

## Inspire our Strategy for Creativity and the Arts In Wales: Council's Response to the Consultation

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### Introduction

Formal consultation on *Inspire: our strategy for Creativity and the Arts* closed on 30<sup>th</sup> April 2014.

Council considered the responses to the strategy and the topics raised by respondents at its Council meeting in May 2014.

We had 27 respondents to the draft strategy. They break down into the following categories:

Revenue Funded Organisations (RFOs) 8

Other Organisations (Non RFOs) 11

Local Authorities 1

Individuals 6

National Advisers 1

The consultation provided us with a wide range of useful and thoughtful insights. These were warmly welcomed and Council expressed its appreciation of the time and effort taken by individuals and organisations to respond to this consultation.

Whilst quality and range of applications was helpful, Council did consider the implications of what might be seen to be a low level of response.

Council reminded itself that a number of people had already been involved in the development of the strategy. Also, a number of the current responses represented a collective view from a number of organisations, or an umbrella grouping.

Opportunities to engage with the development of our new strategy had included workshops at our Annual Conference in 2012 and 2013, and two rounds of open public meetings (our Sgwrs Gelfyddydol). The Open Space session – held during one of the rounds of Sgwrs meetings – proved particularly useful. These meetings were especially influential in helping us to form the content that people told us needed to be reflected in the Arts Council's future strategy. Council noted that we had reported back at various stages in the process and therefore felt confident that the themes of *Inspire: Our Strategy for Creativity and The Arts in Wales* had been subject to a much wider discussion than implied by the responses to this most recent consultation exercise.

Council would nonetheless have welcomed more responses. We recognise the risk of 'consultation fatigue' and accept that artists and arts organisations possibly were having to deal with more pressing and immediate concerns, for example the threat of funding cuts within Local Authorities. Whatever the case, we will keep talking about this strategy as it rolls out and will provide information each year on the actions and activities that give the strategy substance.

There will be changes and pressures over the coming years in the funding and development of the arts. Emphases of policy might need to shift or be adjusted but our direction of travel needs to remain clear with this strategy acting as a compass point. Our strategy envisages a process of change that will probably take a number of years to achieve – we will need to keep reinforcing the messages contained in *Inspire our Strategy for the Creativity and the Arts in Wales*.

The general reaction to the strategy from those who have responded is welcoming and often enthusiastic. However, some respondents are looking for the next level of detail – the answer to the question about how we will translate rhetoric in the language of the strategy into actions and programmes of work. Few are disputing the ethos of the Strategy. Our reluctance to label and specify actions to minute levels of detail is welcomed by virtually everyone, although there remain some, mechanistically, who would still be more comfortable with us being prescriptive over particular issues.

Each year we publish an Operational Plan. You can find the 2014/15 version on our website. The Plan sets out, in more prosaic detail, the individual building blocks of activity. These explain, in a practical way, how our strategies are delivered. In this way we will communicate the annual focus of our developmental work – in the current year we are focusing particularly on Individuals, Local Authorities, Revenue Funded Organisations, Arts and Education.

A number of respondents drew to our attention topics that they felt are absent from the strategy. Two issues stand out: how we address and champion audiences; and, how we explain our creative ambitions for Equalities in ways that don't simply label it as a tick-box legal 'obligation'.

The sections that follow focus through the key topics drawn from the consultation submissions. Given the richness of the responses we received we have inevitably been had to be selective in what we can convey in this document. Every response has been carefully read and considered. However, we have limited ourselves here to extracts that exemplify concerns and points of view we have felt important to work into our finalised approach. In each case we provide Council's response to the point(s) raised.

## A. A new approach to strategy

Respondents welcomed the thrust of the Strategy and its themes. This is a flavour of what people said:

“This is a very inspiring document and we salute you for its clarity and boldness!”

*“impressed by the proposed strategy”*

“Overall the document and its objectives should be applauded and approved.”

*“it is a positive strategy which we are happy to support. We were particularly pleased to see the emphasis on investing in imagination which we feel is integral to community music and in particular our work which is focused on inspiring communities to find their own voice and explore their own ideas. ”*

We were particularly encouraged by the number of respondents who supported our broader approach to creative practice.

“We welcome the Arts Council’s new emphasis on artistic creation and fostering ‘an environment for our artists and arts organisations so they can create their best work’. We also welcome the Council’s expressed intention to depart from a strategy that simply reinforces individual artforms and historical patterns of artform investment, and to adopt an ‘enabling strategy’ which ‘crosses art boundaries’ and nurtures ‘an arts’ ecology particular and distinctive to Wales’.”

*“The crossing of art boundaries has the potential to be a positive move in terms of disabled people, and of so-called ‘minority groups’, who simply because they have to structure their lives in a different way to the perceived norm, are likely to produce art that reflects that complexity”*

However, a couple of responses whilst welcoming the overall approach, qualified their support.

“We understand the reasoning behind no longer approaching art forms separately, especially as we often work on multi arts projects. We would, however, be keen that this does not mean a loss of specialism in the support reflecting the difference between art forms and also within an art

form. We feel that working in contemporary rock, pop and urban music is different from working in classical music for example and are keen that Arts Council of Wales continues to understand the difference in approaches and perception of these genres and ways of working."

Some respondents sought clarity about the audience for the strategy and who it was aimed at.

"I was not wholly clear about the use of "we" in the document; is this we the Arts Council, or "we" who are in receipt of funding, or "we" the whole sector?"

*"We were unclear who the primary audience for the document was; the public? The Welsh Government? The arts and creative sector? Each audience may require a different 'spin', focus and intellectual reasoning perhaps?"*

Others read into the strategy the intention on the Arts Council's part to lead where this was necessary, and to engage where this was appropriate.

"The strategy is, indeed, a document to inspire and is filled with sound ambition and aspiration. Its position that art and creativity are an essential part of the life of the nation is potent but is a point that practically needs to be argued more effectively, especially on a local governmental level. Local authorities need to share Arts Council Wales's commitment to this belief..."

*...the arts will be a cornerstone of Wales' twenty-first century renewal, and that, as well as being projected internationally, this will be a creativity rooted locally in the community."*

## Our response

*Inspire: Our Strategy for Creativity and the Arts* represents a very different approach to arts development, and the way that it's explained. Rather than organising ourselves around individual areas of artform practice, we have instead set out our strategy around three over-arching, complementary concepts: **Make, Reach and Sustain**.

The majority of our respondents recognised and endorsed this approach. Indeed, we are pleased to note that *Inspire* has met with a largely positive response. We will, however, remain sensitive to the particular characteristics of different artforms. We

accept that different types of work in the arts require different creative processes and different skills. We will continue to respect these differences and will develop our knowledge and expertise accordingly. We will seek to be across developments within and across disciplines in the arts and the means they use and forms they take. We need to be responsive (and indeed in instances take a lead), to developments, some artistic, some technological, some ethical and social, which change the arts.

The “we” that is referred to throughout the strategy is designed to signal our desire to reach more widely – to artists, audiences, arts organisations, partners and decision-makers. That said, this is the Arts Council’s strategy. And in the sections on **Make, Reach** and **Sustain**, the actions listed are all areas of activity and actions that the Arts Council will to take a lead on, and advance in the five years of this strategy.

However, as an ‘enabling’ strategy we certainly see the need to share our goals with partners and collaborators. In this way the plural “we” will, we hope, blur as individuals, organisations, and agencies see opportunities for alignment with the goals of “our” strategy. We make no apology for being all encompassing – we have ambitious goals which will not be realised unless we build a broadly based coalition of support.

