

Ministerial Evidence submitted to support the Culture, Communications, Welsh Language, Sport, and International Relations Committee inquiry on plans for the National Contemporary Art Gallery for Wales

Introduction

This paper provides evidence to inform the Culture, Communications, Welsh Language, Sport, and International Relations Committee inquiry on plans for the National Contemporary Art Gallery for Wales. It provides evidence against the four key areas set out in the terms of reference for the inquiry by the committee.

1 Delivery of the Welsh Government's plans for a National Contemporary Art Gallery for Wales.

The model for the National Contemporary Art Gallery for Wales (NCAGW), consists of the following elements:

- a) A network of galleries across Wales providing free access to the national collection and bringing contemporary art closer to communities.
- b) Host galleries that currently host the national collection of Welsh art.
- c) An anchor gallery will provide a prominent public face for the national contemporary art gallery; and
- d) The development of a digital platform named Celf ar a Cyd, providing access to the digitised national collection available to everyone.

A phased approach is being taken to setting in place this model, working across the partner organisations and Welsh Government.

Although an initial report was produced considering the concept during 2008, the first feasibility study was completed in July 2018.

During the Covid 19 pandemic, much of this work was curtailed while the focus shifted to supporting the sectors through the period. Work focusing on the model then continued from 2020. A summary timeline is attached at Annex 1.

a) Gallery Network

This element of the model is led by a partnership between Arts Council of Wales, Amgueddfa Cymru - Museum Wales and The National Library of Wales with support from the Welsh Government. The three partners have been working with different venues which are being considered as part of a dispersed network of galleries across Wales.

An outline business case has been submitted for the gallery network. Over the coming months, activity will commence in up to nine galleries across Wales to ensure that the galleries meet the specific standards required to participate in the network.

Based on the exploratory work undertaken on behalf of the project partners by the Rural Office of Architecture, it is clear that different levels of investment are required in the galleries selected to participate in the network status based on the criteria required to meet GIS Standards. The approach to commencing delivery is phased allowing galleries to participate at different stages as they reach readiness, until the investment in them completes in March 2025.

Each of the galleries will be setting in place the work programmes required over coming months with much of this work subject to competitive procurement.

Nine venues across Wales have been shortlisted to be members of the network of galleries, these will be places where people can view the national collection closer to their homes. Each of the venues are now undergoing a more detailed assessment. These are:

- Aberystwyth Arts Centre, Aberystwyth
- Glynn Vivian Art Gallery, Swansea
- MOSTYN, Llandudno
- Newport Museum & Art Gallery, Newport
- Oriel Davies, Newtown
- Oriel Myrddin, Carmarthen
- Plas Glyn-y-Weddw, Pwllheli
- Ruthin Craft Centre, Ruthin
- STORIEL, Bangor

There is a potential to increase access geographically in the future, either through expanding this network or through the sharing digitised works for display in wider venues across Wales.

b) Host Galleries

Host galleries are those which either currently host, or plan to host the national collection, and are part of the current infrastructure in Wales. They include National Museum Cardiff, and potentially the National Slate Museum in Llanberis and the National Library of Wales in Aberystwyth.

Although these currently exist, they will continue to form an important part of the network and are the main source of the current national collection including contemporary art. Investment will continue in these institutions through the grant awards made to these sponsored bodies to support their delivery.

c) Anchor Gallery

The search for a suitable site for an anchor gallery commenced in July 2022 with Welsh Government issuing an invitation to submit expressions of interest being

issued to public sector estates managers in Wales. A total of 14 expressions of interest were received with five public sector organisations invited to develop a more detailed plan for the site being considered.

In February 2023, third sector organisations in Wales were also invited to submit expressions of interest and in total two were received. One of these has been invited to develop a more detailed plan.

Decisions relating to the assessment of the plans received will take place in early 2024 and if a site is selected for further development, it will commence development under the model for better business cases developed by Welsh Government and Treasury.

Until a preferred site is identified, it is not possible to identify the level of investment required to support the development, affordability, or operational models for any future anchor gallery.

The exact sites have not been disclosed in all cases due to some sensitivities with either the sites or issues with the future tenure of the properties being considered.

d) Digitisation of the national collection

Digitisation of the national collection commenced in 2020 and has now resulted in the June 2023 launch of digital resource platform Celf ar Y Cyd. Celf ar y Cyd is a core feature of the NCAGW with its development being led by Amgueddfa Cymru in partnership with Arts Council of Wales, and National Library of Wales. It is a digital platform open access to the nation's collection of contemporary art.

The website and its resources offer the opportunity to browse, learn and be inspired by the National Art Collection at Amgueddfa Cymru. At the point of its launch, over 30,000 works at Amgueddfa Cymru had been digitized and made available.

