

About National Youth Arts Wales

1. National Youth Arts Wales is the national charity for young performers with talent and potential throughout Wales. Every year we work with hundreds of young actors, dancers and musicians aged 16 – 22, through exceptional training and performance opportunities in the arts.
2. Since its formation in 2017, NYAW has expanded its work beyond the six national youth ensembles, and now produces a variety of year-round development projects designed to improve access to high-level training. This includes Music Futures, Wales's first national mentoring scheme for indie, rock and pop musicians in schools; and Hard Côr, a new vocal collective made up of rappers, vocalists and beatboxers, most of whom don't traditionally engage with mainstream arts activities.
3. In the 2021-22 financial year, NYAW employed more than 200 freelance creatives in order to deliver its ambitious programme of work. These freelance creatives fulfilled a number of roles including instrumental tutors, directors, choreographers, composers, writers, conductors, workshop facilitators and welfare staff.
4. NYAW provides youth employment opportunities, including an annual Trainee Producers scheme, paid at the Real Living Wage, designed to help young people from lower-income families or from Global Majority communities to join the creative industries workforce.

What is the current health of the sector's workforce, including the impacts of the pandemic, Brexit and cost of living crisis? Have workers left the sector, and what impact has this had?

5. Over the last 2 years of the pandemic, NYAW has struggled to find experienced freelance staff to support our project and programme work. We believe that there are many reasons behind this.
6. Firstly, as a publicly-funded arts organisation, we struggle to compete with the wider creative industries when offering fees and salaries, particularly compared to the film and television industries.
7. Recruitment challenges have always existed in the cultural sector, however the Covid-19 pandemic has exacerbated this pattern – as the arts and youth arts sectors struggled with a substantial reduction in activity, and a slow return to in-person delivery. Film and television was generally able to keep going

during the pandemic, so may have seemed a more secure career choice for a majority of the freelance workforce.

8. The cultural sector is the training ground for many freelancers starting in the industry, particularly in technical roles, and arts organisations invest in developing talented technical staff. However, there is a “brain-drain” as technical staff leave the subsidised arts sector for better-paid roles in the film and television industry.
9. Over the past 2 years, we know that the industry has lost talent and knowledge due to staff leaving for other industries or redundancies. This is true of both freelancers and salaried staff. As Cultural Freelancers Wales have reported, it is those from under-represented groups that have been most at risk of leaving the sector, further undermining efforts to ensure an equitable and diverse cultural sector.
10. Recruitment for Welsh-language projects has been particularly challenging. We know that the bilingual creative workforce is in great demand at the moment, particularly due to a growing film/TV sector, alongside the perceived career stability and higher wages of the academic sector, meaning cultural organisations are unable to compete with these growing sectors.

How financially stable is the sector and how suitable are pay and working conditions?

11. As an organisation, NYAW pays, as a minimum, the rates recommended by the appropriate union or trade body. In our case, this could include referring to recommended rates by the Musicians’ Union, BECTU or Equity.
12. We would always advocate for these fees to rise in line with inflation to ensure that freelancers are paid fairly. However, this would put organisations like ours in difficult positions unless similar increases are made to organisations’ core revenue funding.
13. The arts sector as a whole is also facing a reduction in raised and earned income due to cost of living pressures, on top of stand-still revenue funding. This combination of factors could result in a reduction of overall freelance work available across the sector. It would also mean that staff retention will become increasingly difficult, with pay differentials eroding and arts organisations losing their appeal as an employer.
14. The cost of living does not just affect the arts sector through wages and freelance fees, but it also affects project costs including catering, accommodation and travel, further reducing available budgets which could

otherwise be spent on artists. NYAW is particularly vulnerable to increases in catering and accommodation costs through its residency model, where young people come together to train and perform over a period of 1-3 weeks at a time.

15. NYAW is proud to be an accredited Living Wage employer, paying all our contracted staff at least the Real Living Wage. This has recently increased by 10.1%, a cost which we will absorb in our central budgets. This increase affects only a small proportion of the people we work with, as most are on freelance contracts.
16. By its nature, working patterns in the creative sector typically involve long working days, and working at evenings and weekends. The sector has always faced this challenge, however we are seeing a similar pattern of migration to that of the hospitality sector - where Covid has forced them to look again at their careers, with many choosing to move towards sectors with perceived better work life balance and pay. This is especially true in both freelance and salaried positions in “in-demand” roles such as marketing, finance and communications.
17. We are also concerned with burnout and poor wellbeing within the sector. This is one of the biggest challenges facing the sector right now, and a contributing factor to workforce challenges, including talent leaving the sector. Many organisations are working hard to ensure that working conditions prioritise positive mental wellbeing, including at NYAW where we are introducing an “access rider” where those with additional needs can be assured that we will put accommodations in place wherever we possibly can, no matter what the length of the contract.