## B. Practical delivery/implementation

A number of respondents were looking to see how the Strategy would translate from a philosophy of sorts to an action plan. How were the challenges and themes going to translate into tangible plans and programmes? Some of the propositions of the strategy, whilst being seen as laudable, naturally led people to ask what would demonstrate the strategy in action and how would the Arts Council account for the delivery of its strategy ambitions.

“We accept the change of approach from a prescriptive list of actions to an ‘enabling strategy’, but would note that a more conventional approach, outlining specific proposals and plans, tends to enable a greater degree of accountability by which a relevant constituency can hold a policymaking or regulatory agency to task.”

*“...lots of well-meaning but meaningless phrases.... the 8 Objectives are also broad generalisations - how are you going to measure success against these?”*

"INSPIRE ... contains a large number of 'Whats' but no 'Hows'. The principles are (in the majority) hard to disagree with, however it's the 'How' they are going to be delivered that could become the issue."

*"Rather than getting mired in the narrow deliverables of objectives for five years hence, I wonder if there is scope to give more indication of what these principles might mean in practice. For instance, could you be clearer about ACW's ambitions by making recommendations or illustrating with examples? "*

#### **Our response**

We accept that respondents are now looking to us for the detail of how the ideas will translate into practicality, and how progress will be measured.

On an annual basis our objectives are set out and given in more detail in our Operational Plan posted on our website (currently for 2014/15). In each successive year we will explain how we are moving forward with the strategy. We will set out the next phase of work and show how specific goals and tasks relate to the propositions first set out in *Inspire*.

*Inspire* will inform all aspects of our work in the years ahead. Council monitors the delivery of our strategy and we publish, each year, the outcomes that we have achieved. We will also share any relevant research that helps measure the effectiveness of our performance, the quality of the outcomes that we achieve or the accuracy of the data we publish. We envisage a certain amount of benchmark research in order for us to look at how, for example, the circumstances of the individual artist working in Wales changes, or how the programmes and activities launched by this strategy extend, for example, the reach of the arts. A bald statement in *Inspire*, about seeing through the implementation of the recommendations of the Arts and Education Review will, in our view, have a transformational effect on the reach of the arts and potentially on future audiences and the formation of creative individuals and artists.

Our strategy and Operational Plan for 2014/15 also reflect the Welsh Government's expectations of us, set out in our annual Remit Letter. We believe that *Inspire* as a strategy helps to articulate an agenda for what the arts can be in Wales, and what contribution they can make to some of the ambitions and challenges of government in the coming years. It has paralleled developments Welsh Government has advanced through its Sustainability Measure. Sustainability and the ideas connected to it are set to be an all-encompassing set of organising principles for public bodies in Wales.

Immediately in 2014-15 the Council has established areas of concentrated activity around 4 internal Project Groups devoted to our Support of Individuals, the RFO Portfolio, Arts and Education, Local Authorities. These are four building blocks to advance *Inspire* in 2014-2015. They are seen as key areas where we need to advance understanding, ideas and policy and find some “future –proofing” of activity if not new models.

Our website and newsletters will publish updates on our work. And the digital interface that we are planning for *Inspire* and its themes of **Make Reach Sustain** will allow us to share best practice, case histories and exemplary projects.

## C. Language and cultural identity

In the strategy we wanted to capture the predominant cultural dynamic of Wales as a bilingual country and give this justified prominence in the strategy. As a cultural body, the Arts Council sees the role of cultural, social and economic benefits of promoting creativity through both of Wales’ languages.

Our vision of our languages’ role drew a variety of comment from our respondents, particularly from some who saw the need to see and capture a greater diversity in the make-up of Wales.

For some, the matter was entirely straightforward:

*“I would also like to express that we strongly support the goal set out in the strategy of continuing to offer Welsh language arts’ activities in the community. Without a doubt, this promotes and maximizes the rich culture of our nation, at grass roots level. ...”*

Others wanted to see a more nuanced approach:

“Whilst the issue of bilingualism in a Nation such as Wales is crucial for the development of the Nation as a whole, there has to be some recognition of second language use generally. When we are performing in England, we do not produce print or marketing material in Welsh as research has shown that the use of two languages in a primarily monolingual culture can be off-putting to attendance. However, when we are performing in Germany, we will provide material in both English

and German. The issue of bilingualism is surely about being sensitive and response to the use of language in each 'community' you are working in?"

There were some interesting observations about the wider diversity of languages being spoken currently in Wales:

"We also note the need to encourage a distinctive Welsh art practice, supported by bilingualism that is fundamental to the Arts Council's vision. However, in this day and age we believe that this is not without difficulties, and we would urge ACW to enable the nature of our changing communities to inform the vision, particularly the cultural vibrancy that newer communities and groups bring."

*"It would also be good to see here reference to the other languages used in Wales and a commitment from ACW in supporting the use of those languages in the creation and delivery of the arts. This would help to bring the rather vague 'equalities' statement into something practical. For example, of the 514,000 + deaf people living in Wales, there are an estimated 3,000 whose first or preferred language is British Sign Language. There are also many thousands more who are bi-lingual and would appreciate a choice of languages. This is not to forget the thousands of people who speak Somali, Punjabi and other languages in Wales."*

"... recognise Wales as being a multi-cultural and multi-lingual society within a bilingual nation. "

*"In terms of language and culture Wrexham is a very interesting place. Welsh, English, Portuguese and Polish, along with over 100 other languages, spoken in a county with a population of around 135,000. This is the reality of contemporary Wales..."*

#### **Our response**

Responses have welcomed the importance that we attach to the principle of Wales as a bi-lingual nation. However, some respondents have suggested that our approach lacks sophistication. We must absolutely endorse the right of first language speakers to have unfettered access to the arts through the medium of Welsh. However, we also need to reflect and promote the arts of a "multi-cultural and multi-lingual society within a bilingual nation". This notion helps capture the approach we and our

collaborators, partners and portfolio members need to make manifest. We want to adopt it as a formula and we will make this clearer in our final published strategy.

## D. Equalities

A number of respondents expressed anxiety about our approach to Equalities. They thought that they detected a lessening of commitment in this area – a suggestion that we might be stepping back from a commitment to advance and embrace the mainstreaming and dynamism of diversity in the arts.

The concern was that we might relegate these matters and in doing so lose both precision and the momentum created by projects and approaches established in recent years.

### Our response

We have lost none of our commitment to this area of our work. Quite to the contrary, the Council wants to push strongly to ensure that diversity and equality sit firmly in the mainstream of our work. This may be a case of drafting and being more pointed in our final edit of the strategy. We will make this clearer in that final version.

The strategy when published in its final form will be accompanied by an **Equalities Impact Assessment** that looks critically at how we will reach all communities across Wales and sections of those communities and specifically it will test the strategy against the possibilities of inadvertent dis-enfranchising of sections of those communities viewed from the perspective of protected characteristics. Our research and evaluation programme will measure the impact of the strategy tracking the impact of our work.

That said, we were struck by the strength of the concerns that were expressed.

“At the recent ACW Standing Up for the Arts events, it was made specifically clear that equality, inclusion and participation are the driving force of Ysbrydoli/Inspire. This was the very expression used, but it does not come across very forcibly in the document. Because there is little mention of inclusion or the culture of accessibility, I am afraid that the excellent principles in this document will be lost when it comes to ‘minority groups’ or those with protected characteristics.”

*“We must also respect and continue nurturing the burgeoning Welsh Disability culture and Deaf arts scenes, ensuring these practitioners and audiences are not overlooked or marginalized – and continue encouraging intercultural and integrated collaborations. There have been astonishing steps forward in creating a culturally diverse and aware artistic sector, embracing all the possibilities of human variety. I am immensely concerned there are no specific references to accessibility, integration, and inclusivity in Arts Council of Wales’s document.”*

*“A general ‘equality’ label is, I fear, non-specific, even woolly, and unless clearly defined with principles and shared, specific agreements of good practice which are then upheld, it is open to individual interpretation and possible misuse, so the less powerful, less visible once-marginalized yet again become marginalized...  
I believe strongly we are still living in a prejudiced and discriminatory society, which is often unaware of the hierarchies and social constructs which limit and act as barricades, both physically and attitudinally. ”*

#### **Our response**

Adopting a committed and progressive approach to Equalities matters to us.

