

**A POSITION PAPER ON THEATRES AND ARTS  
CENTRES ACROSS WALES**

**SUBMITTED TO THE ARTS COUNCIL OF WALES.**

**Introductory Note:**

This paper has been composed at the invitation of **Creu Cymru** and after chairing and facilitating three substantial discussions with members at the Riverfront, Newport (06/07/09), The Grand Pavilion, Porthcawl (08/07/09) and at Galeri, Caernarfon (10/07/09). A list of participants can be seen in Appendix A. Members welcomed the opportunity to comment on the document **Striving to Excel** and the Arts Council's Investment Review; participation was enthusiastic and wide-ranging. The paper is an independent view of the opinions, commitment and passion that emerged around the table. A record of the meetings was kept through the agency of Creu Cymru, but the distillation is my own.

The aim of the paper is to provide a response to the Arts Council of Wales's paper **Striving to Excel**. The **t**heatres and **a**rts **c**entres who participated in this discussion believe that they can further develop the quality of their offer to the public, build audiences for companies and creators, and strive to enhance their professionalism and the scale of their ambitions. The paper sets out how they believe that can be done successfully with the full participation of the sector, the companies and the Arts Council of Wales working together.

Elan Closs Stephens

**30<sup>th</sup>** July 2009.

## 1. Positioning the Sector

### Introduction

Theatres and arts centres form an arterial network that sustains, nourishes and distributes creative content to the people of Wales. They are much more than sterile receiving venues. At best they develop a diverse audience, market content, provide access and inclusion, and foster loyalty. It is precisely this loyalty that comes into play when theatres or arts centres are threatened with closure; just as in the case of local schools, people view their centres as creative hubs and as focal points of the local community.

### A Tool for Growing Audiences

Between them, in the financial year 2008-9, theatres and arts centres accounted for over 2.5 million visits to performances. This does not include cinema, participants in community activities or users of other services provided by the centres. Theatres and arts centres can therefore be viewed as strategic partners to the Arts Council of Wales's delivery of access, diversity and social inclusion. Moreover, through their audience databases, they offer a tool for growing audiences for new companies or challenging and edgy content, and for fostering the audience's relationship with more established companies.

### A Full Strategic Partner

Despite this, the sector has not been viewed in the past as a strategic partner for ACW, capable of offering discussions on art forms and audiences. Whilst ACW has recently agreed art form strategies there is no strategic plan for the curatorial leadership and business development of theatres and arts centres and no sector lead officer. The sector now wishes to engage fully with the Arts Council as a strategic partner in developing the wellbeing of companies and the enhancement of audience appreciation.

### Working as a Single Sector

The sector would wish to be recognised in developmental terms as a single organisation and to grow its ambitions – and those of the Arts Council - through the development of a recognised network. It does not believe that it would be desirable to act as a single RFO for the distribution of funds. Over time, the aim would be to develop an inclusive sector involving Welsh based companies and producers as well as the theatres and arts centres. For the next few years the emphasis must be on co-operation, shared services and the growth of expertise.

### Working to a Strategy

Above all, this is a network that wants to be treated as a mature partner in the production of a strategic plan for the sector and as a co-operative and informed discussant of other art form strategies. Arising from this would be the expectation of an annual meeting with the Director ACW, and Director Art Form and the three Regional Directors who have an intimate knowledge of the theatres and arts centres in their own regions.

In the shorter term, there would be the expectation of a co- operative and ambitious discussion (which might include the WLGA) to further the production of a Strategy Document this Autumn/Winter (09).

**Action Points:**

- **Recognition of the theatres and arts centres as a developmental network.**
- **Working with ACW to produce a Strategy Document for the sector.**
- **Creation of a Lead Officer/Enhancement of Role of Regional Officers.**
- **Annual meeting between the Sector and Senior Directors ACW to discuss the relationship between the sector and the art forms.**
- **Recognising the potential of discussions with LAs who also support centres possibly through involving the WLGA.**
- **Recognition of a network mechanism such as Creu Cymru.**

## 2. Developing Interconnectivity

### Introduction

Rather than drawing up a list of centres worthy of added investment or not, this paper will argue for the interconnectivity of the arterial network and for its development as a sector. This is not a regression to the status quo. The sector is well placed to understand the exigencies of funding and is clear as to the difficulties ahead; indeed, many centres are run by Local Authorities who are already experiencing serious cuts in central funding. Rather the sector wishes to argue for enhanced and accelerated shared services, marketing opportunities and programming co-operation.

