions over a 5-week tour. The company has sustained this development since then despite no further tranches of additional funding in respect of the vision.
- The company is aware that ironically the above increase in activity in the primary sector placed Theatr Powys in the vanguard of companies seriously attempting to implement WAG's own strategic objectives:
"An experience of Theatre in Education at each of the four key stages of education, free at the point of delivery, available in both English and Welsh".
 In 2008-09 Theatr Powys performed in 76% of primary schools in Powys and 92% of secondary schools. Powys is a geographical area covering a quarter of Wales, spanning approximately 100 miles from north to south.
- Powys has a small and dispersed population, presenting particular challenges in respect of sustainable public transport and a predominance of small rural schools with low and variable annual intakes. The raw statistics applied by ACW deny both a historical vision and the actual cost of a provision developed over many years and to a very high degree.

The above observations challenge the accuracy and authenticity of ACW's rationale. They also suggest that the impact of the loss of Theatr Powys' provision to the schools and communities of Powys will only be felt when it is gone. The removal of almost 50% of the company's revenue funding coupled with the requirement for local authorities to reduce their spending potentially threatens the end of all its provision.

The company has no desire to bandy statistics. ACW has taken its strategic decision to no longer include Theatr Powys in its portfolio of revenue funded clients. It has decided to change its strategy for Theatre in Education and to no longer fund direct provision into schools though the abandonment of this strategy was not made known until the outcomes of the Investment Review were published. ACW is making a *formal* separation between child/human development, art and education. Between feeling and thinking. Between feeling, thinking and action. The liquidation of TIE in Wales destroys the unity of engagement that young people so desperately need and deserve. Stories should not be told to passive recipients! The schools, young people and communities of Powys cherish and value the provision provided by Theatr Powys.

Ironically, every single idea and objective within ACW's new consultative document 'Changing Lives: Arts Council of Wales Strategy for Children, Young People and the Arts' is currently being met by Theatr Powys. Surely the consultation for this new strategy should have taken place prior to the Investment Review and the subsequent withdrawal of future revenue funding from three of the eight TIE/TYP companies in Wales, namely Theatr Powys, Gwent Theatre and Spectacle.

We would welcome the opportunity to present our views to the Committee in person.

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Artistic Director

Nikki Leopold
General Manager

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