As the platform continues to develop, the National Library of Wales will also be incorporating its digitised collection. The resource offers the nine galleries across Wales the opportunity to request works to borrow, giving more people across Wales the chance to see the collection in their locality. The network of nine galleries will have the opportunity to contribute content to the website, that responds to, and reflects, the National Contemporary Art Collection at both Amgueddfa Cymru and the National Library of Wales

This is a first-of-its-kind project, developed and created following responses to a Wales-wide public consultation. With some works having never been seen on public display before, the project is breaking new ground in making Wales's national and contemporary art collection truly accessible to a global audience.

2 The merits of the dispersed model, building on existing assets proposed by the Welsh Government (8-10 regional sites, and an anchor hub).

a) Dispersed Network

The dispersed/distributed model is a way of ensuring the national collections of contemporary art in Wales can be enjoyed by and belongs to everybody in Wales. This exciting way of delivering a national gallery will create a new sense of ownership and collaboration with the art sector across the whole of the country.

This will allow a genuinely democratic way of working with local galleries making decisions about works that will be relevant to their local demography. It will provide a whole host of creative opportunities for gallery directors and curators to compliment the works they borrow from the national contemporary collections with locally held artworks, and to create locally relevant engagement and learning opportunities.

The model has been developed to inspire increased access and participation by people across the country with contemporary art, whilst also increasing Wales's profile as an international destination for cultural tourism.

The nine sites include both larger and smaller galleries and reflects a wider geographic spread across Wales allowing for increased accessibility of the national collection and contemporary art. It is anticipated that this model will support an increase in the audiences attending contemporary art across Wales by achieving a 30% increase within the first 10 years of the project.

While there are pockets of excellence, there is a sense that Wales lacks a focal point for contemporary visual artists and Welsh and international audiences. The model will seek to create a sustainable and resilient network at all levels of the arts ecology. It will create a distinctive focus and identity for Welsh art that would become instantly recognisable both nationally and internationally, along with the landscapes, people and culture that inspire it.

The use of current venues and investment in them represents an investment in the current gallery infrastructure in Wales, supporting those galleries to increase their standards. It also increases the accessibility of art locally, reducing the cost of and need to travel long distances to see the collection which is now more important than ever due to the on-going cost of living crises. This approach will also support a lower carbon footprint through reduced travel distances.

b) Anchor Gallery/Site

An anchor gallery will provide a formal front end and prominent public facing presence for the NCAGW model in Wales.

The addition of an anchor site for the NCAGW is not aimed at replacing existing gallery facilities but will provide a central hub to complement provision in the existing venues that collectively will form a distributed NCAGW model across Wales.

Making new use of surplus public sector property is a strong starting point for the environmental sustainability of any new facility. In line with Ystadau Cymru best

practice, the request for candidate sites scoped out what properties may be available within the public or third sectors or their partners.

The request centred on existing buildings which will require adaption or reconfiguration but also allowed for any undeveloped site which could meet the key locational requirements.

The anchor site will be a 'magnet' for visitors and a significant contributor to growth of the local visitor economy, the cultural and creative industries and related sectors. The development of an anchor gallery will provide an opportunity for town centre regeneration and certainly the "town centre first" initiative will be a strong consideration. Democratic access to the collection is of paramount importance with the intention to make the visitor experience as rich and fulfilling as possible.

The new venue selected will enshrine principles contained within the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 and focus on improving the social, economic, environmental, and cultural well-being of the area and Wales as a whole, as part of the wider model.

More specific detail will become available once a venue has been selected for development.

3 The factors that should be considered when assessing the suitability of candidate sites for the various galleries.

Building on the initial feasibility study (Event Communications 2018), further work was undertaken on behalf of the Arts Council of Wales by the Rural Office of Architecture considering potential sites within a **dispersed mode**. This included research, analysis and evaluation in relation to various sites across Wales and was initially presented in April 2020, with the final version delivered in May 2021.

The Project Board (consisting of Arts Council, Amgueddfa Cymru and Llyfrgell Genedlaethol Cymru), considered the recommendations in a joint meeting of the Project Board and Arts Council's Capital Committee on 21 Sept 2022.

Following this meeting, options for up to 10 galleries were presented to the Cooperation Agreement Oversight Board on 18 October 2022, with agreement that up to nine of these be considered further. It was also agreed there would be at least two host galleries in the national partners.

The galleries identified in the preferred option are widely distributed across Wales and (apart from one) are accessible via public transport. Whilst all participating venues will have to fulfil all other criteria, their location is crucial to the success of the model and compliments the locations of the host organisations (Amgueddfa Cymru and Llyfrgell Genedlaethol Cymru).