### Developing a Map of Interconnectivity

Central to the discussion of a network would be the development of a map showing the interconnectivity of centres and where shared services or programme development already exists. This would corroborate or challenge the interconnectedness of the network and would highlight good practice. There is already much good work that needs to be understood and built upon. Such a map might also lead to discussions as to the inter-relatedness of local and regional centres and whether this might lead to the development of clusters. The sector wished to emphasise that the network's new status as a strategic partner should lead to the encouragement of organic and successful voluntary co-operation based on shared aims and needs. It is painfully aware of non-organic and non-voluntary proposed mergers that have failed.

### Developing Shared Services

One area of fruitful collaboration has been the work of Arts Connect, following 'Making the Connections', on developing shared services within Local Government. Working across geographical boundaries has been difficult. However, there are already groupings working across the South Wales Valleys and Monmouthshire to address common issues such as lack of transport and audience development against a background of shrinking budgets, non-replacement of staff and reduced investment in buildings. The sector believes that Local Authorities and the three Regional [Directors](#) of the Arts Council of Wales should be part of a strategic discussion at the highest level with the Director and Art [Form](#) Director and representatives of the sector network to discuss the opportunities offered by local shared services opportunities and regeneration initiatives.

### Distinctiveness of [Art form](#) and Audience/ The Effect on Assessment

As [arts](#) centres and theatres work more closely together, and as a map of collaboration and interconnectivity is developed, there is a strong argument for moving away from broad remit requirements to an acknowledgement that theatres may specialise both in artforms and in audience development. Some theatres are better placed to develop social inclusion or Welsh language work just as some [arts](#) centres might provide dance opportunities whilst others build a reputation for

modern music. The network believes that it would be beneficial for the Arts Council to regard theatres and arts centres within the context of a geographical, art form or other common interest cluster in terms of their response to ACW remit requirements. Existing collaborative ventures are innovative and venues are quite comfortable in taking their audience to see work in another venue; theatres and arts centres can be supportive rather than in competition. Many are focused on distinctiveness and audiences move around to where the product is taking place. All of this requires careful thought within a Strategy Document. The sector believes that such distinctiveness allows money to be spent more effectively but that it may have a significant effect on remit letters to individual centres and on the quantitative data by which organisations may be assessed.

**Action Points:**

- **Creation of map of interconnectivity.**
- **Accelerated development of shared services.**
- **Co-operating, where appropriate, with LAs in the development of shared services.**
- **The Development of distinctive agendas.**
- **The Development of Clusters of common interest.**
- **Re-visiting remits and methods of quantitative assessments.**

### 3. The Relationship with Companies and Content Creators

#### **The Strategic Discussion**

The Sector believes that theatres and arts centres have a strong curatorial role in providing a mixture of experiences including loyalty to existing companies and the promotion of new work. This paper argues that the sector should form part of a strategic discussion on artform development in addition to the existing discussion on technical and administrative matters. The sector is well placed to discuss the range of products available to audiences, the size and frequency of the offer, and the development of audiences over time.

#### **A Sympathetic Relationship**

The centres have no desire to be seen as supermarkets driving down the price and possibly the quality and insisting on “safe” or commercially viable content. On the other hand, they feel that the present arrangements where they have no voice in the discussion as to the development of artform, is not satisfactory. In fact, they would argue that both ACW and the companies are missing a trick here by not involving the experience of the centres and their audiences in their strategic discussion.

Some examples were given of discussions that might prove useful in noting gaps in provision. An overview of touring for a coming year might throw up the complete lack of classical theatre or drama. The success of a company, its growth and professionalism might take it out of the product range of certain theatres without any discussion as to the growth of smaller companies lower down the development ladder. Some centres, it was argued, were left with a gap between larger professional work and community theatre that did not seem to be filled strategically. The lack of good quality small/mid-scale work meant inconsistency for individual centres, let alone inconsistency of provision across Wales. . There are other, more administrative matters that throw up anomalies year on year, such as the clustering of Welsh language touring, leaving theatres with over-provision and under provision during the year.

In the past, the fund known as Arts Outside Cardiff helped to energise the sector. It brought theatres and arts centres together, helping each other with particular skills and interests. It also enabled centres to embark on productions and co-productions with companies and to understand the difficulties the partner organisation faced. Lessons were learned and co-operative strategies forged. In particular, AOC work demonstrated that the centres were not just interested in safe, mainstream, non-challenging work but that they were ambitious producers and co-producers. As AOC is mainstreamed and disappears as a separate fund, it is vitally important that this proactive, producing and co-producing, adventurous side of theatres and arts centres is maintained. Successfully nurturing the relationship between theatres and companies for the future is one way of sustaining that fruitful creativity born out of AOC.