Our **Strategic Equalities Plan** remains the point of reference for this work now and into the future. That plan is reviewed and renewed on an annual basis. It provides our point of reference for the changes and developments we are seeking. And it helps us monitor the progress we are making in placing equality and diversity more clearly at the heart of our work. This applies to ourselves as a public body and to the organisations that we fund on the public’s behalf.

Given the strength of the concerns in this area, it might be helpful if we provided brief information on some of the practical initiatives that are currently underway.

We have commissioned a **Single Equalities Toolkit** developed in partnership with Diverse Cymru. The Toolkit helps navigate current legislation, highlights effective practice and provides practical tools and information for those who want to develop their approach to Equalities. The Toolkit will go live in the Autumn 2014 and be introduced through a series of events.

Our **National Companies** are also bringing forward a shared and joint approach to Equalities with particular reference to BME communities.

We are pioneering a UK ground-breaking **Disability Ticketing Scheme**. This is scheduled to be piloted and rolled out fully during 2015/16. Although a card scheme is at the heart of this programme, it will also be the basis for customer care training, programming and other aspects of audience development.

We are partnering with the Baring Foundation and Age Cymru to provide access to the arts to our **older people**.

Our work through the **Creative Steps** programme has helped creative individuals and organisations to achieve new levels of confidence and professionalism. People who have previously felt excluded from the traditional sources of arts funding have been helped to find new ways of accessing the funds that they need. To date it has been a targeted programme for individuals and organisations facing the added hurdle of impeded progress because of historic inequalities operating in society or personally for them and which are only slowly changing. This work on facilitating access across thresholds to arts development will be pursued with the goal nonetheless of seeing it integrated and mainstreamed in the way we operate as a funder and developer of the arts.

Our **Open Doors Open Minds** programme is targeted internally at supporting the professional development of our own staff. This internal programme is being developed in conjunction with Diverse Cymru.

The 2012 **Unlimited** commissions were a tremendous success. We were pleased to have contributed to award-winning creation through that programme and we have recently announced our participation in a new UK programme of commissioning which is a follow-up to the initial Unlimited commissions. This will result in up to six commissions by Wales based disabled artists.

**Digital technologies** are creating new potential to develop in roads into addressing equalities issues. An example would be our Digital R&D award to UCAN, a performance and creative arts co-operative for blind and partially sighted young people. They are now working with Calvium to develop UCAN GO, an app that verbally map arts venues in Welsh and English to provide a new form of independence for the visually impaired community. The work is being piloted with Wales Millennium Centre and The Torch Theatre, Milford Haven.

In the last year we published our **Disability Access Survey of Revenue Funded Venues and Galleries** and have begun implementing the recommendations. A series of access training sessions for venues have been delivered across Wales and we have agreed a number of actions that will lead to improved accessibility

and an increase in the number of interpreted performances available in Wales.

## E. Inclusive and Engaging, Amateur, volunteer, professional: a single creative community?

Some respondents questioned whether *Inspire* recognised what might be termed the continuum of arts activity, from the voluntary and the participatory through to the work of professionalised companies and individuals (and everything in between).

"[We] agree with ACW that everyday creativity and participation in the arts on an individual level is an important part of the creation of human 'capital', helping eradicate the poverty of opportunity that faces many disadvantaged communities.... [We] feel that, whilst this draft strategy disproportionately focuses on the role of the professional artist, a series of simple yet important changes in emphasis would provide ACW with the opportunity to radically rebalance the way in which the artistic landscape in Wales is described and understood, fully recognising the value and unique qualities of everyday creativity undertaken by individuals in diverse communities on a part-time, voluntary and amateur basis."

*"[We] welcome the statement that "the old comparisons between high art and popular culture with its zero sum game of polarities – excellence and accessibility, subsidised or market led, high or low – have always been contested and are now largely irrelevant"*

"[Although] this recognition is alluded to in the *Inspire* document, making it explicit would indicate a true step-change in ACW's approach, from a positive affirmation of the role of professional artists and cultural institutions, to a substantially more emphatic statement of the democratic and transformative potential of active cultural participation to enrich and empower the people of Wales."

*"Of the self-governed volunteer-led groups that are the means through which tens of thousands of people access creativity cultural opportunities in Wales, many are financially self-sustaining, through membership fees, subscriptions and ticket-sales. These groups are often most likely to find themselves in need of public or private funding at times of developmental change, when they want to take their activities to the next level, explore new*

*opportunities for partnership and collaboration, or become more accountable to their community by constituting their group. It is at these times that a sophisticated appreciation of the specific 'qualities' of this kind of volunteer-led participation is required by funding bodies, values that are often quite different from those of large professional institutions."*

#### **Our response:**

We accept that this strategy attaches particular importance to those artists and companies working professionally in the arts. We feel a special responsibility to foster and nurture artists and contribute to the environment that maximises such contributions and their dynamic in society. This must be one of the fundamental core responsibilities of an Arts Council.

We recognise, too, that "professionalism" can take many forms. For some this means "portfolio" types of career. And for many professional artists this means tapping into the well spring of different types of activity, much of it derived from Wales's communitarian roots. Overall we see greater and greater interface between how artists work and their relationship to community and we will want to foster this. Our focal point will be the interface between professional artist and the way they can work in and with communities to transformational and empowering ends.

We recognise that amateurs and volunteers are as much part of the cultural DNA of Wales as our award-winning artists and national companies. Much of their activity is unfunded, has its own structures and economy. By and large this won't be an area of Arts Council priority.

However, a heavy-handed emphasis on clear-cut distinctions between amateur and professional can in some cases be culturally irrelevant, even damaging to emerging arts practice. We need also to recognise that volunteers and amateurs sometimes underpin the professional activity that we most value. We need to reflect this in the strategy and certainly place a premium on the work artists can surface and achieve with community activists, and voluntary groups.

The Council will face funding decisions which demonstrate where it feels it needs to prioritise its attention and our strategy is saying this is in the ever greater professionalization of our arts sector in 21<sup>st</sup> century Wales but for those artists and organisations to share our concern for reach and involvement through communities.

## **The 10 Challenges**

### **1. Creating the right environment for the artist and the arts to flourish**

Most respondents agreed that we needed to focus on creating the circumstances in which the creativity and the arts were most likely to thrive. However, some questioned the sustainability of our vision. Our strategy over the next five years has goals for improving the environment for artists to have sustainable careers from their base in Wales. Many respondents shared this view. As an Arts Council, working with individual artists means an interlocking set of jigsaw pieces composed of services, network growth, opportunities, funding, brokering, advocacy, infrastructural and professional development.

“We absolutely agree that development of new talent and artists is crucial to the long-term future of the Arts in Wales. As a company we provide support to a number of both developing and established performers and companies in Wales. However, the Strategy does not follow through with what happens next! The Strategy makes clear that RFO funding is limited, but we could be faced with an arts environment full of developing/developed artists with no-where to continue that development due to lack of funding and resources...”

*“We do not consider that the lure of the South East of England and its power to draw away the brightest and most creative people is properly acknowledged in the strategy. This position is not likely to change in the lifetime of the strategy and will, if anything, deteriorate as the imbalance in affluence increases. There is a need to be clear that working with England, in particular, of the UK countries, will be essential to both artistic and economic sustainability.”*

Some respondents stressed the importance of looking beyond Wales for professional opportunities:

“One of the obvious partnerships that is missing in these financially squeezed times is that of the 4 Arts Councils in the UK working together to deliver a cohesive touring strategy that exposes quality work beyond geographical borders. There needs to be a particular focus on the small/mid-scale.”

