
Turn up the volume: an inquiry into the live music industry

Senedd: Culture, Welsh Language and Communications Committee

A response from the Arts Council of Wales

The Arts Council of Wales welcomes the Committee's inquiry. We recognise the importance of live music to our nation and we want people in Wales to be fully able to make, participate in or experience live music on their own terms. Black Lives Matter, #weshallnotberemoved, economically disadvantaged communities and the inequalities exacerbated by the Covid pandemic have highlighted that this is not the case.

This inquiry focuses on one particular and important area of the music industry. But live music comes in many types and forms and happens in many places. There are voices and activity not represented in this report. And we need to be conscious of this as we move forward.

As an organisation we ourselves are reflecting and acting on how we can address this. Our goal, through our funding and support, is to ensure absolutely that equity and diversity are central to our work. As well as maintaining and building on the assets we already have, we need to look at what is not being supported, who is not benefiting. Better meeting their needs will be fundamental to ensuring an inclusive approach to supporting live music.

We know that our colleagues in the Welsh Government's newly formed Creative Wales team are similarly minded to put diversity at the centre of their work and to give more emphasis to under-platformed and supported music. We'll continue to work closely with them on our mutual investment in music in Wales.

In doing so we'll recognise our respective roles. This means being clear about where each of us can best focus but also understanding how our complementary activities can piece together and where there are areas around which we can specifically collaborate. For example, Creative Wales lead on music venue business support, but venues can also apply to the Arts Council for projects that demonstrate a clear cultural and public benefit. We're mindful that this needs to be done with the widest definition of the sector – industry and musicians – working with them to support their work, rather than being dictated by us. We'll be working to pull these strands of activity into an action plan that is clearly communicated so that opportunities are easier to navigate.

The inquiry report includes recommendations addressed to Arts Council of Wales as a public funder which we respond to below.

Recommendation 4

Public funders should tailor the support they provide to the industry to encourage people to provide some Welsh language music at predominantly English language gigs. Creative Wales should work to bring different language and genre communities together to encourage collaboration.

We're passionate about the development of work in the Welsh language. We want to invest in projects that develop the capability and skills of artists, musicians and professionals wanting to work in Welsh. This ambition underpins the delivery of our strategy and our funding and is included as assessment criteria in our funding programmes.

We expect people to be able to engage with the arts in the language of their choice, whether as audience, participant or artist. We see this realised in funded projects such as Forte, Horizons/Gorwelion and FOCUS Wales. All of these work with artists making music in both languages equitably and interchangeably.

Our "Noson Allan" scheme supports community groups to promote their own shows in their local venues, including Welsh language music. Before the pandemic we were working with PYST and Dydd Miwsig Cymru to encourage use of the scheme by young Welsh language music promoters. We hope to pick this up again when circumstances allow.

The Arts Council's Welsh Language Committee scrutinises the range, impact and effectiveness of our Welsh language activity. It reflects on our work to date and setting priorities for future work. This includes examining our funding data which is published in our Welsh Language Annual Report.

We also recognise that nearly 80% of Welsh speakers live in economically disadvantaged communities. When thinking about supporting access, it's important to acknowledge that many experience additional barriers to accessing music/arts due to poverty.

Recommendation 10

Many buildings – including arts centres – outside of urban areas receive public funding, either from local authorities or agencies such as the Arts Council. Funding-providers should consider attaching conditions to this funding so that, where possible, these spaces are opened up as rehearsal spaces for musicians.

The venues that we fund as part of our revenue-funded Arts Portfolio Wales are more than just buildings. The teams that run them work closely with their communities to ensure their often unique facilities best serve them. We've seen this in action even within the restrictions of the pandemic.

They also need to generate income from their resources, including more commercial room hires. There's a delicate balance to strike. When there's demand from the community for a service and there are no other suitable facilities, we'd encourage the venue to find ways to support this need. However, this needs to be done alongside the needs of other groups within their communities and

within what's financially and practically feasible. There are (sometimes significant) costs attached to opening doors and making space available.

As we support and monitor venues in the Arts Portfolio Wales, we'll continue to ensure that they're fulfilling a progressive and enabling role as a creative hub for their community, of which providing rehearsal space could be part.

Recommendation 11

Support and mentoring for young people in the live music industry – like that previously available through the Forté Project and Young Promoters' Network in south Wales – should be available for the whole of Wales and should include professions such as managers, promoters and agents. The Arts Council of Wales should strongly consider funding such a nationwide organisation during its investment review.

We've regularly supported Forte Project, (and its parent programme, Sonig which includes the Young Promoters Network). This support has been channelled through Rhondda Cynon Taf Borough Council since the project's inception.

We supported the Research & Development costs of looking at a Wales-wide model (Beacons), as have our colleagues in Creative Wales. Our focus has been led by those that run Forte, centring on the artist development and wellbeing and the opportunities and impact this has on the young people involved either directly as an artist or in the artist's team.

In the Autumn we'll be starting our Investment Review process. This is our five-yearly exercise to invite applications from organisations wishing to apply to become revenue-funded members of the Arts Portfolio Wales. It's not appropriate for us to pre-empt that process and its outcome, but equalities, diversity and reach will be central.

It's also worth noting that within the currently funded Portfolio, Community Music Wales, National Youth Arts Wales, Canolfan Gerdd Wiliam Mathias, Ty Cerdd, Live Music Now and Trac support music development opportunities for young people, in specific ways.

Recommendation 12

The Horizons programme should be expanded so that artists receive more career development advice and support to help them take their careers to the next level.

Arts Council of Wales established Horizons with BBC Cymru and have since funded the project annually. This year in particular we've seen the scheme support a record number of black and ethnic minority artists and MOBO genres. We've endeavoured to maintain funding levels when our partner has not been able to match. This year we increased the ring-fenced funding awarded

to Horizons for the “Launchpad” initiative. This included further grants to support emerging music talent and to enable all recipients to attend industry training.

We’re delighted that Creative Wales are also supporting Horizons this year and will be continuing discussions regarding future support, particular focussing on industry connections.

Until this year we’ve also partnered with the Welsh Government in supporting the PRS Foundation Momentum scheme for ‘tipping point’ artists. Whilst Creative Wales have rightly taken lead on this, we’ll continue to explore other ‘pathway’ options that enable us to maintain our work with both partners. Again, we’ll be looking to reflect our priorities of equalities and “reach” in any funding we commit.

As a general response to the other recommendations, such as a web portal for music, we’d like to highlight the work AM. Supported by Welsh Government it’s developing a platform for digital and online arts, including music, that’s building a growing ‘native’ audience. We’d also observe that rather than creating a new platform, we need to support music creators to better utilise platforms that music fans and audiences are already using.

Finally, the Committee will no doubt be aware that as it stands, the post-Brexit UK/EU Trade Deal doesn’t allow for frictionless artist mobility. This will make touring in Europe far more complex and expensive and this will inevitably impact on music talent and the range artists able to perform in music venues in Wales. Our colleagues in Wales Arts International are working closely with the other UK Arts Councils and sector bodies to advocate for change and provide practical information. An important part of this work is the establishment of a visa “Infopoint”.

Arts Council of Wales
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