**Active engagement for developing audiences.**

The theatres and arts centres would wish to engage actively and in a timely fashion with the directors, theatre and dance companies and other creators of the work - acting as one sector for the benefit of all. This should form part of an overarching strategic discussion with ACW. Further discussions with individual directors well in advance of rehearsals would allow the centres to develop the company's audiences to maximum advantage.

Building up audiences takes time and the sector as a whole still hasn't reached its full potential. As it strives to excel and to professionalise, it will seek to network to market and to develop audiences. But the relationship with the companies is vital as is an understanding from all organisations, including ACW, that building up audiences is a long-term investment. Any long term strategy in audience development will involve co-operative strategic thinking in the development of companies and vice versa.

**Action Points:**

- **Annual Strategy meeting with ACW and companies on the development of artform and the development of audiences over time.**
- **ACW to facilitate, possibly through its remit letters, ongoing and timely relationships between theatres, arts centres and companies for the benefit of sustained audience development.**
- **Arts Centres and Theatres to co-operate in developing shared services for marketing/box office and professionalising their understanding of audiences, shared technical equipment and possible administration.**

#### **4. The Development of Commercialisation.**

##### **Effective Use of the Resource**

In accord with its statement that this paper is not meant to defend the status quo, but instead seeks to make effective use of public money, the sector wishes to fully exploit the commercial revenues from theatres and arts centres. The sector recognises that there are centres that are not fully commercialised for a variety of reasons, not all insurmountable. Spaces are not fully exploited; there are dead times and missed shopping and restaurant opportunities. This paper argues for an investment in business development.

A more commercial approach to maximising earned income could provide additional funding which could be fed into core costs as well as helping to fund artistic programmes. It would widen the funding bases and reduce reliance on just one or two major funding sources and thus give additional artistic freedom. It would also contribute to long term sustainability. In the context of reduced funding in which the Arts Council of Wales, Local Authorities and other funders such as charities now exist, this area of development is vital.

##### **Areas for Development**

Areas for development include all aspects of retail from selling a cup of coffee to a piece of artwork as well as conference opportunities. Such activity provides valuable income but it also helps to widen the engagement with the centres and to break down any perceived barriers to attendance. Many of the theatres and arts centres listed will already be engaged in this activity but would benefit from advice in order to maximise returns. This area of work should not deflect from the core mission to develop and deliver the arts but as a valuable tool in helping to achieve that goal.

##### **A Possible Role for ACW as a Development Organisation.**

There is considerable disparity between the earned income of some theatres and arts centres, not all of which can be attributed to size, geography or social context. Even the most successful could benefit from seeking to professionalise their activities even further. The Arts Council of Wales, as the lead development organisation, might consider the form of intervention that might lead to success in the commercialisation.

This paper suggests looking strategically at mentoring on an individual level; twinning with other successful organisations not necessarily in the arts; short visits and shadowing opportunities to successful UK and European arts centres.

This paper would also wish the Arts Council and the theatres network to consider how the business world might help develop commercialisation within the arts. Many companies work on a voluntary basis with the public sector as part of their Corporate Social Responsibility Schemes on a pro bono basis. How do we develop such partnerships to offer mentoring? Are there WAG business support networks that might be available? Are there partners that could be gained through an organisation such as Arts and Business? Such partnerships could be sustained

or could be a short analytical consideration of the current commercial opportunities.

Furthermore, a possible change of UK Government might well see added emphasis on philanthropy in the arts and our organisations need to be well placed to consider these opportunities.

**Action Points:**

- **To seek to exploit commercial opportunities so as to maximise income and develop programming.**
- **To ask ACW to consider working with the sector to develop strategies for offering professional help.**
- **That private companies, working within their CSR remit, should be encouraged to work with individual arts centres and theatres.**
- **That Arts & Business Cymru be encouraged to offer advice and partnerships.**
- **That the theatre and arts centres network should share good practice and offer mentoring and shadowing visits.**

## 5. The Curatorial, Management and Leadership Role

### **Development of Leadership within Theatres and Arts Centres and Succession planning through the development of young managers.**

Individuals can be developed through mentoring and twinning. Successful directors of centres can be encouraged to find development opportunities through visits to UK or European institutions. In the first instance brief and sustained shadowing opportunities can be developed through visits to larger centres where that centre might take on a mentoring role for development. This could be encouraged through a network programme. The second example will need a more structured approach involving more financial backing.