*“Balancing the local and international can be a tricky position for arts organisations, but those who manage it well break down the hierarchy between the two and benefit from the active engagement of their local community, growing artists and audiences and contributing to the cultural vibrancy of their locale.”*

“‘Key Moments in an artist’s career’ should be spent OUTSIDE Wales, in order to learn and SEE material, in order to one day, return to Wales. ”

Many respondents’ view of the challenges in this area tended to be influenced by the particular focus of their activity:

“Your goal of “funding touring work” is also to be commended and supports our activity as a company. However, we have tended to become ‘victims of our own success’ in this respect. We are increasingly asked to tour more extensively (both in terms of time and geographical reach), but without adequate funding it is impossible for us meet the requirements of all audiences at all times. ”

*“We would like to see more recognition given to the need to support the health of artists, as they cannot create if they are unable to function. At the same time, we would also like to see greater recognition given to what artists can achieve despite suffering debilitating conditions such as severe depression, bipolar disorder and schizophrenia and how such illnesses can also be the source of creativity.”*

However, there were some interesting examples of consensus around the importance of developing and nurturing the individual artist and those who support them:

“‘Make’ is a word that brings with it a sense of personal empowerment that is both active and democratic, and explanation of the concept should include specific reference to ways in which ACW can embed opportunities for everyday creativity in all of our lives, whether or not we identify ourselves as professional artists. [We] would propose less emphasis on ‘artists’ as a subset of the wider population, and more recognition of the term ‘artist’ as an element of human experience that we can all identify with, and aspire to, as part of our creative cultural lives.”

*“I’d like to suggest that you should recognise the importance of supporting and nurturing our artistic entrepreneurs – the creative producers that support these artists – by emphasising the importance of the professional development of these individuals.”*

A concern for the sustainability of individual careers led some respondents to comment on training and professional development:

“We do feel that training in informal settings is also important and informal training such as peer to peer mentoring can be beneficial. We feel reflective practice needs to be embedded in the artistic community and so training should also happen outside of HE and FE.”

*“support for artists coming out of education and into their professional lives is something that [we] feel is really important. Professional development is important at this stage, of course, but more importantly development of practice needs support. Helping artists to build critical communities which can feed the development of their practice is essential at this stage and this needs to come from artists and arts professionals that are experienced as well as from their immediate peer group.”*

**Our response:**

The Arts Council has an obvious desire to see our artists thrive. However, such an ambition is dependent on a range of circumstances, only some of which are within our control. We will go on campaigning for continued public investment in the arts. However, in times of economic austerity, we need also to consider what might be achieved by looking creatively at new ways of developing and sustaining the creative endeavours of artists and arts organisations.

We will be re-focussing the way that we provide support for the individual artist. Funding programmes such as Creative Wales have proved their popularity and success. We need to build on these foundations.

This is not just a matter of funding, but also the development of services, opportunities, the possibilities of networks, the recognition of how experience is gained, the support for collaborations and formalised pairing of artists with venues and organisations, residency work, developing patterns of post entry training and development. We are active already in these areas, but the responses to the strategy consultation have persuaded us to be clearer about how the Arts Council should co-ordinate and sustain this work.

We are clear in seeing a priority for us resides in the greater professionalization of the artist but for this to happen in ways in which the broader community and economy also benefits.

Skills and work force training are targets for us to develop with partners.

We are not seeing this as standing outside of our commitment to inclusivity. This theme of inclusivity is a focus of a later section of the strategy (and comments in the introduction above) and we are certainly not taking our eye off the ball in this regard, neither for ourselves as an Arts Council nor in our work with those whom we fund. Our Strategic Equalities Plan is the focus of how we are developing our activity in this area, and this will be reviewed and re-focussed annually.

We envisage patterns of grant to voluntary sector activity will still come forward to us for support but acknowledge the overall thrust of the strategy is to develop the professional artistic base in Wales. This will in turn, we think, have benefits for voluntary sector activity, given the way that “social practice” of artists is increasingly a feature of artists’ work.

The contention of the strategy is that whilst we might not be looking at growth of base-line resources, there is probably a good deal more we can achieve using partnering and networking, different forms of economy, and refocussing the nature of our support and interventions and opportunities for artists. We recognise many venues and organisations have developed such practice with our support already but we need to see this ethos spread and deepen.

The thrust of the overall strategy is to counter a trend which sees a drain of our creative talent and cultural entrepreneurship and instead builds a counter momentum. For that, the context and infrastructure for artists and, yes, creative producers and curators, across different disciplines and media with their careers and activities from a Wales base has to become ever more possible. We recognise it will demand a convergence of factors and a growth in critical mass. We are acutely aware of the dangers – and opportunities – associated with possible changes in the way for example that local authorities are organised in Wales and the effect on arts this is having. Over the next couple of years we will work closely with local authorities to ensure that wherever possible we defend and protect funding and development of the arts. Part of our focus will be tooling up for any eventual change in LAs in Wales and guarding against “unforeseen” consequences for the arts of such organisational change and indeed participating where we can, to get a better dispensation for the arts, the other side of such a change alongside the piloting of any alternative patterns and models and the sharing of practice of local delivery of the arts.

It is not surprising that a number of respondents have emphasised the importance of developing work beyond Wales. For example, we will look at the most effective ways of using touring to sustain the work of Welsh companies. But it needs a wider touring circuit for viability. We will address common approaches with colleagues at the UK Arts Councils.

Similar issues apply to the development of an individual career. If artists are to make a career living and working in Wales it is likely that they will also have to develop an international dimension to their work.

## 2. Being Fit For Purpose

A number of respondents recognised the connection between our 2010 Investment Review and ambitions of the new strategy. The Investment Review set out a new pattern of funding and encouraged organisations to be enterprising and imaginative in the ways that they developed arts opportunities.

Some respondents wanted to revisit the outcome of the Investment Review and the consequence of decisions.

“... would strongly recommend a gradual shift in funding priorities back to the support bodies that have historically provided the membership services and bespoke guidance that enables self-led voluntary groups to thrive.”

### **Our response:**

We do not believe that it would be right to return to the funding arrangements that existed prior to the 2010 Investment Review. Council remains committed to the view that the current portfolio of organisations best meets the criteria set for the 2010 Review.

Council recognises, however, that not all of the arts needs in Wales would be met by the organisational portfolio alone, and other developmental initiatives have been supported through the strategic use of other project-based funding. This will continue to be the approach that Council will wish to adopt towards representative/umbrella organisations. Council recognises the importance of these organisations as co-ordinators and advocates on behalf of their sector. However, Council’s engagement with these organisations will continue to be focused around the commissioning of specific services and projects linked to the outcomes that we jointly want to achieve.

Anyone working in the arts constantly faces the challenge of re-inventing and of making anew. For example we have seen significant growth across the Festivals sector in Wales. And we have also been supportive of those initiatives that have not relied on the habitual and familiar but have researched new ways to make connections with their audiences. We can point to the enhancing of inclusivity in the

programmes and initiatives we have encouraged. Inclusive Festivals such as that developed by Hijinx and supported by Arts Council have been in the vanguard of such Festivals.

“We accept that venues need to look outward, to support arts non-building based offer e.g. in town centres and other site specific places – to take the art to the audience. As local authority arts services we will continue to seek to do so, and to be inventive in seeking the necessary additional resources.”

“The reference to festivals in particular is interesting. *We agree that our leading festivals are, and need to be, unique to Wales.* However, referring to the *Make, Reach, Sustain* approach, there needs to be further clarity on how events/festival can thrive in the current climate and still reach a degree of sustainability.”

