



Promoting Welsh Arts and Culture on the World Stage

Report to Arts Strategy Board

Authors: David Alston Arts Director Arts council of Wales
Harry McIver Acting Director Wales Arts International

Summary

In November 2008 the Communities and Culture Committee of the National Assembly of Wales agreed terms of reference for conducting an Inquiry into the Promotion of Welsh Arts and Culture on the World Stage. It took oral evidence from 3rd December 26th February 2009.

The Arts Director, Arts Council of Wales, the Director of Wales Arts International together with the Director British Council Wales, the Senior Adviser, Arts, Creative Industries and New Media, British Council, and the Director, Arts, British Council UK gave oral evidence together to the Committee's initial session. The Committee was supplied with Arts Council of Wales International Policy and Wales Arts International's Strategy *Creating 2013*.

The Inquiry report was published in July 2009. An electronic copy of the full report is available on the National Assembly's website www.assemblywales.org. (See Appendix 1 for extracts including Chair's foreword, inquiry brief and recommendations)

1. Creating a Focus

In its meeting on the 18th September, the Arts Council warmly welcomed the conclusion of the Inquiry which highlights the need for “a strategic, easily communicated plan...needed in the current climate ...enabling existing resources to be better focused on achieving better results”. (Chair’s preface)

There is currently no active focus for the co-ordination of efforts of all parties in international cultural work. The starting point for this should probably be the strategic framework of 2004 referred to in section 55 of the Inquiry. This is specific to the overall international work of the Assembly Government. This would be the focal point for a process seeking to refresh and update strategy. This could and should be done in an inclusive way, and the synergies between arts policies, cultural players, the Creative Industries and educational work given a new focus which could be maintained in regular forward looking fora to achieve strategic alignment.

The British Council, Arts Council of Wales, and Wales Arts International along with other key players such as Amgueddfa Cymru /National Museum and the Universities, need to be involved. This would be best led by Gary Davies (as Director of European and External Affairs in the Welsh Assembly Government), and in the Arts Council’s view should embrace the Major Events unit also within the Assembly. This would make the necessary connections between cultural profile created within Wales and externally to the country. Cultural dimensions to the overall international strategy of the Assembly Government could then be brought into the frame.

In revisiting the existing strategic framework, the potential of an audit of international arts activity from Wales was raised to capture knowledge of work not currently appearing on the radar, including work by independently funded organisations and artists that are not regularly in communication with the support bodies in Wales. These activities might include projects, networks, core activity, strategic initiatives, etc.. Undertaking such an audit would need to be resourced. Creative & Cultural Skills are developing research into International Skills Development which is likely to include audit work. This may include, or may be expanded to include, information useful to this context.

2. Defining the World Stage

The process of review would bring into greater focus the issue of defining, at this juncture, the strategic 'World Stage' for Wales. It is not just any stage outside Wales, which is the implication. The context in which individuals and companies work is crucial; if the criteria are not appropriately set and the context is not right, there is no benchmarking occurring. The mere fact of putting on artistic work outside Wales is not in itself an indicator of success of any kind.

There is an opportunity here to articulate the ambitions and aspirations for Art and Culture from Wales in an international context. The 'World Stage' means that an appropriate context has been developed that allows for effective promotion for the benefit of a range of organisations. These organisations would include the company, the sector, and or the broader community that will create or further cultural relations, dialogue and sustainable links to that location, other sectors and relevant strategies of government, industries, etc. A stage has boundaries and also, more importantly, focus. For the arts the key driver is: why do we want this particular piece of work to be experienced by other cultures?

3. The Promotion of Wales

Arts Council is supportive both of the idea of "the promotion of Wales" through the Arts and the freedom of artists to create independently. Indeed we would advocate the idea that high quality independent art produced in and of Wales – and achieved at the very highest standard – is the best promotion of the culture of contemporary Wales. In such circumstances, intercultural dialogue, and thus promotion, can be best served by such interaction.

Arts Council would emphasise that the independence and self determination of artists is vital and must be protected and maintained across all aspects of artistic practice. This must not be clouded or sacrificed when artists work in contexts such as Cultural Diplomacy or work with cross-sector strategies.

The established cross-cutting strategies of the Arts Council must also be considered in this context. For example, in considering equalities, the costs relating to a disabled artist's travel and work in other countries may be different from those of a non-disabled artist. Other countries may also have different support mechanisms in this context and this needs to be considered also.

In international work there is a place for the glossy showcase. But no less important is the contact and developmental work and long term engagement of artists in networks and with communities of interest. Because of the general lack of definition of ideas around promotion throughout the report, we can help by being specific. "Promotion" is cited often but not defined. The qualification of this term needs to be set out for this context. The response to the document needs to reflect the defined, strategic need for promotion and not allow the mistake that any activity in this arena constitutes "promotion" and even worse constitutes useful promotion. These ideas could be further unpacked in the context of refreshing overall international strategy as referred to above.

4. The question of resources

The report does not take stock of the current level of resource being expended in this area of activity. It neither probes what the commensurate budgets might be, nor more specifically what is the appropriate investment in the cultural component of such work.