### **Existing opportunities for leadership programmes.**

Some opportunities for growth and development already exist e.g. the Clore programme and the Peach mentoring opportunities. Clore has operated successfully in Wales providing career enhancing opportunities for two fellows per year. It has been instrumental in developing ambition and strategic thinking. The main criticism arises from its lack of structured discussion on devolved nations and devolved cultural policy. Some of the participating institutions are also extremely large and iconic and bear little resemblance to a small theatre's chronic problems. The sector might benefit therefore from a leadership programme more heavily geared to the needs of Wales with opportunities for sharing examples of work with the other devolved nations and the smaller European nations.

Theatres and arts centres, especially those attached to Local Authorities, might also benefit by looking at the opportunities on networks such as Public Service Management Wales where the annual Summer School puts its emphasis on developing leadership skills.

### **Accreditation**

Some benefit in succession planning and the development of young managers might be gained through a process of accreditation that gave a clear developmental pathway and a growing respect to the profession. [Within the UK there are several](#) Masters in Public Administration but [far fewer part-time](#) Masters in Arts Administration giving detailed consideration to programming, leadership, commercialisation, understanding the social context, understanding audiences, papers of public policy etc. [In particular an MAA should give attention to the policy of devolved administrations.](#) The sector could profit from professionalising its career structures but would need finance for expenses, fees and missed working days.

## **Action Points**

- **Developing a network of mentoring and shadowing opportunities between centres.**
- **Taking advantage of existing leadership programmes.**

- **Exploring different and more customised leadership programmes together with a professional accreditation.**
- **Finance for fees and missed working days.**

## 6. And finally, A Big Idea

### **Digital Interconnectivity: Virtual Shared Programming.**

We need to recognise the importance of new and developing technology not just as a tool of delivery but, by its very nature it makes us radically change what culture we deliver and who delivers it.

The list of new opportunities is growing year by year: YouTube, Digital stories, Twitter, Google Earth, virtual access to archives, broadcast live performances of theatre, opera, dance and music. This paper has emphasised the interconnectedness of the theatres and arts centres in Wales. It also urges the Council to consider the opportunities offered by new and developing technology to greatly enhance that interconnectedness from [viral marketing opportunities through to viewing content](#). The virtual links offered by the new digital era in the presentation of screened live performances [is just one example of the potential of the new era we are entering to offer creative content](#).

The live screening of the National Theatre's Phedre has given us a glimpse of what can be achieved. Aberystwyth Arts Centre for example has taken up the New York Met's offer of live opera. Yet Wales remains unconnected for its own creativity. Working with the Film Agency for Wales, the Welsh Assembly Government, the Heritage Lottery, Charities and other possible sources of income, an award of £600,000 would digitise 6 cinemas or theatres capable of carrying screen projection. £1m would digitise 10 to be able to offer high definition simultaneous viewing. Smaller work in either language could find a larger audience; larger productions where the cost of touring extensively might be prohibitive, could be appreciated digitally. This is a new opportunity to create a virtual digital community who would appreciate and support work across the length and breadth of Wales, creating an artistic One Wales.

This is an opportunity for theatres and arts centres to respond innovatively to the economic climate, using monies more efficiently. It also shows theatres and arts centres responding creatively to a new digital era which might otherwise be seen as a threat as young people turn increasingly to on line entertainment. Nothing will replace the excitement of live actors in a shared space, but a simultaneous transmission carries some of the excitement and challenge of live performance.

There may well be opportunities here for further discussion with broadcasters as to their ambitions in a digitised arts world and how some programming might be shared and co-financed. If so, the discussion should involve the centres as well as the companies in a pan-Wales view of the possibilities.

### **Action Points:**

- **To explore the possibility of interconnecting theatres through live, simultaneous digital transmission as an important step in opening up the opportunities new technology offers.**

## Conclusion

This paper seeks to demonstrate a sector that wishes to professionalise its activities, to grow its audiences, to exploit its commercial opportunities, and to achieve more for the financial allocation. It has also pointed out some developmental opportunities that would require additional costs.

The sector wishes to offer itself as an active and engaged partner in the strategies of the Arts Council, whether artform or centre based, and to develop all opportunities in a considered and strategic manner.

Looking to the short term, the theatres and arts centres would like to develop a Strategy Paper in partnership with the Arts Council of Wales, building on some of the ideas presented in this paper and exploring others as they arise.

In the longer term, it seeks to engage with the Arts Council and with the companies in an annual discussion.