Some respondents had some interesting observations to offer about audience and about types of work.

“Marginalised artists are not ‘artists with problems who need to be brought into ‘the mainstream’ – their art has a uniqueness that can enrich the arts in Wales. And of course, marginalised artists can learn from others, more experienced in other ways. But it has to be a two-way communication; I am afraid that without this, the arts in Wales will only be fit for purpose for a supposed elite.”

*“We note the emphasis on the ‘new and contemporary’, but we would urge the Arts Council not to create a climate in which interpretations and re-interpretations, or the display, of works that might be deemed classic, or important to the history of the arts in Wales, the UK and Europe, can only be seen across the border. Welsh audiences should be enabled to learn from that history in the same way as any other. This is not to say that Newport will not want to take its own risks, with work produced in the City, or brought in, but it will want to do so in the context of the knowledge and understanding of its audiences and artists.”*

“ A sustainable leap from the old to the new and the local to the national and international will be hard to achieve without a planned journey for some audience members loyal to a more traditional entertainment programme who may need some smaller stepping stones to get there. As

stated in Inspire, in a difficult financial climate, the right balance must be struck.”

#### **Our Response**

Council recognises that it is required to respect breadth and diversity – both in terms of the audiences that it is trying to reach, and the range of artistic work that Council is trying to encourage.

We are aware in these straitened economic times, that venues in particular are concerned about the extent of the new and unfamiliar that they might be encouraged to programme. Often they will say that they need more recognisable, saleable titles in their programme if they are to sustain their audiences and, consequently, achieve a greater measure of financial stability. The question of new work and the re-interpretation of canonical works is a perennial issue. In turn often representations are made to Council to the effect that venues know their public best. Or that their public needs a sort of content which will then prompt them to develop appetites for other work. This particularly dogs the debates around the programming of drama. Venues and Council do agree that good choices of companies and repertory need to be constantly worked at from a non-dogmatic and unprejudiced vantage point and that the key here is the rationale underpinning choices. We will come forward with proposals that we would see as playing to the strengths of companies and venues working together for their public.

Council has expressed no desire to dictate cultural taste. Council does, however, have a responsibility to encourage audience development, to nurture new and exciting voices, to connect with audiences through the relevance and immediacy of work that inspires and engages them.

### **3. Leading from the Front**

Respondents welcomed the focus in our strategy on the National companies and their remit. Respondents were looking for developments in the connections of all our national institutions can make:

“We welcome the focus on a strategic role for the national companies, and the expectation on all of us to explore how we can be truly national. However, we would find it enormously helpful to explore and agree on what the structures will be for fulfilling this role.”

*"It is always useful and vitally important to pose the question, "How are we national?". This is a question that deserves and should be asked regularly, the answer to which will invariably differ and evolve over time. We should be wary of adhering too strictly to some of the old concepts and ideas, and be prepared to develop and change when necessary."*

"The national companies, if they are barometers of the strength and vibrancy of our arts, need to be accessible in all respects to people with protected characteristics, and should be seen to be so. Here is another opportunity to drive home the equalities agenda with the national organisations setting examples."

The strategy alludes to the lack of a national focus, beyond Amgueddfa Cymru National Museum Wales, for the visual arts. Feedback from the Visual Arts and Galleries Wales suggests other more immediate lines of development and sees the need for a National Centre for Contemporary Art as perhaps a diversion of resources, wasteful, unproductive and perhaps old fashioned model. Equally Cardiff's strategy for the City as Gallery does not necessarily provide a surrogate. More physical additions to infrastructure in the capital could still be on the agenda when comparators are made to European competitor cities and their offers and the growth market represented by interest in contemporary art.

"...create a dynamic visual and applied arts ecology of production, distribution and education which plays to the specific strengths of a creative network of different organisations and artist-focused agencies in Wales, rather than focusing on expensive 'centralised' infrastructure solutions such as a monolithic 'national centre for visual arts'. Aside from questions around the viability of such an institution in the current financial climate, VAGW questions whether such a centre is desirable until the underpinning bedrock of vibrant visual and applied art activity in Wales can be safeguarded through sustained investment and cross-sectoral development.

The main issues facing the sector are not addressing a lack of creative ambition, we have that in spades, but about building capacity and business sustainability, achieving greater leverage for public subsidy, engaging new audiences and exploiting the creative and business potential of digital technologies and social media. We ask the Arts Council to reconsider its stated position in Inspire that the strategy over the coming period should be

‘to explore how to bring about a sustainable appropriate national platform for the visual and applied arts’. The visual and applied arts sector already has several high performing and responsible companies ‘creating work of national and international significance, showing leadership in developing the arts in Wales, nurturing the partnerships and relationships that will develop new artists, building the audiences of the future.’”

**Our Response:**

We note that there seems to be a general embrace of the notion that our national companies should be leadership organisations, demonstrating an exemplary approach to the creation, promotion and management of their activities. We also expect national companies to be generous in sharing their expertise and resources for the benefit of the wider arts community.

We respect the views offered on the need or not for a National Centre for Contemporary Art. In the current economic climate we recognise the obvious constraints and the existing competition for scarce financial resources. Nonetheless, Council believes that it must take the long view, and we do not believe that even now it is right to dismiss entirely the possibility of a new national organisation for contemporary visual art.

It may be right that a major new national gallery for contemporary art in Wales is not thought currently appropriate. But equally, we have to acknowledge that something is missing from the mix. It is not sufficient to say that the current protagonists perform adequate and resourced national roles. More is needed, and it might be that these players need to build their capacity to act as a national *network* for the visual arts, more than is currently the case. Council would want to support this. However, as a notion, such a national network would need to gain acknowledgement over time and a wider acceptance in the public and political sphere and not just within the visual arts sector. Could this be credible alternative to what has been thought of as a National Centre for Contemporary Art? A concept for present needs, rather than the idea of a hard-to-achieve and resource-hungry building? The quest for national standing for contemporary visual arts must continue so that the visual arts are thought of in a concomitant national context alongside the performing arts and music in Wales.

#### **4. Making more of our arts buildings**

The Arts Council’s investment in arts buildings has roots that extend back over many decades. Where they have worked well, these facilities have been a major focus for

community development. *Inspire* envisages a developing role for such places at the heart of their communities. Respondents both welcomed this and saw the challenges:

“The view that they should be social and cultural hubs, and the acceptance that these two roles are indivisible, is welcome.”

“This Challenge links with the first challenge in that arts buildings are part of the effort to provide the right environment for artists. While the opening paragraph in ‘Making more of our arts buildings’ (section 4) reflects the range of theatre venues to be found across Wales, paragraphs three and four choose to talk exclusively about the ‘key’ buildings (which the first paragraph distinguishes from others ‘beyond that network’) while extolling virtues and attributes which are perhaps more likely to characterise those organisations which lie beyond that network of leading arts centres and galleries.

While we are sure ACW is correct to state that ‘for many people in Wales, their routine engagement with the arts is through one of the country’s key galleries, arts centres or theatre spaces’ could it also be true that for just as many, if not more, their routine engagement is with the buildings beyond that network?”

“... supports ACW’s wish to make the most of Wales’ arts venues, and agrees with the assertion that these centres will need to continue to reinvent themselves, breaking down divisions between cultural and social engagement, and emphasising community ownership and habitation.”

“we would also welcome a means of creating a stronger commitment among venues to work more collaboratively with visiting organisations, thus allowing us to contribute towards that connection and maximise ACW investment.”