The criteria for the selection of the venues included the physical and operational requirements of the distributed/dispersed gallery network which provided the framework to identify the galleries. These included:

- delivering an equitable geographical spread and affording a higher degree of access to people across Wales;
- providing adequate physical security, storage and environmental standards and meeting the requirements of the Government Indemnity Scheme (GIS);
- ability to offer educational and engagement programmes and co-create with communities;
- ability to deliver within the project timeframe and be sustainable for at least five years;
- staffing with the leadership and curatorial skills, experience and resource to contribute to co-curation and co-production; and
- affordability (within Welsh Government indicative project budget).

Requirements for access and facilities for disabled visitors and artists are subject to ongoing assessment.

For the **anchor gallery**, a list of essential and desirable criteria was drawn up and agreed with organisations asked to submit expressions of interest against these criteria. From the submissions received, five public sector organisations and one third sector organisation have been invited to develop their proposals further based on how they met the brief and the following criteria:



Anchor Site Draft
Criteria#2.docx

The criteria for the selection of the potential anchor gallery sites at the next stage will include an assessment of:

- How the site meets/or could meet each of the criteria set out in the full list of criteria developed for an anchor site as attached,
- The initial plan/options for the layout of the site meeting the requirements above
- The explanation of how the site would work with other local museums and galleries including other that may be a part of wider NCAG developments
- How public or sector support for the application will be achieved;
- Estimated costs for delivering the plan;
- Funding model to be used and from where contributions would be sought; and
- The timescale for delivery.

These are the key criteria to be used in assessing the plans submitted to inform decisions on a location early in the next calendar year.

4 The merits of digital access to contemporary art.

Celf ar y Cyd makes Wales's national and contemporary art collections more accessible than ever before. Key merits include:

a) Improved accessibility:

- i. Over 30,000 images of artworks currently available, including many that have never been on public display before including fragile works such as those on paper that need to be stored in dark solander boxes to prevent fading and deterioration.
- ii. The collection can now be accessed through your mobile phone or computer without having to leave your own home.

b) Democratic visual access is improved:

- i. The collections belong to the nation, everyone in Wales and beyond i.e. international audiences (who have internet access) can browse, learn, and be inspired and without the need to travel long distance. The website looks to change the way the people of Wales, and beyond, engage with our contemporary art.
- ii. To understand what people in Wales want from a website devoted to contemporary art, and before development of the Celf ar y Cyd website could begin, a Wales-wide consultation was undertaken. Over 900 people were consulted.

c) Benefits to partner galleries:

- i. The website acts as a 'shop window' that showcases the artworks in the national collection. Partner galleries (as well as other organisations in Wales and beyond) can research the digitised collection for exhibition planning and loans. Celf ar y Cyd offer galleries an online and interactive digital space to further develop their exhibition/display programming.
- ii. The website is designed to bring up interesting contrasts and comparisons through the intuitive search function. This will help gallery partners when researching works for display or exhibitions.
- iii. Through the high-resolution camera equipment and IIF technology, galleries can research and examine artworks in minute detail.

d) Formal and informal opportunities for learning enhanced:

- i. The digital learning programme covers all aspects of what Welsh contemporary art is, what it does, and how artists speak to us through it. Users can find out what goes on behind the scenes and meet the teams that look after the collection. Users will be inspired to have creative responses. There will be wider community engagement with the collection through innovative editorial content.
- ii. The consultation revealed that educators did not want strict lesson plans, but preferred resources that can be used to suit their programmes.

5 Longer Term Sustainability

The longer-term sustainability of the model is an important factor in determining viability of the proposals being delivered once the initial investment in the creation of the asset has been completed.

For the dispersed network, we are awaiting a more detailed plan from the partners relating to this aspect of future delivery. We have agreed that this will be submitted as part of the full business case that will be developed and submitted before the end of the calendar year.

Similarly, more detail will become available for the anchor gallery, once a site has been selected and more detailed business case produced.

However, in both cases the expectation is that sustainability will not be purely reliant on funding from Welsh Government and there will be a reduced reliance on central funding. This will be achieved through commercial elements such as sponsorship, donations, philanthropy, fundraising, merchandising, funding raised through income on intellectual property and charging for elements such as touring exhibitions. This will assist in achieving a better balance between funding sources and any future revenue requirement from Welsh Government. The exact balance of these elements is yet to be determined and may vary over time.

This approach to funding reflects the current financial context and that in response to this situation, efficiencies need to be considered within the overall budget.

Annex 1 - Summary NCAGW Timeline

