

CREU CYMRU CONFERENCE 2010

Held on Wednesday, 6 October 2010, Caer Beris Hotel, Builth Wells.

Creu Cymru's 2010 Conference came at a time of change for the sector and the theme considered the way in which the Investment Review, potential financial situation and strategy reviews were affecting the provision of the performing the arts and the ways that theatres, arts centres and companies were responding. There was a particular focus on collaboration in all its forms and we were able to build on the developing relationship with Wales based companies and producers by opening the conference to them for the first time.

Following an introduction from Nic Young, Chair of Creu Cymru, there were three keynote speeches, given by:

Charlotte Jones (Chief Executive of the Independent Theatre Council - ITC), who presented the situation facing England and the discussions regarding Arts Council England's proposed funding schemes. She called for mature debate between Arts Councils, Local Authorities and the sector, rather than the parent/child relationship that seems to exist at present.

Jon Morgan (Director, Federation of Scottish Theatre – FST). Jon's presentation outlined the work of FST: a development agency with a membership of theatres, arts centres and companies across Scotland. He explained that they work similarly to Creu Cymru in bringing companies and theatres together and working across the sector in partnership with particular groups, while also presenting a series of training and CPD projects across the sector on behalf of Creative Scotland.

Geinor Styles (Artistic Director, Theatr na n'Óg) spoke of the benefits of collaboration and her range and experience of creative partnerships within Wales.

The remainder of the Conference consisted of breakout groups that considered the opportunities and benefits of collaboration in certain specific areas of work:

Production, Planning and Programming
Training
Audience Development
Artist Development

Notes from the groups are attached – thank you to the individual reporters.

The day ended with a personal view and summing up by Elen ap Robert, Vice Chair of Creu Cymru.

Notes from breakout session: Production, planning and programming

Chaired by Sharon Casey (Blackwood Miners' Institute)

SC explained that three theatres had put Arts Outside Cardiff money into working together as a hub – Beaufort Theatre (Ebbw Vale), Borough Theatre (Abergavenny) and Blackwood Miners' Institute. The aim was to consider joint projects and productions and to collaborate on regional one off projects such as week- long residencies, particularly focusing on young people.

They also collaborated on joint marketing and created a joint website B3 <http://www.b3live.co.uk/> aimed at the family market.

One of the original aims of the partnership was to encourage audience crossover between the venues. This didn't happen but all the theatres identified that their audiences had strong relationships and loyalty with their local venue.

Blackwood Miners' Institute is also part of the Inventive Promoter scheme run by Creu Cymru (originally funded by the Paul Hamlyn Foundation), for a group of theatres and arts centres with similar resourcing issues. The group meet to discuss the challenges in getting audiences to certain work and looking at potential audience development initiatives. There are also opportunities to go and see work, which is especially important. Over the course of the scheme they have identified a common ground – Family Friendly and accessible work. Working as a collective has meant that joint buying power has increased and theatres are more willing to take risk based on the support of the network.

The mid-Wales Circuit has taken a similar approach by considering gaps in Welsh language product.

Nic Young (Riverfront, Newport) said that it's been difficult to see a growth in audiences for harder work such as dance as his theatre is too young. Drama is the same. There is need for a long-term investment in these art forms. There is also a lack of production in Wales – few producing venues and companies and a lack of key texts being produced. Classic and set texts will attract a school audience, who will then become future drama audiences. Blackwood Miners' Institute are co-producing with Black RAT Productions creating work for this target audience.

We need to identify common ground between the two groups. Advance planning is essential and highly beneficial. Partnerships have to be natural. The joint WAPA / Creu Cymru initiatives are vital and extremely useful. It's important to have a rapport and maturity between the partners and confidence in each other's ideas, comments and suggestions. Sometimes we have to compromise in partnerships. You also have to be brave: to give and receive feedback, whether it's positive or constructive. We need to identify and have an understanding of what the audiences want.

WAPA / Creu Cymru could facilitate feedback with the audience.

There are opportunities for direct engagement with audiences via:

- Q&A's
- focus groups
- insight activities
- in the bar post-show
- other events that open up communication channels with the audience
- more opportunities to showcase and get theatres and arts centres and audiences to see work in progress performances
- promoting performances aimed at specific groups such as schools, teachers, children, young people etc (e.g. Citrus Arts had done a recent showcase performance which IP theatre staff attended and discussed critically).

Need to take the opportunity to make the most of the 6 months gap following ACW's Investment Review (possible quiet period/lack of product) to have more meetings, start talking and looking at future projects.

The Inventive Promoter scheme could be adapted to include producing companies.

Other venues not included could learn / set up their own schemes in other groups.

A member of Theatr Iolo has recently attended a meeting of the Inventive Promoter scheme as an observer. It proved been useful and important to both the group and the observer.

There also need to be more conversations about marketing, sharing good practice and methods of marketing – between theatres and companies.