**Our response:**

We would encourage all venues to think imaginatively about how and in what ways they are able to reach and engage audiences and develop themselves in both social and artistic ways for their communities. However, we have invested significant revenue and capital funding into a national network of arts venues and we see these organisations as having a special role to play in helping us to deliver our arts ambitions. These theatres, galleries and arts centre venues have a special relationship with the audiences and artists that they are nurturing. Their challenge is

to retain and grow the loyalty and engagement of their communities whilst also introducing the innovative and diverse programming that is so important to arts development.

There was a concern expressed about what was seen as a risk to staging plays within theatre buildings, although there was by no means a consensus on this point:

“You should be promoting the use of the empty theatres and arts centres, not ‘new places for action’. Over the past 10 years, I have been horrified at the disgraceful lack of ability to stage a play within a THEATRE. We must address this NOW, and appoint the personal who have the ability to create theatre where it belongs, not on locations all over the country. If not, then we are risking losing the ability to STAGE a play...”

*“The potential to make partners across Wales with pubs, restaurants and churches... Even if only an additional ten spaces were found in Wales that were of quality this may help to make, reach and sustain.”*

#### **Our Response:**

The balance and variety in our theatre ecology continues to be important. The attention that site specific work has drawn to Wales of late cannot be denied. We encouraged NTW in its mandate to make theatre anew with each production, something it has taken on, to great effect for the profile of work being minted in Wales. We are sensitive however as to how to bring about great work on stages as well as non-theatre spaces. This is not an either/ or, and staged work on stages and in theatre spaces still clearly has its place.

In producer and presenter relationships, there is clearly a variety of approach and certainly no consistency of what we would see as best practice and we will continue to work at brokering the most productive relationships around repertoire, context and publics.

## **5. Wales in the World**

Over the last decade artists in Wales have developed a more informed understanding of the importance of international connections in today’s cultural market-place.

However, many respondents pointed out that it is about more than just the development of new business opportunities, it is also about the creative opportunities that collaboration can offer:

“International engagement is about more than simply the import and export of art and artworks. It is about meaningful collaboration across national borders, about intercultural dialogue and exchange, about creating new opportunities for Welsh artists to work overseas and about offering Welsh audiences access to the very best contemporary art from around the world. Showcases such as festivals, biennials, trade fairs and international platforms are important, but international engagement should be in the DNA of all creatively ambitious artists and arts organisations in Wales.”

*“The role of Wales Arts International, the Welsh Government and the British Council is important in this regard, but perhaps a more arms length approach is needed which is responsive to the creative ambitions of artists and arts organisations, rather than prescribing the types of international collaboration and target countries or regions... International working should not be funding-led, it should be led by creativity and seizing new opportunities for ‘cultural connectivity’. From this approach, new markets will be opened up for artists and arts organisations, and Wales’ cultural reputation overseas will continue to grow.”*

“Distinctive Welsh art practice is a difficult thing to define, and the diversity of the cultures within Wales, and of the world within which Wales sits, needs to be acknowledged.”

*“We recognise that it is through consistency and confidence that we can deliver work of quality, relevance and innovation and promote a vibrant cultural identity beyond our borders.”*

However, some urged us to consider looking a little closer to home when considering opportunities beyond Welsh borders:

“... from the position of a touring company with almost 25 years of touring product locally, national and internationally, the Strategy misses out on the ‘middle’ ground. Works needs exposure and profile and in our experience, touring throughout England – and London in particular, can provide opportunities for that exposure and profile. London media

coverage of work helps to build that profile and is nowadays rarely received outside of a London/Manchester/Birmingham season. Additionally an international programmer is more likely to fly into London to see a piece of work than to Wales."

*"If you want 'fresh new voices', then YOU MUST look beyond Wales, and promote and support the study and writing for Theatre outside Wales. And not just internationally, but on our doorstep. Welsh artists working and living in London, who mix and work with established theatrical practitioners, not just out of work 'Welsh' actors. Inspiration must come from seeing work outside Wales, and not be influenced by the weak material they see constantly, within Wales."*

#### **Our response**

As the recipient of significant funding from the Welsh Government, we feel that it is right that we share and reflect the Government's strategic priorities in the international arena. These priorities reflect Government's desire to encourage sustainable international relationships, ones that promote Wales as a vibrant place to live, work and visit. These priorities are focused on specific countries where the Government believes the opportunities for developing ties and relations are greatest.

Our strategy will support this approach, and we will endeavour to work in partnership with the Welsh Government to exploit the full potential of the cultural, social and economic returns that investment in international activity can bring. We share an agenda in those areas where we clearly see cultural development going hand in hand with developing sustainability and social and economic benefit. However, this does not preclude us from looking at projects elsewhere when there is a persuasive cultural argument for doing so.

It is our contention that innovative and distinctive arts can help crystallise impressions of both the heritage and dynamism of contemporary Wales in the international arena.

Our partnership with the British Council also requires a shared focus if it is to be effective.

At the invitation of Government, we are putting in place joint arrangements to work with Welsh Government's Economy Science and Transport Department over the new EU Creative Europe programme. This should have dividends for the arts and cultural sectors, by developing a Wales Desk to channel and act as an information point. We will also look at how we collaborate with the other UK Arts Councils to see if there is

more we could do to encourage the cross border sharing of work in economically sustainable ways.

## 6. More people creating, enjoying and taking part in the arts

The challenge here lies at the heart of our strategy. Interestingly, our respondents came at this question from several vantage points although the importance of audience development was a consistent theme:

“My other concern is around marketing & audience development - or the lack of anything clear in the document beyond aspirations. How is ACW planning to show leadership in audience development, especially in light of the closure of Audiences Wales? You say “We expect the key organisations we fund to play a leadership role in terms of both artistic innovation, audience development and in the way they conduct their business” - but what do you mean by audience development? How are you defining it? How will you be supporting it (financially and strategically)?

I have been alarmed by the reduction of audience focus within major arts organisations in Wales over the past year or so. Given that marketing exists to bridge the gap between the art and the audience, does ACW share my concerns about this disinvestment in marketing... how should ACW be responding to this? Where are the audience ‘champions’ within ACW and within the subsidised arts sector in Wales? Where is the leadership and expertise in marketing & audience development coming from over the next few years?”

*“While we support the move to help fledgling and early-career artists, is the ACW also interested in people who have never learnt an art or craft and encouraging participation from them - not for career reasons but for hobby and health? Also, does the ACW only think of non-experienced participants as children and young people? The strategy seems to have such a focus, but not on people in older age ranges, who are new to arts and crafts.”*

“more on audience development and what/who/how this is to be achieved would be welcome.”

*"I did not feel that there was much reference to the broader public or audiences in Wales, which I would very much welcome; for again without both the artist and the audience, the sector is entirely hollow."*

There were a number of references to the importance of recognising, and engaging, other partners:

"CCLOW [Chief Culture and Leisure Officers of Wales] and WLGA [Welsh Local Government Association] ...has committed to "all people in Wales being healthy" and for the arts this means "all people in Wales being creatively active". As there is a close connection between ACW and local authorities in many instances across Wales' 22 local authorities, should the CCLOW commitment to the people of Wales and their access to the arts be mentioned here?"

"There appears to be little mention of Health Boards as partners moving forward. Also I wonder if the challenges faced by third sector organisations and / or art services who are moved out of local authority direct control are addressed fully. Also, wonder if there could be more joined up thinking between lifelong learning and the arts."

And other respondents reminded us of the diversity of arts audiences and some of the challenges in providing access to the arts:

"we recognise through our membership network the differentials that exist in terms of access to the arts across Wales. We welcome the opportunity to work with ACW and our membership to further address these inequalities in a sustainable manner, that recognises the different challenges that a diverse presenter-base faces. We look forward to exploring with ACW how we can play a role in developing this work."