How equal, diverse and inclusive is the sector? How can this be improved?

18. NYAW is striving to improve the diversity of the freelancers we employ. In the 21-22 financial year, we sent an anonymous equal opportunities survey to all freelancers – 14% of respondents were from Global Majority backgrounds, and 15% of respondents have a disability. We will strive to improve these figures year-on-year. There is currently no baseline information for Wales however, so it is hard for us to measure our progress against the wider sector. Conversations and actions around equality, diversity and inclusion - while needing to acknowledge intersectionality - also need to be balanced against how differing communities across Wales are comprised.
19. During the pandemic, NYAW formed four Diversity Taskforces to explore inequalities within the sector – focusing on improving access to artists with

disabilities, artists from the Global Majority, and artists from lower socio-economic backgrounds. These taskforces were independently led by experienced freelancers with lived experience. We regularly review the independent recommendations and these will continue to inform our work.

20. We know that more must be done. We welcome the growth of entry-level roles reserved for young people from the Global Majority, but there is more work needed to ensure that this talent is able to progress to all levels of the workforce including senior management roles.

21. There is more that we can do as a sector to encourage those from lower-income families to join the creative industries. We don't believe that unpaid internships are fair, as they exclude those who cannot afford to work for free. However, unlike in places like London where some arts organisations do advertise unpaid roles, this is rarely the case in Wales, which we welcome.

How sufficient are skills and training opportunities? Are there gaps, and how should they be filled?

22. On a small scale, NYAW has been able to help young people entering the freelance workforce to get the training and skills they need. One example of this is our Future Mentors scheme, where six young people from the Global Majority were given paid work and offered mentoring and training, helping young musicians to gain experience as workshop facilitators. This was as part of Music Futures, our new contemporary music development project for 15-19 year olds in Wales. The Future Mentors scheme has been funded by the Youth Music Incubator Fund.

23. Our Professional Pathways project, delivered in partnership with Theatr Clwyd in 2022, enabled us to give more than 40 young actors an insight into many different career paths, not just acting. Participants were able to meet and learn from theatre writers, directors, producers, designers and technical staff, to explore the wide range of career opportunities open to them.

24. Whilst we will continue to explore further opportunities such as these, we feel there need to be more widespread opportunities for young performers, particularly for those from under-represented communities, to explore how their skills can be used across the whole sector. More dedicated funding in this area, along with a joint working approach between the arts sector, schools, colleges and universities, will help all young performers to have a better understanding of the career opportunities available to them.

25. We also feel that many young freelancers would benefit for advice on some of the more practical issues facing creative freelancers – such as how to apply for funding, and how to manage invoicing and taxes.

What has been the impact of support from public bodies such as the Welsh Government, and is further support needed?

26. Funding to organisations including NYAW during the Covid pandemic, such as the Cultural Recovery Fund, did indirectly help to ensure that freelancers could continue to work during the pandemic. 27% of our first CRF award went directly to freelancers, with a further 13% going to small Welsh businesses. Whilst we were determined to support our freelance community as much as we could, we were aware anecdotally that many were struggling to access financial support to supplement losses of income due to the pandemic.
27. We are really pleased to see support from Creative Wales to help strengthen the creative industries in Wales. Whilst it is encouraging to see this support for sectors not traditionally supported by Arts Council of Wales, it's clear that a collaborative approach is needed as the sectors are connected. One example of this is the flow of talent from the subsidised theatre sector, often benefitting from subsidised training and development opportunities, into the commercial film and television sectors, often for substantially increased fees. This creative brain drain can result in a skills shortage in the sector responsible for developing skills and talent in the first place. A subsidised apprenticeship scheme for arts and culture, similar to those offered in the wider creative industries, would be impactful.
28. The Welsh Government's Cultural Contract has, we feel, helped to facilitate a conversation within the sector about equity of opportunity and fair pay for freelance workers. We welcome this and would encourage funders to increase this further into funding requirements.
29. Positive messaging around the desirability of the arts and cultural sector in Wales as a viable and rewarding career choice would be helpful. This could be linked to the new opportunities presented by the new Curriculum for Wales, and how creative and expressive arts are taught. To increase diversity, it is particularly important that efforts are focussed on young people from lower socio-economic communities - who may not be aware of the kind of job opportunities that exist, particularly off stage (technical, marketing and communications, administration, finance and fundraising) in the arts and cultural sector.