

Cynulliad Cenedlaethol Cymru / National Assembly for Wales
Pwyllgor Diwylliant, y Gymraeg a Chyfathrebu / The Culture, Welsh Language and Communications Committee
The role of arts and culture in addressing poverty and social exclusion / Rôl celfyddydau a diwylliant wrth fynd i'r afael â thlodi ac allgáu cymdeithasol
CWLC(5) CP01
Ymateb gan Traddodiadau Cerdd Cymru / Evidence from Music Traditions Wales

Writing as the Director of Wales' national organisation for the folk and traditional arts, we have a particular perspective on how we work with communities and how we build a sense of well-being, self-confidence and identity as well as keeping Wales' unique indigenous culture alive.

These are huge and very important questions and whilst we cannot hope to give a comprehensive overview of the whole sector we can address how we have interacted with these initiatives and our experience.

Let me start with a little about trac, who we are, why we formed and what we do now.

We formed over twenty years ago as a direct response to the experiences of four Welsh folk musicians and promoters as we travelled round the world and saw how other parts of the world protect and cultivate their own cultures. Whilst they took many different forms they all addressed a particular risk. The risk is risk of loss. The late twentieth century was not a world where we could rely on the old ways of transmission to occur unassisted. Nor was Wales a country where one organisation took a strategic overview of the participatory, professional and establishment networks. So we formed, and began running courses on how traditions pass on, learning & engagement activities for adults, young people & professional musicians as well as developing an advocacy programme to bring our traditions away from historical reproduction and into contemporary practise – how it fits within the community arts, education sector, international links sharing best practise and how to help our growing but very small professional sector develop sustainable careers for themselves. In that time we have developed into a Charity and Company Limited by Guarantee and a Portfolio Client of the Arts Council of Wales.

Now we concentrate on running opportunities for our young generations to engage with our traditions, run a stage at the eisteddfod, grow relationships with the wider Welsh public sector and develop exemplar projects to stimulate awareness of and participation & confidence in our indigenous culture. We do this because it makes us better people, helps communities bond, stimulates the use of the Welsh

Language and when we run projects in poorer communities and for example with Roma groups we find that the “benefits” are not just artistic. As with many arts interventions, growing a relationship with a creative discipline changes the whole person and we now have a growing list of alumni who run their own businesses or who have completed their education or who feel themselves to be more socially integrated than they were before they met us.

We have a few comments about each of your proposed subjects and then afterwards we have a few comments about the wider issues:

How effective have the efforts of Welsh Government sponsored bodies (namely the Arts Council, National Museum, National Library and the Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historic Monuments of Wales) and local government been in using culture to tackle poverty?

In our practise, funded by Arts Council Wales (ACW) we work to make our opportunities inclusive and accessible. We price our activities as low as we can and although this sometimes results in a disproportionate number of children from stable, relatively high-income homes participating we keep bursaries and free places available for those who are in poverty. We target our activity to places where the take-up is likely to include people who are in poverty, for example working with Merthyr Tydfil Youth Services or with Roma communities. However we do this on Lottery funding rather than from our core. Our core funding is around £82,000 per year which pays for a full-time staff of two, some freelance administrative back up, overheads and running our Board. This is typical of a number of ACW clients and as a sector it presents us with a strategic problem, which is that projects typically run for less than a few months and then we have to stop. Technically there are three-year funding options available but this rarely happens as ACW are unable to predict their ongoing resources and are not able to make three-year funding commitments without cutting down on opportunities for others.

Some of their funded venues, notably the Welfare in Ystradgynlais, do tremendous work to improve access and engagement. Yet this is as much to do with the community within which they sit as much as the work of their staff. Within the Portfolio the community arts companies form a very small proportion of the overall activity within Wales and the mechanisms for sharing and learning have not yet

matured to the point where the larger organisations are able to deliver as well as they could or buy in advice and expertise from the sector.

We see a similar range of experiences in our work with local authorities. Where youth services still have the capacity tremendous project work is being carried out but as ever it is done on a shoestring.

Our view is that this is a long-term strategic activity. It needs to be resourced properly and there need to be Wales-wide networks where information, ideas and learning from others is equally important. We do not think it can be done in one-off Lottery projects nor in a fragmented sector. As far as ACW, our core funders, are concerned, the work they do is excellent when they can broker the right partnerships. If there is a shortfall it is in building the expertise into a sectoral, collective understanding of how we go about this and how this fits in to the rest of public life.

What impact has the Welsh Government's Fusion programme had on using culture to tackle poverty?

How effective the Fusion pioneer programmes have been in stimulating local collaboration?

The reports look extremely interesting, however the Fusion programme suffered greatly by being "announced" after the fact. We came across it after we had been building a project in a Pioneer area and informed our local authority partners about it. The team did not know about it. However, we saw this as an opportunity to tie a youth project into the Fusion programme only to find that the local development had been allocated and that only a few community groups were eligible to apply for some hundreds of pounds— great if you're a church hall but really not useful if you are a national development organisation who could have offered something to the project as a whole.

This is a typical experience. The projects look great but the consultation has been entirely within the public sector and news of it and how we can collaborate with it arrives too late to build into project cycles. Moreover, what is available is too small to develop the long term relationships necessary to make these initiatives as successful as they should be.

How effective has the Welsh Government been in improving participation in and access to culture for people in poverty?

It's too early to tell. Certainly in the arts sector there is not enough integrated data to make anything more than a snap judgement. In all the work we do with community engagement we find that the benefits of one action can last for years with small groups of people, but to change a whole community's involvement the most effective way of doing it is by being within a community for years. The successes of Valley and Vale, Valleys Kids and Ucheldre are based on decades of engagement. Access to Culture for people in poverty is a vital part of building the Wales we need and doing it within the Well Being of Future Generations Act is probably the only way to address this.

So to sum it up, we can say that individuals and organisations funded by ACW and others do great work. This is true of Arts in Health work, The Creative Learning Project and many other government-funded programmes. Some of this is work that would happen whether this initiative existed and some is new. However to improve it we feel it needs to be seen to have a higher priority for that to be backed up with additional funds that not only provide more activity but that train and network the sector to make that delivery more effective, more strategic and more sustainable.