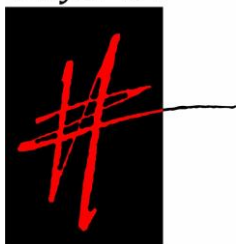


HIJINX



THEATRE

Hijinx Theatre
Wales Millennium Centre
Bute Place
Cardiff Bay
CF10 5AL

William Powell AM
Chair
Petitions Committee
Ty Hywel
Cardiff Bay
Cardiff Cf99 1NA

24th February 2012

Dear Mr Powell

PETITIONS COMMITTEE 28TH FEBRUARY HIJINX THEATRE

Thank you for providing Hijinx with the opportunity to comment on the letters you have received from Huw Lewis, Minister for Housing, Regeneration, and Heritage dated 21st December and from the Auditor General for Wales dated 9th December, following discussions with and consideration of our Petition by your Committee on 1st November.

We have no comments to make in respect of the Auditor General's letter, understanding that he can comment on process only.

In respect of the Minister's letter, we fully appreciate and understand his position regarding the Arts Council for Wales. We are encouraged by, and fully support the Welsh Government's strategic priorities and targets for the arts in Wales. We are pleased that priorities are focussed on improving accessibility for children and young people, breaking down barriers preventing participation with particular emphasis on people with disabilities, ethnic minorities and people living in rural areas.

Hijinx share this ethos and have always believed that arts activity should be available to everyone regardless of their ability or geographical location, and not be focussed on the few. For over 30 years, we have been delivering high quality arts activity for adults with learning disabilities and their community, as well as for the general public in small community centres both rural and urban. When we have crossed the border into England and Scotland we have seen ourselves as ambassadors for Wales, showing that as a nation Wales care about equality and inclusion.

ACW's Investment Review decision to reduce our revenue grant and move our inclusive Odyssey group from lottery project funding into core activity without any uplift, resulted in a 40% reduction in revenue funding. This has resulted in compulsory staff redundancies and reduced output for the very groups that both Hijinx and the Welsh Government see as a priority.

Our Petition was one avenue open to us to draw attention to the situation Hijinx found themselves in following the Investment Review. It is worth reminding Members that no other retained organisation was treated so severely as Hijinx and indeed the vast majority of retained organisations actually saw an increase in their revenue funding. In our previous submissions to this Committee we have provided further detailed information on the impact of this situation both to ourselves and far more importantly to the audiences and people we serve.

I still feel that the wording of the petition is relevant and to my knowledge hasn't been addressed. To remind you of that wording :

*“Following the disproportionate cut in the revenue funding of Hijinx Theatre we call upon the National Assembly of Wales to urge the Welsh Government to ensure sufficient funding is available so that the exemplary and ground breaking work undertaken by Hijinx is not threatened. This unique Welsh company has spent 30 years developing opportunities for people with learning difficulties to **be included at all levels** and this cut will result in a serious reduction in their current provision.”*

We are grateful for the confidence the Arts Council have placed in Hijinx by retaining us in their portfolio of RFOs, and awarding substantial project grants for the 2011 and 2012 Unity Festivals. We have also received a project grant to contribute towards the costs of bringing world famous companies in to Wales to run short inclusive residencies for students in our training academy for actors with leaning disabilities – this work is ground breaking and unique in Wales. We do value ACW's support and have continued to have a professional relationship with them during this turbulent year.

We must however be realistic in that project grants are not a substitute for the massive reduction in revenue grant and the ability of the core company to support the exciting projects we are now undertaking. Each project grant does have a degree of free-lance support built into it, but the experience and history has been lost – people are constantly trying to re-invent the wheel. Lottery project grants also require Hijinx to attract at least 25% of matched funding, which, in the current economic climate is a real challenge, especially when we are seeking additional funding to support our core activity.

We still mourn the loss of our community tour that for so many years provided small communities all over Wales with the opportunity to enjoy wonderful live theatre on their doorsteps at a reasonable price. Hopefully, at some point in the future we will be able to resume this provision and feel reassured that targeting artistic provision to rural communities is also a priority for the Welsh Government. We are also painfully aware that at no point in any review, or audit of the review, have audiences been consulted about their views. We have many, many quotes from audience members “... please, please don't stop coming to rural communities, it is a life-line” ... is just one of them.

Our dream was that at some point in the future, all lines would be blurred between productions, and talented, trained actors with learning disabilities would be able to tour in mainstream productions for the general public in disability blind parts. This is what real inclusion means to us and is now further away than ever before.

Please be assured that we have always enjoyed a good working relationship with the Arts Council and will continue to do so, although I still feel they don't quite grasp the true nature of inclusion, but feel the need to tick a box to do with providing a service for people with a learning disability.

Finally can I thank the Members of the Petitions Committee (both present and past) and the support staff who I have always found to be helpful, courteous and efficient in dealing with our petition, and keep us informed of progress.

Yours sincerely

Mike Clark
Chair of Trustees
Hijinx Theatre