



Cyngor Celfyddydau Cymru
Arts Council of Wales

20 April 2011

Naomi Stocks
Clerk
Petitions Committee
National Assembly for Wales
Cardiff Bay
CF99 1NA

Dear Mr Stocks

Petitions: P-03-308 Save Gwent Theatre
P-03-311 Spectacle Theatre
P-03-314 Save Theatre Powys and Mid Powys Youth Theatre

Thank you for your letter of 5 April 2011 on the above.

You asked for further information on two matters:

1. The outcome of the consultation around *Changing Lives*, our draft strategy on Children, Young People and the Arts
2. How the strategy will widen access to the arts in the areas previously served by Theatr Powys, Gwent Theatre and Spectacle Theatre

The outcome of the consultation exercise

We're awaiting a small number of responses from young people's groups, but the analysis of the consultation is largely complete. I'm happy to offer a flavour of some of the key messages so far.

Overall, the responses were supportive of the proposed strategy. Respondents welcomed our commitment to focusing on the creativity of children and young people themselves. Respondents were also supportive of the broader based approach that we were proposing to take across the full range of arts disciplines.

We received many positive and constructive proposals about how our strategy might be enhanced. It was also pleasing that a number of the respondents expressed an enthusiastic wish to work with us on taking the strategy forward.

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Working in partnership with other key public sector bodies was a clear theme in the responses. Local Authority respondents were keen to work with us and offered helpful examples of activities and initiatives that they are currently taking forward. We were urged to work closely in the future with the Children and Young People Partnerships, who have responsibility for the Child Poverty agenda at the local level, and to ensure that our plans link with the Single Plans for Children and Young People.

There were differing views on whether the balance of priorities contained in *Changing Lives* was correct. Some felt we focused too much on participation and the social impact of working with children and young people and not enough on the arts and artists. Others suggested we should focus more on creative and participatory work with children and young people from disadvantaged communities, feeling that our strategy was too focused on nurturing the artists of the future.

There was universal support for *Arts Plus*, the arts recognition and improvement scheme for schools that we're developing in partnership with the Welsh Assembly Government's Department for Culture, Education, Lifelong Learning and Skills (DCELLS). A number of respondents viewed this as a very important means for encouraging more (and wider) use of the arts in schools. There was broad support for artists working in schools, although it was also pointed out that education and learning does not just happen in schools. We were asked in future versions of the document to do more to acknowledge this.

Several respondents, including those from education, expressed the view that training for teachers (and indeed others working with children and young people in the arts) was important. There were a number of suggestions and pleas for a "one-stop" shop for information, advice, support and resources about arts in schools, with one proposal that there should be some kind of national "brokerage agency". (Examples of similar ways of working locally were shared.)

Some responses focused with some strength of feeling on the issue of Theatre in Education and the funding decisions that we took in June of last year. The value and meaning of Theatre in Education and its importance to the development and learning of children and young people was presented in detail in a number of the responses. The responses of most of those who referred to Theatre in Education were critical of funding decisions and were negative about this part of our strategy.



A number of the respondents suggested that few venues in Wales could be considered “Family Friendly” and questions were also raised about Family Friendly product. We’re aware that a number of venues have taken specific initiatives to broaden the appeal of their activities, but we were interested to note the rather different perception that was being reflected back to us by some respondents. There was strong support for free and reduced cost access for children to arts provision.

The need for training, professional development and progression were recurring themes throughout almost all of the responses we received, both in terms of career pathways for young people and training and development of artists, teachers and others working with children and young people. The role of National Youth Arts Wales (NYAW) was referred to by a number of respondents. On the whole these were supportive, but there was also some concern about whether NYAW had the resources to deliver progression routes from local to regional to national.

Several of the responses stated the view that the strategy could have been more explicit in terms of Welsh language provision, although some respondents commented that they welcomed the fact that Welsh was seen as important in the strategy. One of the key issues raised was the need for a competent Welsh language workforce. Training and development of artists to deliver work in this field through the medium of Welsh came across as a priority for development.

The role of technology and the media attracted a lot of comment. Examples of how new media/technology is helping to support children and young people’s creativity were shared with us. However, there were also questions raised about whether technology in and of itself helps creativity at all. Nevertheless, there was a very clear message to us that we needed to “up our game” if we were to engage effectively with the interests of young people. New technology and social media are not just “add-ons” for young people, they’re increasingly becoming an integral part of their daily lives.

The responses that we’ve received so far from young people themselves have been both insightful and useful. It’s absolutely clear that young people want to engage actively with the arts, but often feel that much of what they see around them from professional arts providers is not of interest or relevant to them. Young people want to be active creators, not just ‘consumers’ of arts product.



Young people have an appetite to experiment with new and different forms of arts experience. It's also clear that the way that the arts are described and promoted in the media can have a significant impact on the perceptions of young people.

The responses to our consultation have been enormously helpful and will help us to improve our final strategy. We'll be publishing the results of our consultation next month. In the meantime we're discussing with DCELLS, the Welsh Local Government Association and other strategic partners practical ways that we can work together to implement the strategy.

Access to the arts in Powys and Gwent

Delivery of our strategy will be dependent on coordinated activities of a range of funded (and unfunded) arts provision. There is a wide diversity of activity in both the Powys and Gwent areas. However, future provision will also depend, critically, on developing effective partnerships with local authorities.

As highlighted above, local authorities are very keen to work with us, and plans are currently being developed. In March, Powys County Council (the providers of the Theatre Powys service) reported that theatre in schools and support for youth theatre will continue in Powys. Under new proposals, young people's theatre and community theatre productions will continue.

There will be changes in the way the services are delivered with increased use of partner companies. Under the new arrangements there will be increased variety of theatre provision for schools and more equitable youth theatre provision across the county.

Powys will continue to use the drama resource centre in Llandrindod Wells as a centre for arts and set up a small development team to cultivate new partnerships. Powys Council's future strategy for arts and young people aligns very closely with our own, and we have already given our commitment to work with Powys on a joint approach to delivery.

Discussions in the Gwent/Valleys areas are less advanced, but there is a similar willingness from local authorities to work with us on coordinated programmes of activity. We expect to work especially closely with the proposed 'Arts Connect' consortium of local authority arts services.



It's worth noting that the Spectacle Theatre and Gwent Theatre companies continue to exist, and are exploring options for them to play a new role in the future. We have provided funds to both organisations to help them to do this. Gwent Theatre is, at the time of writing, probably the more advanced of the two in considering potential options.

Gwent Theatre has been looking at some interesting ideas for the development of the Melville Theatre in Abergavenny as a hub for community/young people's creativity. And the good news is that Monmouthshire County Council has agreed to the company's continued occupancy of the building and has also committed to provide further funding. Gwent Theatre is in discussion with other local arts organisations about the possibility of some interesting creative collaborations in the future.

We're currently supporting the activities of Gwent Young People's Theatre (GYPT). We've also discussed the potential of funding through our Training strand, with Gwent Theatre using its expertise and resources to develop creative skills with and for young people.

I hope that this letter provides you with the information that the Committee is seeking. Please don't hesitate to contact me if I can be of any further assistance.

*Yours sincerely
Nick Capaldi*

Nick Capaldi
Chief Executive

