

**Consultation doc. Arts and Culture, Comm&Cult committee. [REDACTED]
Inquiry Into the Accessibility of Arts and Cultural Activities Across Wales**

Consultation Document [REDACTED]

I thank the Clerk of the Communities and Culture Committee for letting me provide this consultation document.

This document is qualitative and analytical. There are attempts on my behalf to appease subjectivity. I have used my own analysis with my dealings with the ACW and the committee meetings completed in building this short document.

The ACW's 'Major Survey of the Arts In Wales 2010' report has interesting findings. 86% of people supposedly tell the ACW that they attend or take part in the Arts. This could be anything. From self funded Sunday canvas painting to listening to a self funded band at a local pub. Nothing to do with the ACW. The ACW is seemingly non-existent in West Wales. With a journalists notepad I asked twenty people in Carmarthen town whether they had ever heard of the Arts Council. Only two knew what I was talking about or had heard of them. I was going to ask a bigger sample of people but decided that people generally were finding it odd what I was asking them.

'Access to art forms across the country is patchy' (Nick Capaldi 22/09/10 meeting)

He has hit the nail on the head. The ACW is funded adequately well by the Welsh Assembly and has adequate lottery funds but is failing to spread into some counties, towns and villages.

This is what people want in small towns and even villages. A funded male voice choir or a potter or an acting company or an artist exhibiting at the Town hall or village hall or even Church hall. It would be the biggest thing of the year in a small town to have a small opera or dance company or drama company perform at a building they know well. It is also more environmentally sustainable as they will not have to travel by car to the big city like Swansea or Cardiff to see it. It is also community building. From an economic perspective it also spreads funding throughout Wales to a much greater degree.

'Small is beautiful' and local is also beautiful. From a subjective point of view I enquired a few years about the feasibility of exhibiting at a small hall near me in sculpture. Being a very experienced craftsman I know how to put on an exhibition or present work. This village hall was completely out of the question. It was not something the ACW controlled. Yet this same village hall is good

Consultation doc. Arts and Culture, Comm&Cult committee. [REDACTED] enough to house a Farmers Ball, a sell out crowd of Amateur Boxing and even political jousting against P.O. closures. Assembly Members Angela Burns, Nerys Evans and Alun Davies publicly speaking alongside Nick Ainger M.P.

This hall and others like it in small towns and villages across Wales are perfectly capable of providing local people with an exhibition of art or a Shakespeare play or an evening of Classical music. They are most often made of natural stone and robust. The public are intimately acquainted with these structures. They are intrinsic to their community.

The Arts Council's desire for large and desirable buildings in big towns and cities will be to the detriment of bringing the Arts and cultural activities to the people of Wales. The use of local buildings such as town halls, village halls, community centres, leisure centres and even open air exhibitions in High Street's is a way for the Welsh Assembly Government to engage with the people of Wales in a positive way.

The key is small groups. Small companies of actors, musicians, painters and sculptors, poets, potters, craftspeople. Big groups centralise arts activity and eat up resources. Money can easily go astray with bigger groups. Smaller groups localise arts and cultural activity and is more inclusive for those providing the activity and those attending.

To make a subjective example. The local Craft guild in Carmarthen put's up a small marquee some Saturdays in the centre of Carmarthen Town. Jewellers, greeting card makers, wood turners and other crafts are on display for sale. People flood in to visit. Up the road at the Arts Council funded Oriel Myrrdin one can always get the whole gallery to view alone. Sometimes people feel inhibited at visiting galleries and museums. A much vaunted ACW experiment of a building may be too overwhelming to a lot of average people to visit. A local and municipally used building in towns and villages across Wales will bring publicly funded arts and cultural activities to the people and it will be a way for the Assembly to engage. After all people of lower educational attainment and 'social standing' (whatever that is) have as much liberty to visit and enjoy the arts as the better educated that Nick Capaldi describes.

With many more smaller groups who will provide much more de-centralised activity in the arts and culture there will be the need for more administration. In my opinion this is part of the reason the ACW do not like to spread the money too thinly. It needs more administration to provide £10,000 each to 20 small groups rather than £50,000 to 4 bigger groups.

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With three offices in Wales this should be no problem at all. In fact it is strange that someone who lives in Brecon and find's it easier to travel to Cardiff (Brecon -Cardiff 33 miles) will have to deal with ACW mid and West Wales office in Carmarthen (Brecon-Carmarthen 39 miles and poorer transport links). Public funding for the arts is to provide public benefit and this means bringing arts and cultural activity to the people. Not to fund what I think is unnecessary offices. The Arts Council of Scotland saves money by having it's only office in Edinburgh. The same in the Republic of Ireland.

With other groups in the Arts. A man from the ethnic minorities publicly criticised the then Heritage Minister at the 2008 ACW conference in Aberystwyth. Another criticised over the lack of opportunities for disabled artists and performers. It is simply not consistent to say one thing and make claims and not see arts flourish with the ethnic minorities. Or to send disabled practitioners along to Disability Arts Cwmru as a way of getting rid of them . People from minorities should be given an equitable opportunity to obtain funding or to view arts and cultural activity .

The Individual. If people outside of Wales think about Welsh arts activity it is often about male voice choirs which are known throughout the world. As well as this people outside of Wales think of individuals like bryn terfel , Katherine Jenkins, Dylan Thomas, Augustus John and others. It's Welsh individuals who have given the impression of Wales as a small artistic powerhouse. It's not big art organisation's expecting large annual payouts to keep them in a certain lifestyle. Promoting individual painters, musicians, playwrights, poets, potters and so on.

Conclusion

It's all about going small. Amount of money has no reflection on quality. Whatever Nick Capaldi may claim. Small groups in cities, towns, villages throughout Wales. No need for large new buildings. No need for a 3-year funding cycle. Do artists and groups get funded in 3-year cycles? No. Opportunities to ethnic minority people and to deaf and disabled people to express themselves in the arts. Also to individuals. The most important thing is bringing arts and cultural activity to the people of Wales . The ACW logo and the WAG dragon displayed outside town and village halls, community centres, leisure centres and High street Marquees will achieve this. It will not be achieved by the current ACW attitude of going 'Big' by overfunding large arts organisations and the desire to create public buildings while there is many quality and local public buildings that exist and are under used.