The Arts Council identified the need for a bespoke International Touring Production Fund, for example, that lies beyond the scope of current resources. This might be a 'prestige' fund, supporting Welsh links with other cultures as part of a joint strategy with WAG (e.g. as is operating in the group currently coordinated by Gary Davies Director of European and External Affairs, developing links with China).

Whatever resources are currently being allocated to this work they are being expended piecemeal. In the absence of any coordinating strategy or framework, it is probably not therefore being maximised for the benefit of Wales. Over time by collating material from its clients in its annual survey Arts Council of Wales would be able to compile a picture of international work in the arts. If, however, such an audit was deemed necessary at this stage it needs to be resourced as a mapping stage supporting the work of revitalising international strategy.

5. Cultural Strategy

The Committee's report highlights the potential of a new iteration of Cultural Strategy. This sits with the Heritage Department. The Arts Council strongly supports all efforts to produce a cultural statement

and any work towards a Cultural Strategy. The Arts Council's Investment Review Vision document should be seen as a contribution to the arts aspect of a cultural statement.

6. Points on other specific recommendations:

Recommendation 3

- The idea of channelling information through one site wales.com, needs "caveated" support. The habits of internet browsing need to be taken into account...people follow the line of their interests from a starting point. It is the responsibility of the starting point to capture interest in the first place then begin the process of relay and allow people to discover "favourites" along the way. Currently, in the view of the Arts Council, no website is acting as a cultural gateway to Wales in any depth and no website even adopts links which could fulfil this function.

Recommendation 4

- The Arts Council of Wales is approaching this in tandem with the British Council and is aiming to find best fit projects and then the wherewithal to support participation in the projects through matched funding. Progress is being made in relation to European projects and the activity in the action plan of the European Desk co-sponsored by Arts Council of Wales and British Council. (See Appendix 2)

Wales Arts International envisage this service operating as follows when key organisations in the Arts sector in Wales are fully engaged in European networks and projects:

- as the point of contact liaising with organisations in Wales engaging in European activity and the WAG contact in Brussels
- Flagging up and passing on relevant opportunities to these organisations through fluid communication with WAG office Brussels

- Supporting and encouraging Welsh organisations to strengthen their own links with their European counterparts through networking and introductions
- Supporting and encouraging Welsh organisations participation in European transnational projects
- Identifying and participating in / leading on specific projects to develop the arts sector and those that fit in with WAG strategic objectives

Recommendation 5

- The Arts Council felt that there was a need for clarification here. Glyndwr University in their evidence make a point about finding funding from “public patrons” before other funds are withdrawn and this becomes a recommendation in the report. If what is intended is about private sector and trust and foundation support and individual giving then the Inquiry needed to hear from Arts and Business regarding the climate for such activity, not just currently but generally and what governs such support for activity with international dimensions or happening outside of Wales. If the point concerns leverage for partnership support (though not always resulting in hard cash) then access to the British Council network and recognition of British Council brand is relevant here.

Recommendation 6

- An action plan would be an outcome of achieving Recommendation 1

Recommendation 7

- *Strive to Excel*, produced as part of our Investment Review process, is seeing such linkages between arts organisations and the bigger world beyond as beneficial and evidence of a successful arts organisation, i.e. that there is a constituency or network demonstrating a community of interest in the company or organisation’s work. Our best companies from small to large demonstrate this.

Recommendation 8

- Working for a Translator’s House was a recommendation included in the Arts Council of Wales’s Art form Literature strategy (under Resource Category 3) and the first step has been realised by Welsh Literature Exchange working in partnership with Ty Newydd and Academi, but the fully fledged version of a

Translator's House would be dependent on securing more core funding.

Recommendation 10

- We will be appraising the effectiveness of our communications... this is part of the roll out of plans for WAI's website and Canfas Newsletter

Recommendation 11

- The first port of call for diplomatic issues is the FCO and local consulate. There are appropriate practices and channels Arts Council of Wales can and do refer artists to. British Council would point to its advice services available centrally and where appropriate throughout its world wide network of offices. For general practical advice, there is some generic information available about travelling overseas with or for work. Basic information is covered by the British Council online - on a professional level the British Council Collection website has video demonstrating how to pack artworks - Visiting Arts also have a number of helpful generic information online.

If WAI were to not duplicate but did need to develop something bespoke, then this would need scoping. WAI could run this service but it should be discrete in its formulation. Advice (as with Practics, International Opportunities Fund and British Council links), Promotion, Cultural Relations work, support of outreach work, added value for Welsh links in other countries in liaison with Welsh Assembly Government and other organisations. Such a service would take advantage of and complement the British Council network, Visiting Arts services, EU networks and projects such as IETM (an international network for contemporary performing arts), Practics, potentially Toolquiz, etc. Fully rolled out this would demand additional resources.

7. General further points

Arts Council noted the following points relating to the Terms of Reference and the questions the Committee set itself. (See Appendix 1 Page 8 of the report)

- 7.1 There is little in the conclusions of the report that for example "measures success" in this field. This could be because the

Committee could not identify the binding strategic intent of such work. But we should and could evidence how at least at a project level we are working with purpose and measuring success against aims.

