

To whom it may concern

14 December 2018

Dear Sir

Response from the Royal Welsh College of Music & Drama to the consultation on the role of arts and culture in addressing poverty and social exclusion

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

From the perspective of the National Conservatoire, a number of key Welsh Government schemes and policy initiatives have supported the work of the Royal Welsh College of Music & Drama in improving participation in and access to the performing arts for people in poverty. For example, the College is proud of its long-standing participation in HEFCW's First Campus project in raising the aspirations and Higher Education awareness of under-represented learners through activities and workshops. Our First Campus activities form a key component within the College's Wales-wide schedule of educational and community outreach initiatives, much of which is targeted towards areas of social deprivation. In 2017-18, our outreach programme of projects and workshops extended to 100 venues across ten Welsh LEAs and reached 8500 participants. Of the 215 workshops presented approximately 50% took place within Communities First areas. The College offers all projects within its outreach programme free of charge, it also hosts regular low-cost instrumental club schemes in Cardiff at weekends and has established ground-breaking drama programmes in areas of social deprivation in West Wales.

The principles of the Welsh Government's Well-being of Future Generations Act play an increasingly central role in shaping the strategic direction of the National Conservatoire, notable through our emphasis on the development of a network of collaborative partners across all levels of the Arts and Education sectors in Wales, and in shaping the work of the College to more transparently reflect the diversity of our national communities. In response, for example, we have sought to remove financial barriers to public events through the offer of a greater number of free performances, and we have expanded our engagement in the Cardiff Time Credit scheme, allowing community volunteers to access public performances at the College in recognition of their work.

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The need to address poverty and social exclusion is also informing our future plans, which include proposals to establish Foundation degrees and courses, apprenticeships in Theatre design and Stage Management, and collaborative partnerships with arts and education sector organisation sector in key regional areas across Wales.

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

The work of the Welsh Government in this area is clearly valuable, both in terms of its recently established Fusion framework and initiatives, and potentially through the influence these may have on the wider Welsh arts community in stimulating complementary or linked activity. The programme is clearly at an early stage and a thorough critical review may not be possible until a five-year schedule of activity has been completed and evaluated.

In assessing effectiveness, the development of a robust mechanism for measuring the lasting/longer term impact of projects would provide a potentially deeper measure of effectiveness (measured against the seven Fusion performance indicators). This could also assist in the evaluation of similar activities within the wider arts and culture sector across Wales.

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

The overall effectiveness of the Pioneer programmes in stimulating local collaboration is difficult to assess from evidence available in the published documentation. However, there has clearly already been much valuable work. Greater visibility of the scheme and its projects would certainly enhance its impact and sustainability, and its ability to attract and incorporate the widest possible network of collaborative partners.

The Performing Arts sector seems under-represented in each of the eight lead bodies at present, in spite of much work already taking place in the form of educational outreach and community engagement by most of the national performing arts institutions (including the BBC National Orchestra and Chorus of Wales, Welsh National Opera, National Youth Arts Wales, and an extensive, pan-Wales provision here at the National Conservatoire). Incorporating or coordinating this existing work and expertise into the various Fusion programmes would appear to be an advantageous development for all stakeholders.

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I hope that this response has been constructive, useful and informative. The National Conservatoire remains committed to extending the reach and impact of its work across Wales in support of Welsh Government initiatives, in collaboration with the wider Welsh arts and education sectors, and in partnership with the people and diverse communities of Wales.

Yours sincerely



Professor Helena Gaunt
Principal