NY then spoke about the Esmee Fairbairn project that bought 5 mid-scale theatre and arts centres together to bring interesting drama work to Wales. Having the 5 was a problem as it was hard to find a common ground. Many other theatre companies from the rest of the UK weren't interested in coming to Wales as it meant performing split-weeks. This is why they are producing work themselves – commissioning Aberystwyth Arts Centre to produce *Wuthering Heights*.

Sometimes collaboration works better when you're doing something completely different.

Notes by Louis Miles Crust

**Notes from breakout session:
Training – CPD for artists (not our workforce)**

Introduction

Theatres have a role to play in the wider arts ecology, supporting artists and companies, especially those less well-resourced.

As part of this Aberystwyth Arts Centre takes responsibility as far as is possible, for providing artists development and CPD opportunities.

The session wished to look at different models and contexts for CPD delivery asking the questions:

- What are these?
- What skills do artists need?
- What are our responsibilities as regional theatres/arts centres?

Models: AAC proposes the 3 models below which are presently delivered there:

- Formal training (from age 4 to college entry) for dance, music, drama. This training enters prospective artists of the future for nationally recognised examinations, for example LAMDA, Northern School of Music; Ballet exams.
- Mentoring (e.g. emerging stage writers working with established writer for 9 months). This takes place in a number of artforms and is also included in our artist residency programmes.
- Apprenticeships – these include the formal technician apprenticeship scheme just started in partnership with CCSkills and The Circuit; and other models like the Deep Blue and Cherry Orchard projects where an apprentice company is formed.

The Sherman have been doing writer development projects for a number of years.

Most of those present were particularly interested in cultural leadership schemes. Other organisations present are also involved in supplying technician training. Some have also run cultural administration training.

Hijinx – had student on placement working on stage management and design.

Placements offer another model.

Welsh College/University brings in vocational training with accountants etc for their students. This is normal for drama schools but not usual in University courses, though some visual arts departments do offer this.

Bangor University – will be offering participation projects. Range from small-children's music events to musical project with senior schools. All community based. A distinction needs to be made between training/CPD and community arts, as the aims are different, though sometimes there is an overlap.

Theatr Felinfach's work is also community based and might help people who are interested in looking at a career path in the performing arts in the future. There are examples of this progression having taken place.

Where is the greatest need in Wales? It was generally agreed that the greatest need at the moment is training for designers and directors:

- Creative leadership is most important directors.
- Shortage of talented designers
- Design students all leave Wales
- Same with directors

There isn't a path of progression for these people.

Query – is there enough work in Wales? If they go to London they can constantly be in work.

Difficult for graduate to walk straight into design/directing job. We don't have many small companies for people to get work and progress way up. Big companies don't take risks on emerging directors and designers.

How do we bridge the gap?

RWCMD designers when doing freelance work often allow recent graduates to share the work.

Companies in Wales normally have in-house director but not designer. Directors and designers usually work in teams.

How can we provide opportunities so people will gain a reputation?

Because there isn't a big body of companies, graduate designers have to create their own work. Once a company has a good director and designer they tend to stick with them.

Sherman does director training. Some of these people have gone on to work at Aberystwyth.

View that CPD has to take place within a professional workplace.

Funding is needed to do this. We all have big workloads, how do we prioritise?

Living pictures – people pay a lot of money go get on the course. Bursary schemes are available. Popular due to the names who are working on it.

The companies – Is this a way of training?

Most people have a second skill to get them into theatre work (e.g. as a model maker)

Hijinx offer graduates jobs when funds allow – do have one at moment, although for the last 2 shows they couldn't afford to.

Specialist admin roles

E.g. European funding, trust and foundation funding

Wales not taking advantage of alternative funding schemes because of lack of expertise in applying for and running the EU programmes.

Sherman – work with a network of organisations, meet quarterly development officers. Learn by doing it. Become a valuable commodity when can do it.

Bangor University – Knowledge Transfer Partnerships, developing skills with local businesses.

Local authorities have European officers.

Costs a lot to bring in expertise to get money and then to run project.

General Points: Is this a broader argument about arts management training?

Courses are available, e.g. ITC, Talbot not prioritised.

ACW used to run a good course.

Training budget is available from ACW.

Is it ACW's responsibility to tell us to offer CPD to our staff? Should this be part of funding agreement?

Issue of capacity.

Difficult to get smaller bids now – move towards larger bids by group of organisations.

Technical Apprenticeships

Any other areas requiring this?

Welsh speaking specialists are difficult to get.

Technical apprenticeships are geared to receiving houses. They are also heavily focused on lighting.

Major constraint on employing graduates is the cost of insurance on driving trucks.

Technicians can get more money by moving into conferencing, music tours etc. we lose a lot of staff once they have experience.