*"It is possible that the term 'Equalities' may not be fully understood by all readers. Not everyone is au fait with the Equality Act and may not be aware of all the protected characteristics involved."*

"There is a general lack of reference to the health agenda in the document. Considering an increasing proportion of our population / (audience), are elderly. With the dementia care agenda ever present and all of us with the potential to develop this condition (1 in 3) I wonder (knowing that the arts can assist this condition) does the sector not need an artistic strategy within the dementia care field."

Our consultation coincided with the publication of a Welsh Government commissioned report from Baroness Kay Andrews on Culture and Poverty. A number of respondents drew the connections to our strategy:

“... strongly supports the recommendation of Baroness Andrews’ recent Culture and Poverty report that “Welsh Government, cultural organisations and voluntary sector ...investigate scope for a national cultural volunteering strategy” and suggests that ACW and VAW [Voluntary Arts Wales] might together be instrumental in pushing this agenda forward, and co-author such a strategy with Welsh Government.”

*“...the point made about “poverty of aspiration” is interesting. To us, part of the benefit of creativity is the act of making something that wasn’t in existence previously, so being a ‘creator’ and realising that the person has a kind of power and potential for more creation. This can increase aspirations - at first in art and maybe later in other aspects. ...We view participation as fun and empowering, but appreciate the need for participatory arts to be accessible and affordable. When delivered effectively, participatory arts can be a catalyst for further involvement and development.”*

**Our response:**

Achieving growth in Audiences through increased reach and engagement is fundamental to our strategy. However, we accept that this could be more prominently flagged in *Inspire*. It is our conviction that the excellent work created by our artists and companies never reaches **all** the audiences it is capable of pleasing and moving. A number of initiatives now running in our work and through our portfolio, all aim to increase the numbers of people seeking repeat engagement with what the arts have to offer. Our strategy in *Inspire* looks to the long term outcome of change and development of the place of arts and creativity in Education, through to what new technologies can permit currently and the types of artistic project or arts environmental work that build in new types of audience involvement and participation.

Over the past three years we have seen modest increases in attendance and participation, but we want to reach further and into new areas.

For example, current work includes promoting the value of **Family Friendly** arts activities. And our **Our Space** scheme supports projects that develop or build the capacity of arts organisations, enabling them to experiment with new or

innovative ways of developing arts audiences. Our Sharing Together scheme supports opportunities for artists and arts organisations to exchange ideas, learning and best practice through networking. There have been a wide range of projects supported with networks focussing on arts in health; gallery education; strategic marketing; youth arts; professionally led participatory projects; and Welsh language marketing. There were common themes that dominated the proposals - establishment or strengthening networks to enable sharing of information, ideas and best practice and explore new and innovative ideas. **Sharing Together 3** has recently been launched.

We have begun to develop further our partnership work with **Local Authorities**. This has involved developing and pooling our knowledge, and offering perspectives in relevant consultations. We will also be developing work on alternative models of local working through the arts, and some groundwork on the arts in the context of the Williams review and what that might herald. As we do so, the Welsh Government's Culture and Poverty report was published during the course of this consultation and we are now working with Government colleagues to look at how our strategy dovetails into the approaches Baroness Andrews is advocating.

We are currently reviewing the audience development and engagement programme **Our Space**. The programme sought proposals which had a long-term, sustainable vision for developing new audiences for arts activities through innovative and exciting programmes. We invited organisations, primarily venues to think outside the box, take risks and be imaginative in their approach to finding new audiences. We have supported a broad range of ten projects over the last two years.

As the **Artworks** partnership fostered by grant support from the Paul Hamlyn Foundation moves into a concluding phase of its research and development, we would anticipate initiatives to follow up the work of the partners in an implementation phase for some of the ideas that have been fostered by this project.

Audience development lies firmly in the remit of one of our portfolio managers and we will continue to provide services and networking occasions helping share best practice. The marketing and audience development work of all our clients is monitored and reviewed.

## 7. Nurturing young talent, lighting the spark

Our strategy has been informed by the publication of the Welsh Government's Review of Arts and Education, commissioned from Professor Dai Smith. We are delighted that the Education Minister has accepted all twelve of the report's recommendations and discussions are currently underway to agree on an implementation plan.

The Smith report is transformational in intent, with challenges that will test both the education and arts sectors. A number of respondents welcomed the emphasis and scale of the task. They also reminded us of the importance of developing appropriate partnerships:

*"Creativity has been devalued in schools for many decades now as the emphasis on Literacy and Numeracy has taken over. But as our thriving creative economy here in the UK testifies to, it has an important role to play in the creative industries."*

*"I feel that there is much emphasis within the document on developing skills/giving opportunities in the arts to our young people, (and that's to be applauded) without reference to the practical learning/operational pathways for example apprenticeships and locations/work experience associated with BAC for example."*

*"Should there be clearer recognition of the role of local authority arts services as being the key people ""on the ground"" in terms of the strategic influence e.g. advocating for the inclusion of the arts within Literacy and Numeracy strategies and operational partnerships with schools/the education system? Also in terms of the delivery of Single Plans for Children and Young People: access to culture and Play Sufficiency Developments. More meaningful interpretation of the Arts in Education report should be included, including evidence of the partnership working with LAs, given arts officers 'on the ground' influence."*

**Our response:**

Much of the immediate focus will be around the adoption by Government of the Arts and Education Review report and its recommendations. This focus, in the first instance, is on developing a **National Plan for Arts and Creative Learning**. This will need to be dovetailed into the Welsh Government's curriculum review which is currently underway. The findings of this latter review are not due to be reported on until the end of the year and the outcome of the review will have a direct impact on how we move forward with our joint plans.

On another front, a second phase of project development is looking at the

feasibility of establishing a **Youth Arts Festival**. The research has revealed a strong demand for a national, bilingual, festival that would be cross-artform and provide a platform for young people from all backgrounds and from all across Wales to come together, share ideas, showcase work, take part in workshops and learn from each other in an informal, non-competitive environment.

One respondent felt obliged, under this heading, to draw our attention to other sectors of society:

“Consider though, whether it might be inadvertently ageist to only focus on youth when considering age issues. Where is the commitment to nurture older talent, especially considering the increasing number of older people?”

**Our response:**

We do recognise the importance of developing work with and for older people. Projects such as the **Gwanwyn** festival for older people and a new partnership that we have established with the Baring Foundation and Age Cymru are just two practical examples of our work in this area.

## **8. Putting communities first**

Arts Council funded activity reaches extensively into a wide range of communities and localities across Wales. We know that we are not set up to be able to deliver universal provision (much as we would love to be able to adopt the NHS motto “to be free and available at the point of demand”).

This part of our strategy featured two particular issues – the need to invest in experienced practitioners and organisations, skilled in community development; and the important community-facing role played by local authorities.

On the former, one respondent endorsed the importance of this work but noted the challenges in sustaining it:

“the benefits of these initiatives can sometimes be short-lived, when at the conclusion of the publicly funded project the participants struggle to bridge the gap between their continuing desire to create and the apparent absence of opportunities to do so. VAW’s [Voluntary Arts Wales] new pilot project ‘Putting Down Roots’, which is supported by ACW and the Spirit of 2012 Trust, looks at the potential of the voluntary and amateur arts sector

to improve the sustainability of professional-led community arts initiatives, by linking participants with opportunities to join, or set up their own, self-governed voluntary groups, thus creating opportunities for ongoing participation.”

However, it the pressures facing local authorities that drew the most responses:

“Local Authorities face years now of the most extreme pressure on their discretionary spend beyond the services which they are obliged to provide. This is going to demand wholesale re-thinking of arts in localities. Nobody has neat financial solutions to plug gaps opening up in the way matters have been ordained to date. It could lead to profound disinvestment in arts particularly in localities and certainly in patterns that appeared well established.”

