

Alun Ffred Jones AC/AM
Y Gweinidog dros Dreftadaeth
Minister for Heritage



Llywodraeth Cynulliad Cymru
Welsh Assembly Government

Eich cyf/Your ref P-03-317
Ein cyf/Our ref AFJ/00225/11

Christine Chapman AM
Chair – Petitions Committee
National Assembly for Wales
Cardiff Bay
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Dear Christine,

21 March 2011

Thank you for your letter of 9 March about Hijinx Theatre.

I welcome the Committee's continued interest in the provision of arts opportunities for the people of Wales as I attach great importance to extending artistic opportunities for adults and young people, including those from minority groups.

As you are aware, the strategic agenda for the arts in Wales is determined by the Welsh Assembly Government in consultation with the Arts Council of Wales (ACW), while individual funding decisions are solely the responsibility of ACW, who operate at arms-length from Government.

In light of this, it would be inappropriate for me to comment on any individual funding decision arising from the ACW Investment Review although I am happy to comment on the Review itself.

In undertaking their Investment Review ACW's Council had a complex task before it, which related to all the artforms it supports, and to all the companies who submitted business cases. I am satisfied that ACW acted in line with the remit I issued in the way they conducted the investment review. My instruction to the Council was that they should undertake a root and branch review of all areas of funded activity. My expectation was that the effectiveness of all aspects of activity should be scrutinised in the same robust fashion as part of the review process. ACW provided clear written advice in advance of the review to all those who would be affected by it explaining the approach that it intended to follow.

Organisations that will lose, or receive a reduction in, their funding will inevitably be disappointed. I know that ACW are continuing to meet with those organisations facing cuts in funding from April 2011 to explore alternative funding sources and to discuss ways of managing budget reductions and develop business plans that reflect their individual circumstances.

I am familiar with the work of Hijinx Theatre, and the issue of its funding is a matter that was touched upon during a meeting I had with the Chair and Chief Executive of ACW on 1 February. Hijinx Theatre have been aware that they were to receive a reduction in funding since the recommendations of the Investment Review were announced in June last year, reflecting ACW's decision that the company will no longer be funded to tour productions to Wales, England and Scotland. ACW will, nonetheless, continue to fund Hijinx Theatre for their work with learning disabled people. I would stress that this is an activity to which the ACW Council attaches a high degree of importance and would therefore like Hijinx to concentrate on in the future. I am aware that ACW have met Hijinx Theatre, to discuss future funding proposals and to help them manage their business through this transitional period. That Hijinx Theatre remain a revenue-funded organisation is an expression of ACW's confidence in the company's work with learning disabled people and ACW will wish to see them thrive artistically on a financially sustainable basis.

In terms of funding from alternative sources, eligibility will depend on the type and nature or the funding sought and for what activity. ACW will continue to welcome applications for project funding from Lottery sources but this will not support core activity. It is a similar situation with European Structural Funding which, as I informed you recently in respect of a separate petition, is not available for core activities. The need to discuss options, and to revisit their business model, leads me to stress the importance of Hijinx remaining in dialogue with ACW.

With regard to the final point of your letter, in relation to my priorities for the arts, I would not agree with the statement that the decision by ACW to cease funding Hijinx for community touring work "flies in the face of" my priorities, disappointing as the reduction in funding has undoubtedly been for Hijinx. Indeed, in my remit letter to ACW for 2011-12, I have reminded them of the importance I attach to community arts and asked them to report to me on whether there is more that could be done to support greater community and voluntary engagement in the arts.

Sincerely
Alun Ffred Jones

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