

National Campaign for the Arts Response to Wales Arts Review 16 August 2006

## 1) The existing and future role of the Arts Council Wales in relation to:

## a) Its funding of the arts, including the national arts organisations

ACW has acted as a respected and trusted authority in allocating funding to arts organisations in the past. There remains considerable support, particularly among smaller organisations, for ACW as the distributor of government funding. Although it is acknowledged that ACW has shortcomings (for example in geographical arrangement and staffing levels) these are neither insurmountable, nor, necessarily the fault of ACW.

As an arm's length organisation, ACW helps to protect the arts from many of the dangers posed by political control over artistic freedom through financial power. Arts organisations value ACW's role of providing an overview of the sector, assessing financial support for artistic endeavours objectively and with expertise, developing relationships with funding bodies from across the UK and identifying and promoting best practice in the arts.

The ACW document, *The Arts Work, Facts and Figures 2005*, showed that investment in the arts by Government, business and private donation, brings a substantial return to the public and that the arts create good public value. Given the importance of Government funding to the arts sector, this amounts to a commendation of the Arts Council's distribution of that funding.

Financial security is crucial to the development of the arts and allows for a balance between artistic risk-taking and core stability in an organisation. The arts in Wales need a long-term and coherent funding strategy involving partnership between ACW, umbrella bodies, local authorities and the individual organisations. It is vital that the funding needs of the whole arts sector be expertly and fairly judged and that the funding process be transparent and efficient.

The infrastructure of the arts sector is highly interdependent and cross-fertilising. Artists, administrators, artistic ideas and administrative best practice move within the sector, fuelling creative, professional and administrative development. No single element within the arts can provide all the outcomes that are desired of the sector. In the light of this, the National Campaign for the Arts (NCA) notes that there are fears among arts professionals that funding 'national' companies separately is potentially divisive and could destabilise the sector. There have been questions about the criteria for being a 'national' company, the need for separate funding, and whether the 'national' companies would support this proposal if their funding were not increased by it. There

are concerns that non 'national' companies might suffer reduced funding which local authorities and charitable bodies would be unable or unwilling to replace and about the administrative costs of running separate funding streams.

#### b) The development of the arts in Wales

Development is a broad term and can refer to many or all aspects of the arts, whether taken as a whole, as organisations in particular or as artist's individual practices. It can include progression in artistic expression (e.g. in the sources of inspiration, manner of expression and form that the art takes), and change in an organisation or across the whole sector. The latter could include expansion in the size of an organisation or the sector, audience/participant numbers, educational and community programs and the geographical reach of the work as well as changes in the type of work produced, improvements in the quality of work, and better professional standards.

The balance and quality of cultural provision in Wales has improved but is not yet even or sufficient. Development is a matter which organisations must address individually, but which, in the sector as a whole, requires strategic planning, evaluation and direction. However, the NCA notes the value of diversity within the sector and stresses again the interdependence of a healthy arts sector and the need for collective development. By virtue of its individual relationships with organisations and its overall perspective, ACW is in the ideal position to provide such direction and could assume an increasingly strategic role in this.

#### c) The development of access and inclusion in the arts, and tackling social inequalities

As with the question of development, these are issues that individual organisations must address and also sector-wide issues. If provision for access and inclusion are to be systemically improved, then strategic planning, guidance, and support from a central body are required. Again, by virtue of its combination of individual relationships with organisations and an overall perspective, ACW is in the ideal position to provide such direction and could assume an increasingly strategic role in this.

As mentioned above, despite considerable progress, there is still room for improvement in the balance and quality of cultural provision in Wales. The relationship between the arts, education, and social policy could also be greatly improved. The individual and collective efforts of arts organisations in these areas can have an impressive impact. However, a central body is necessary to promote and co-ordinate increased involvement of the arts in social policy and to act to improve the pattern of arts education provision across Wales. This is a role that ACW could fill and to which it could bring expertise in knowledge and skills.

The arts should be an integral part of strategies for social policy across the board because they offer opportunities for personal development, the acquisition of skills and knowledge, and exposure to new and varied perspectives on life. However, access and inclusion are affected by many factors including education, transport, economics and social mores, and the arts cannot be expected to tackle access and inclusion single handedly. In particular, it is vital that the arts be embedded in the education system if

children and young people are to engage in the cultural and artistic opportunities available.

Government must recognise that the arts are primarily responsible for producing the best art that they can. It is right that they should make this available to as large and diverse an audience as possible, but for this part of the equation to improve greatly will require more than the efforts of the individual organisation.