*“An Arts Council must look to working with local authority partners as they and others in the localities try to establish new and different local approaches against the background of potentially wholesale strategic reconfiguration of local authorities in Wales.”*

“There has been some lack of acknowledgement of the ‘expertise knowledge’ at ground roots level by local authority arts officers and therefore this strategy is to be welcomed in that ACW appears to be recognising the importance of collaborating more closely with their local authority partners.”

*“We believe it is important that the Arts Council recognises the need to work strategically with Local Government to manage the expectations and capacity of the sector over the coming decade. This dialogue should be recognised in the document and would then underpin the points made about the role local authorities currently play. However, the capacity to continue to play such a role is not guaranteed and therefore the strategy should be fully risk assessed with this in mind.”*

*“[This City Council] welcomes the Arts Council intention to deliver an ‘enabling strategy’, and one which faces up to the challenges ahead. There is no doubt that the local authority arts landscape will change significantly as the overall funding available to councils continues to reduce, and clarity about the role of the Arts Council and the application of its resources in that landscape will be welcomed. However, it is unclear, towards the end of the*

*document, how the Arts Council plans to approach its relationships with local authorities and an implied shift towards greater entrepreneurship in arts organisations or by artists.”*

“It is clear that the new ACW partnership with Local Government will help us achieve that, but with rigorous cuts and corresponding reductions in programmes and resources (within Local Government), we should be also be realistic about the number and range of partnerships that might be feasible within this context.”

*“I welcome a more informed advocacy by ACW at a local level, but fear for some arts organisations as the changes in local government and the savings that need to be found begin to hit over the next few years. This is a time for focused and sustained advocacy that covers all parts of Wales.”*

#### **Our Response:**

We recognise that we face many complex challenges. However, we remain convinced that the bedrock of attendance and participation in the arts remains in enabling local opportunities for people to enjoy and take part in the arts. Our specialist community arts organisations are trail blazers in this regard, and the Arts Council’s **Night Out** scheme continues to bring high quality arts within reach of local communities. However, we also look to commissioned work – such as Voluntary Arts Wales’s **“Putting Down Roots”** – for new information and intelligence on the challenge of developing and sustaining local opportunities for participatory arts..

The Partnership between the Arts Council of Wales and Local Government provides the broadest based foundation of the arts in Wales. Between us, we have the potential to touch the lives of everyone in Wales. Local authorities bring to the table their local knowledge, broad range of responsibilities, their citizen focused delivery and their democratic representation. The Arts Council brings specialist expertise and a national and international perspective on arts practice and development. Both of us provide funding and investment that funds creative activity. It is a powerful combination.

We recognise, however, the pressures facing local authorities in the years ahead. We will increase our contact with local authorities and find additional ways to promote and advocate the value of the arts. We will also do what we can to negotiate lasting and sustainable funding partnerships that protect investment in the arts.

## 9. Making New Places

Our strategy envisages new approaches to regeneration and that these will increasingly be guided by evolving notions of “sustainability”. The new emphases on place making and well-being are attracting new partners and encouraging a more sophisticated vision of what delivers social, cultural and economic benefit.

A number of respondents picked up on this new agenda and commented on our new funding programme **Ideas, People, Places**:

“We welcome the recognition of the need for *advocacy* – this should also be included in Challenges 1, 6 and 7, at the least. IPP [Ideas, People, Places] is exploring this through links to Regeneration and Planning (in terms of influencing the design of new spaces). Should this be highlighted in terms of “promoting a creative approach to re-generation?”

*there is a need to ‘start afresh in the here and now’ in terms of understanding how the arts contribute to rural and urban regeneration, architecture and the built environment, to cultural tourism, to arts and healthcare, to digital opportunity, climate change and community development. The old models of ‘public art’ and ‘community art’ seem tired and ill-suited to the needs of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. Digital innovation has perhaps re-defined notions of the ‘public realm’ and ‘community’, or at least shown the potential for radically different notions of ‘social and public space’ than the received ones.*

*Artists and visual and applied arts organisations are alive to these issues, and want to be at the heart of debates and new activism around the making of art and new forms of public engagement. The Arts Council of Wales has an important role to play in framing these debates, and bringing people together across sectors and different branches of the creative industries. As Inspire states, the fertile territory is ‘the meeting point between people, art, architecture, environment and design’. It is time the arts sector fully embraced knowledge transfer, collaborative working, blue sky thinking and the development of new paradigms for production, distribution and public engagement. As Inspire states ‘challenging times call for determined action’.*

**Our response:**

We welcome the breadth of understanding displayed in the responses. Generally, we found a sophisticated and committed understanding to the broader principles of sustainability. These chime well with our future ambitions and reflect a policy priority of the Welsh Government that is growing in importance and prominence.

## 10. Our digital times

Respondents saw the development of a more digitally driven world as a 'given' and welcomed our approach of seeing it as an integrated not a stand-alone activity...the norm rather than the extra. But at the same time we are also recognising that the embrace of the digital can lead into new and unfamiliar territory. As the possibilities – and obligations – of digital technology become more apparent, it is clear that many organisations are questioning the very fundamentals of what they are about as an arts organisation, how they produce their work and how they connect with their audience

The following was typical of the responses we received:

“Welcome reference to creativity, digital technologies, innovation and creativity. Acknowledge and agree that the digital sphere has vastly changed the way people access and disseminate information. However, we feel this section should also reflect on and identify exploitative ways to promote artistic endeavours – through social media, for example - which will in turn strengthen partnerships and collaboration, further compounding the 'Make, Reach, Sustain' agenda.

Additionally, the digital aspect could run throughout each element, and this could be identified within this section with more clarity, exploring in more depth, Welsh Government agenda and policy.”

### Our response:

We are absolutely certain that a clear, creative grasp of digital possibilities will be fundamental to the future of arts development. No organisation can afford to ignore these possibilities and we will work hard to pilot and promote new thinking in this area. Digital offers a fresh way of addressing fundamentals in an organisation's work, by nature of the interrogation it prompts around problem solving.

For example, we have initiated action research projects through a partnership with NESTA in **Digital R&D** through which we are funding projects that exploit the

capability of digital technology to increase public engagement.

We have also established formal relationships with Wales' two public sector broadcasters – **BBC Cymru Wales** and **S4C** – and these connections are already exploring different ways to commission arts content and to explore digital platforms for creation and distribution of work.

As might be expected, we are especially interested to look at how young people are using digital technology. So we are currently exploring what might happen if a **Digital Producer** took up residence in a school as part of a wider project partnering an arts organisation, school and university research team. We are curious to see if digital technology might be an enabler / tool in deepening relations between schools and arts organisations and help them overcome some of the attitudinal barriers that sometimes dissuade young people from engaging with the arts.

## Concluding comments

The general reaction to *Inspire* was largely positive. Although many respondents recognise that implementation will be challenging, and there will be difficult decisions to be made, it seems timely for a strategy of this type.

It seems fair to conclude, therefore, that the need for a review of strategy is well understood and widely accepted and that *Inspire's* propositions are broadly embraced and supported.

## Appendix: List of respondents

Name/ Company /Organisation
Voluntary Arts Wales
Visual Arts and Galleries Wales*
Kaite O'Reilly
Sinfonia Cymru
Steffan Hughes Jones
Pontio
Paul Griffiths
Newport City Council
Mission Money Models
Matt Cawardine Palmer
Making Minds
Laura Drane
Disability Arts Cymru
Chapter( Arts)
Axis
Earthfall
Creu Cymru
Community Music Wales
Bara Caws
Arts Connect **
Patricia Aithie
Stacey Adamiec
National Theatre Wales

\*incorporates Ffotogallery/s response

\*\* Incorporates\_ArtsDevUK/CLOW/WLGA