Those members who participated in this discussion under the aegis of Creu Cymru wish to develop the network so as to be able to initiate and sustain the activities outlined here.

Finally, members welcomed the document **Striving to Excel**. They hoped that their discussions and this distillation of their thoughts emphasised the scope of their ambition to develop a quality experience for the benefit of Welsh audiences. The quality of the experience gained in [an arts](#) centre or theatre grows an expectation of excellence in the people of Wales. Quality matters.

26<sup>th</sup> July 2009

## Appendix A.

## Participants

<b>Chair</b>	Elan Closs Stephens
<b>Creu Cymru</b>	Richard Hogger Deborah Keyser Iain Kempton Yvonne O'Donovan
<b>The Riverfront, Newport</b>	Nick Young
<b>Rhondda Cynon Taf CBC theatres and arts centres</b>	Geoff Cripps Carys Wynne Angela Gould
<b>Borough Theatre, Abergavenny</b>	Nick Banwell
<b>Blackwood Miners Institute</b>	Sharon Price
<b>Bridgend CBC (on behalf of Grand Pavilion, Porthcawl)</b>	Gill Elfyn Jones
<b>Wales Millennium Centre, Cardiff</b>	Gareth Lloyd Roberts
<b>St Davids Hall, Cardiff</b>	Roger Hopwood
<b>Theatr Mwldan, Cardigan</b>	Dilwyn Davies
<b>Taliesin Arts Centre, Swansea</b>	Sybil Crouch
<b>Torch Theatre, Milford Haven</b>	Daniel Shaw
<b>Wyeside Arts Centre, Builth Wells</b>	Guy Roderick
<b>Carmarthenshire Theatres</b>	Carwyn Matera-Rogers
<b>St Donats Arts Centre, Llantwit Major</b>	Janet Smith
<b>Galeri, Caernarfon</b>	Elen ap Robert
<b>Aberystwyth Arts Centre</b>	Alan Hewson
<b>Theatr Brycheiniog, Brecon</b>	Andy Eagle
<b>Bangor University</b>	Dyfan Roberts
<b>Neuadd Dywfor, Pwllheli</b>	Ann Rowena Jones
<b>Observing</b>	Peter Gregory, Arts Council of Wales David Newland, Arts Council of Wales Sian Tomos, Arts Council of Wales Julie Turner, freelance

## **Appendix B      Quotes from meetings.**

### **General health of the sector.**

“Theatres and arts centres are of central importance to the arts in Wales; developing, nurturing and welcoming the arts. They are not just buildings they are the absolute focal point for artistic activity and expression, both amateur and professional, in their communities. They are innovative in their collaborations and working practice plus they know their audiences well so are essential in linking to the work produced and toured. Venues make funding go further, deliver the country’s social and well-being agendas and have trained staff with transferable skills. They can demonstrate that huge benefit is given for the investment that is put in; a significant level of provision and value for money.”

“It should be celebrated that we’re all doing different things. For a venue to be central to the community it has to provide work that resonates with that community and that’s different for every venue. Every venue has its own identity, own flavour and the audience is created because something special happens there.”

“Theatres and arts centres provide a place where people can engage but the sector has been hugely neglected in its importance.”

“Every venue builds up audiences and therefore all parts of the sector become valuable.”

### **Role of ACW**

“There needs to be a mature dialogue as we’re all actually in it together as equals: ACW has the money, venues have the buildings, others produce the work.”

### **Arts outside Cardiff**

“AoC offered so many possibilities for innovation in Wales and it has achieved a huge amount, right across the country. It’s been a success and that needs to be built on.”

“It’s been remarkable value for money with a huge return. It’s revitalised venues, encouraged collaboration, created work, brought in work and enabled us to become creative hubs of our communities in Wales. And this reflects that funding through venues is good value for money.”

### **Collaborative working**

“CC has proven to be an excellent, positive example of working together, the essential link in providing mechanisms for collaboration. Schemes such as Inventive Promoter, 21<sup>st</sup> Century Promoter, Valleys Roots and the various Art form Consortia have provided theatres and arts centres with significant added value.”

“Theatres and arts centres are now not working independently of each other; they’re sharing ideas, knowledge, audience data, experience, critical debate, good practice, professional development..... It makes the investment work harder and go a lot further.”

“Dialogues need to be opened with the producing companies in order to ensure quality product in Wales which engages with people.”

Quotes from:

| Julie Turner’s notes from the meetings

Nick Banwell

Elan Closs Stephens

Dilwyn Davies

Andy Eagle

Alan Hewson

Richard Hogger

Elen ap Robert