The NCA notes that producing art, making this accessible to a wider audience, and tackling social issues through the arts are interrelated but not necessarily mutually inclusive and that funding streams and strategic direction should recognise and reflect this.

# 2) The roles of the Arts Council of Wales and the Welsh Assembly Government in future, taking account of needsfor:

## a) Democratic accountability

The arts are an important part of Welsh national life, contributing to and improving it in many and varied ways. A recent ACW survey showed that the population of Wales values the arts and believes them to be important to the quality of life. Attending arts events was more popular than attending sports as a spectator and participation figures were comparable. There was positive correlation between attending arts events and attending or participating in other activities, and also between engagement with the arts and proficiency in Welsh. 76% said that the arts made Wales a better place to live and the majority of respondents in the survey believed that:

- \*the arts enrich their lives
- \*children should have the opportunity to participate in the arts
- \*participation in the arts builds confidence
- \*skills gained from participation in the arts can improve employment prospects

The Government has a democratic responsibility to provide for the arts financially and to ensure that the allocation of funds is conducted in an unbiased way by experts in the sector such that Government funding is best able to promote stability and long-term strategic direction in the arts. The Minister for Culture is responsible for ensuring that this is the case and for promoting and protecting the interests of the arts in Wales when dealing with government departments and with other countries.

Whatever the future relationship between ACW and WAG, it is vital the arts sector has a trusted and authoritative body that can assess its needs and merits fairly and with expertise and which represents these to Government in an unbiased way.

# b) Transparency and openness

It is important that the body representing the arts and allocating Government funding to arts organisations has no agenda other than that of serving the best interests of the arts sector. Artistic decisions should not be influenced by political agendas and should be made and administered by people with proven expertise. Reports on funding

decisions should be publicly available and information about the sector handled by a central body should be collected, collated and presented openly and objectively.

The NCA notes that the arts sector has felt excluded from political decisions that affect it and that the public is not always well informed about such decisions or debates. A BBC Wales poll in February 2006 showed that the although 79% of respondents had been to an arts event or venue in the past year, and 73% had heard of the Arts Council of Wales, only 16% had heard about the debate about the future of funding for the arts in Wales and ACW's role in that. The NCA also notes that arts organisations are often over-stretched, lacking the capacity to engage with the political process and that they need a body which can do this on their behalf. The arts sector and the public ought to be informed about decisions affecting the arts and involved in making these.

#### c) Artistic freedom

The arts must have the freedom to explore, comment on and challenge any area of life, including the political. Artistic merit must not become subordinate to political agendas. Decisions about funding and strategic direction and support for the arts should be made on the basis of artistic merit alone and designed to serve the best interests of the sector.

### d) An environment within which the arts can develop in all parts of Wales

The arts are a cross departmental matter and should be fully integrated into the government's strategies for all social policy (education, health, environment, social inclusion etc.) The arts are also an issue for every local authority and clarity should be sought on their responsibilities.

There must be a balance between development in terms of increasing audiences and participant numbers, and sustaining and improving artistic standards. It is not sufficient to focus on the former. There is a danger that increases in the number of people involved in the arts can be taken as a sign of success without relating these critically to artistic standards and that statistics might be considered out of context. The body responsible for the strategic direction of development in the arts across Wales must be aware of the need for this balance, able to sustain it, and qualified to assess artistic merit. It must also have expert knowledge of the sector in order to create strategic direction and provide professional support to the sector as this is implemented. The arts sector is a complex one and its needs and abilities are highly specific and sensitive. Development therefore needs to be handled in a sensitive, specific and strategic manner.

#### e) Improving access to the arts

Improving access should be a core part of the work of all arts organisations. However, arts organisations should not be expected to take full responsibility for this as they may simply not have the resources. Improving access should be supported at a national

level involving expert professional support and a pan Wales strategy. It should be expected that improvements will take time.

#### f) Improving excellence in the arts

Once again this is a matter for each arts organisation or artist to address and also something which should be part of the strategic direction and support offered by a central body. It should be acknowledged that artistic excellence is as varied as art forms and artists and that critical judgements also vary widely. The arts elicit personal responses, and judgements about artistic excellence will rarely be uniform. It is therefore vital that decisions about, or influenced by, judgements about artistic excellence are made by trusted panels of experts representing a variety of artistic interests and opinions and capable of engaging in informed debate.

The requirement for improving standards should be met by improvements in levels of pay and in support for professional development.

#### g) Active management and development of arts funding recipients

The management and development of funded arts organisations remains primarily a matter for the individual organisation and their knowledge and practice should be respected. However, the central body allocating funds should have a role to play in providing strategic direction for the sector and sharing examples of best practice. It should also give specific professional advice and expert support to funded organisations as necessary and can be a very useful development resource in this way. There are doubts in the Welsh arts sector about the WAG's ability to provide this.