Notes by Sarah Ecob

Notes from breakout session: Audience Development

The starting point was “what is happening now and where would we, as directors and marketers, like to go in the next ten years in collaboration and co-operation in audience development?” In the time allowed the group enjoyed a lively and free ranging discussion which combined questions, aspirations and examples of working practice.

The questions are common to all levels of activity:

How do we attract people?

How do we get them through the door?

How do we keep them engaged?

There were positive examples of the benefits of **collaborative working**:

The Circuit members had decided that they needed more analysis on work in the Welsh language and were able to structure a report to suit their own needs. Because of their collaborative input the completed the report became one actively used in the workplace, rather than one that sits on a shelf.

Although the commissioning of the report was not dependent upon the existence of the Circuit, it was necessary to have an organising body of some kind to “pull it together”.

There was an understanding within the breakout group of the value of people from different theatres working together over time to establish a shared language and understanding. Within any overarching context, each theatre would have a set of needs and priorities that would be distinct from others.

Examples were given of how producing companies were open to marketing input from presenting theatres, a contemporary example being the Creu Cymru tour of *La Fugue* by Canadian company Qui Va Là. In Canada the style of the visual representation of the show and the age group for which it is considered suitable were significantly different from what was considered appropriate in Wales.

Illustrations were provided on approaches to understanding different **audience segments** and understanding people’s attitudes to attending. For example, within a “family” audience there can be those who are motivated by the needs or wants of their children whilst others might be driven by educational desires to raise their children’s awareness.

People also choose to adopt different personalities or have different roles – out on a girls night out, out as a parent, out as a teacher. If you understand the segment and understand that segment’s needs then you can tailor all communication to that segment appropriately. In your communication you have

to sound sincere about what you are saying and the way in which you are saying it.

Research into segments can be undertaken by foyer surveys and on-line. From this research the segments take shape which then allows you to create focus groups based on these segments. You are then in a position to build pen portraits of these segments - and realise that people from different walks of life can be part of the same segment.

The box office staff can be briefed on this information to help them understand the audience and also understand the marketing processes that you are undertaking. A “flow of information” has been created.

The value of this approach is that it treats audiences as individuals, not as statistical data. The understanding of the market demand, and where that demand is, in turn feeds back into programming decisions. Because this approach identifies not only audience desires but also artistic gaps it becomes an artform development tool as well as an audience development tool.

In order to attract all of your potential audience it is not enough to produce one piece of print or one direct mail letter.

Audience development is not a quick process; it is a **long term commitment**. This can cause problems in getting things past Boards. It is resource intensive and is not just about marketing but is organisation-wide involving the product, the facilities, education and the organisation’s attitude towards its audiences.

Community engagement was also cited as an important method of promotion and information, an example being the success of NoFit State’s publicity distribution.... And unfortunately at that point time got the better of us.

We hope a stimulating day that also offers networking opportunities between theatres and companies to build on the tow previous Creu Cymru / WAPA Conferences.

Notes by Nick Banwell

Notes from the breakout session:

Artist development / collaborations with artists & performers

- A danger inherent in collaborations with artists/performers is that the focus can be inwards rather than outwards
- Jacqui at Harlech talked of the benefits of a holistic approach and the importance of keeping in view “the bigger picture”.
- Noted the importance also of keeping in mind the contexts that our audiences are dealing with
- JH spoke about the Dance Buddy schemes – the sometime unexpected outcomes and values of venue/artist exchange. Quoted the example of Tanja Råman at Taliesin where Tanja working with Stella Patrick (Marketing) enabled Stella to better write about and “sell” her work – whilst these conversations impacted on the nature of the work that Tanja was making.
- Conversation was had about in the early stages of a possible venue/artist collaboration of having the time to discuss what was being attempted via the collaboration – to affecting agreements to a collective approach and the benefits of jointly agreeing a set of shared values that informed both parties of the nature of the collaboration.
- All agreed with Carys’s comment on how art being made in the building creates a “buzz” in the whole space – whether that comes from Ffin Dance working in the Met or the Frank Vickery company rehearsing in the Muni.
- What artists often need is time and a space – and often (even in these challenging times) there are ways for the venues to provide both – perhaps at little or no cost.
- Jacqui raised a point about the nature of certain work emanating from “front rooms” will only be of that scale – this is not a criticism but an important factor to be borne in mind.
- A discussion ensued about how artist and audience development goes “hand in hand” and that therefore in discussions with artists about collaborations this point should be central to developments.
- CW raised the issue of the possible disappearance for large areas of Wales of some of the companies who formally delivered work directly into schools (e.g. Theatr Powys, Spectacle, Gwent). What should the response of the venues be to a much changed situation? What types of collaboration might emerge in the future?
- In conclusion those attending thought that it would be useful for CC to establish a virtual notice board for artists on the CC website – artists could post their ideas onto the board – as could venues looking for specific types of artistic collaborations. It was also suggested that CC look to defining the possibility of a forum to enable continuing conversations with artists.

Notes by Geoff Cripps