- 7.2 The final report is silent on the "top priorities". This is because of the pragmatic aspects of international work. However, it is also because whilst some of the priorities are clear to those working most consistently with them, they are less clear to those who are trying to relate to them. It also might be a reflection of the arts being in this instance also "customer led" i.e. responsive to artists' reasons for wanting to work in a particular place or context.
- 7.3 There is nothing in the report on "research into unique/growth areas and current balance." This is an area which we should be able to build more commentary on and probably need to "workshop" some conclusions in this area. The Arts Council would need to take a dispassionate view of where our international efforts are going, develop some overview of different sectors and the activities of both direct provision and arts organisations' own activities. This information is not immediately available. Further reflection is needed on the issue of evaluation in respect of the efficient and effective use of public money. These are both issues which would need resourced research but which could be useful in informing international strategy in the future.
- 7.4 There is a need also, to flag the developing UK agenda for culture set in the context of European definitions and developments. As a result, is Wales missing out on DCMS originated initiatives (which have had new resources, none of which has yet come to Wales)? To date, the Assembly has not embraced the creative industries agenda in a way which matches the broader definitions that are commonplace in Europe.
- 7.5 In researching a refreshed strategy, it would be useful to include a re-iteration of our current partnership and its activities. This should be accompanied by conveying also, where appropriate, the broader remits of both the British Council and the Arts Council. This should highlight, where necessary, work that is delivered outside of the British Council/Arts Council of Wales partnership by Wales Arts International and British Council.

Reference should be made to the forum for exchange and collaborative work which the Cultural Diplomacy Group meetings, hosted by the British Council, are developing. These are attended by the Arts Director, Sponsor Division, the other nations' Arts Councils and government departments, the Foreign Office and some National Museums, e.g. Tate, V&A.)

8. Conclusion

Arts Council of Wales welcomes the potential priorities and drivers implied in the recommendations from the Inquiry. Many of these chime with recent initiatives or ambitions in the sector and the Arts Council would seek to develop a framework for these from this foundation.

Areas indicated that would benefit from a full analysis and focussed development include: promotion, strategies of support for culture from the EU and other sources, developing the potential and support services for artists and organisations from Wales working internationally and the evaluation of this work; all implying further partnership working with British Council, departments of Welsh Assembly Government and other international bodies.

There would be much to be gained by carrying forward the refresh and refocus on international strategy recommended by the Inquiry.

Arts Council of Wales would look to playing its fullest part in such a follow up to the Inquiry, along with our partners in the British Council and through Wales Arts International and the key players in Wales.

Promoting Welsh Arts and Culture on the World Stage

Report to Arts Strategy Board – Appendix 2

Wales Arts International's European Desk:

Set up in July 2008, the first six months of this project allowed extensive research and contacts development in relation to relevant European programmes and networks. The role and objectives are set out in an Action Plan for the post and includes the development of three key applications to EU programmes. The first application submitted was successful and a brief of all three is included below:

Practics: Artists' Mobility Project 2009 – 2011, across Europe

The project's objective is to develop a pilot network of "EU Cultural Mobility Contact Points" for the cultural sector, to stimulate mobility between EU countries and help overcome existing obstacles to mobility. A number of partners will develop and pilot Cultural Mobility Contact Points (CMCP) for their countries. Those partners are Kunstenloket (Belgium) SICCA (N'lands) WAI/ACW (Wales) and Interarts (Spain) The CMCP is envisaged as a first entry for people seeking information related to incoming and outgoing cultural mobility and designed to offer administrative support. The project is led by the Finnish Theatre Information Centre.

Toolquiz: Cultural and Creative Sector, Human Capital and Knowledge based Economy. Application submitted January 2009. Decision expected in November 2009.

The main objective is to improve the competitiveness and the economic development of the partner regions by analysing and transferring good practices relating to the links between the cultural and creative sector, human capital and knowledge economy, working on employability in and through the cultural and creative sector. There are 13 partners from France, Norway, Italy, Spain, Poland, Belgium and Wales. The project is led by the regional council of Nord Pas de Calais.

Impact: Indigenous Music Promotion Advancing Cultural Tourism.

Application in development for submission in 2010.

This will be a transnational project with partner countries in the Atlantic area aiming to develop employment in the tourism and traditional music sectors, also developing branding, sustainability and access for visitors through a web-based portal. There will be comparison with partner countries and sharing of best practice to significantly develop the Cultural Tourism offer in relation to the traditional music sector. This project will be led by Arts Council of Wales/Wales Arts International.

Other activity:

Alongside these major pieces of work, the European Officer works to support and engage the arts sector in Wales in the various relevant European political structures, networks, strategies and funding programmes. For example, a landmark seminar in Brussels was organised by WAI for a large, cross-art form group from Wales with a programme developed in partnership with the Welsh Assembly Government office in Brussels and an expert in the field. Four members of this group have attended the Cultural Forum in Brussels and will feedback at a seminar in Wales in November. The aim is to develop a network supporting those working in this context in Wales.

HM/WAI 1/10/09