## 3) The funding of arts in an international context:

## a) Levels of arts funding

Arts organisations should be recognised as playing a vital part in national, local and personal life and funding them should be a core responsibility of Government. If the arts are to sustain their present position and build on this, then funding must, at least, continue to rise in line with inflation and specific project or sector funding should also be made available to enhance this as and when necessary.

The benefits that the arts provide are multiple, varied, and cross sector. Government should recognise that arts funding can result in improvements in areas such as community life, health and education. Furthermore, a relatively small investment in the arts can yield big results both economically and socially. However, the arts sector is highly vulnerable to financial insecurity and a reduction in arts funding in real terms will have a detrimental impact on arts organisations, the cross sector areas on which they have an impact and individuals.

There are concerns among the arts sector that Wales lags behind other countries in its support for the arts and that it cannot achieve full international recognition without addressing this.

## b) Funding mechanisms

The UK arts funding system differs from its counterparts in Europe and the USA in that Government support is lower than in the former and higher than in the latter, while the opposite is true of private patronage. Whether or not this is satisfactory depends on the stability of the funding sources, the period of time over which funding is committed and the levels of human and financial resources that are required in order to secure and sustain funding. Many arts organisations have to invest considerable resources to acquire funding, much of which is short-term and project focused, leaving the long-term future of the organisation and its core costs in a vulnerable position and impeding successful strategic planning and therefore matters such as development, improving access and improving excellence.

The primary function of arts organisations is the production of art and Government should seek to reduce bureaucracy and encourage long-term perspectives in arts funding.

#### 4) Further comments

The NCA is the UK's only independent lobbying organisation representing all the arts. It provides a voice for the arts world in all its diversity. It seeks to safeguard, promote and develop the arts and win public and political recognition for the importance of the arts as a key element in our national culture.

In this response the NCA takes an overview of the arts sector in Wales, reflecting the concerns of the sector in general and of members in particular, and seeking to ensure the long term health, stability and vibrancy of the sector.

The NCA welcomes the opportunity to be involved in the Wales Arts Review and requests that the following key messages inform the research and debate regarding the future relationship between ACW and WAG:

## The value of the arts to Wales

Arts organisations make a unique and significant contribution to life in Wales at a national, local and individual level. People in Wales value the arts for their own sake and for the social impact which they can have.

The arts play a vital part in providing educational opportunities, increasing equality of opportunity through promoting participation in cultural activities by the disadvantaged and/or excluded, offering opportunities for volunteering, and facilitating training and self-awareness. The arts can bring benefits in terms of community life, social inclusion and health. Participation in arts activities can be an important factor in personal development and fulfilment, leading to increased knowledge, skills and self confidence.

The WAG has a responsibility to support the arts sector in Wales such that it is stable and sustainable and can develop and improve.

## The value of stability in the sector

The arts sector is financially vulnerable and professionally under-supported. Financial stability is necessary for long-term strategic planning and for the development of provision for and of the arts across Wales. There is also a need for greater support for arts professionals in terms of training, levels of pay and opportunities for career development if the arts sector in Wales is to attract and retain artists and administrators of the quality it wants and needs. An unstable arts sector cannot sustain the quality and diversity of work which people in Wales value and which enables the arts to have the impact which they do. WAG and ACW should build on current successes; they cannot afford to be complacent or to risk damaging existing good practice and provision.

## The value of diversity in the sector

Arts organisations are diverse in art form, purpose, location and size. Such diversity is essential to a thriving arts sector, allowing the arts a wide artistic, geographical and social scope. Artistic work is fuelled by debate, reaction, criticism and inspiration: artists respond to the work of other artists and this energises the sector as a whole and their work in particular. It is also in the nature of the sector that individuals move between organisations and locations as part of their career development. The diversity of the arts sector is necessary to its continuing development and serves to prevent stagnation or complacency. A strong case is made for diversity in the arts sector in the Diversity Manifesto produced by EQ and the NCA which can be found at: http://www.artscampaign.org.uk/info/Diversity%20Manifesto%207%20Nov%200 5.pdf

The bodies responsible for strategic direction, professional support and funding allocations within the arts must be aware of the need to sustain and build on the diversity present in the arts, as part of ensuring a worthwhile future for the sector.

#### The need for expertise in a central body

The arts sector is a complex one and the central body responsible for strategic direction and the allocation of Government funding must have the expertise, professionalism and knowledge of the sector to make artistic decisions, create and implement strategies for the sector and provide professional support to organisations.

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