



	WAHWN (Wales Arts Health & Wellbeing Network) response to the Culture, Communications, Welsh Language, Sport and International Relations Committee consultation into the priorities for the Sixth Senedd.
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Introduction

1. WAHWN (Wales Arts Health & Wellbeing Network) welcomes the opportunity to respond to the Culture, Communications, Welsh Language, Sport and International Relations Committee consultation into its priorities for the Sixth Senedd.
2. WAHWN is a Wales wide network of colleagues delivering arts and health work. The Network represents members from the arts, health and HE sectors and includes practitioners working across the full range of art form practice in health, arts and other community settings.
3. WAHWN works strategically with the Arts Council of Wales and Welsh NHS Confederation to build the evidence base and raise the profile of the benefits of arts for health and wellbeing. WAHWN represents the sector at the Cross Party Group on Arts and Health.
4. WAHWN supports the sector through networking, training, research, advocacy and sharing practice.
5. On behalf of our Network members, WAHWN is calling on the Committee to undertake an inquiry into the role that arts and culture can have in supporting people's health and wellbeing. When the Culture, Welsh Language and Communications Committee held a public poll to choose a new inquiry subject in the Summer of 2018, 17% of people who responded wanted an inquiry considering how using the arts to improve health and wellbeing. This was the 3rd most popular choice. Through the Committee undertaking an inquiry into arts and health it will consider the evidence that is currently available around the benefits the arts and culture has on people's health and wellbeing and the barriers to further implementation across Wales.

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Blaenoriaethau ar gyfer y Chweched Senedd / Priorities for the Sixth Senedd
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What is the current impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on your sector, and what further support is needed from the Welsh and UK Governments both to mitigate the impact of the pandemic and enable the post-pandemic recovery?

6. The pandemic has underlined the importance of partnership working across different sectors, such as arts and health and social care. COVID-19 has impacted all sectors of public life, and it is important therefore that Wales adopts a cross-sector, joined up response. Since March 2020 WAHWN's priority has been supporting and representing our members to respond to COVID-19. In addition to supporting members, we have been working closely with our partners to explore how our sector can contribute to a 'whole system' perspective. Working in partnership with Y Lab (an innovation and research partnership between Cardiff University and Nesta) on the HARP programme (Health Arts Research People) we have been exploring how we can generate, grow and learn about impactful innovations that support the health and wellbeing of the people of Wales, and in particular addressing health inequalities which have been exacerbated by Covid-19.
7. The response to COVID-19 could not have happened without the excellent partnership working across Wales with local government, the voluntary sector and the private sector. In addition to working closely with arts, health and social care Network members, we have also raised awareness of the significant positive impact that the arts and creative activity can have on people's health and wellbeing, especially in relation to loneliness and social isolation during the time of lockdown restrictions. We commissioned and promoted a film in 2020 highlighting how the arts are significantly supporting the mental health and wellbeing in Wales. <https://vimeo.com/430381462/3479b074d6>
8. In response to the extreme challenges faced by arts and health freelance practitioners as a result of Covid-19, WAHWN is delivering an artist well-being programme 'How Ya Doing? Sut Mae'n Mynd?'
9. The annual turnover of the arts industry in Wales is around £2.2 billion a year. The sector employs 56,000 people, many of whom work as freelancers. As the sector is reliant on people coming together in close contact, it has faced some of the most hard-hitting structural challenges of any industry. Shutting services and closing doors to the public, coupled with the feeling of isolation, has meant that many artists have found themselves in financial difficulties, despite interventions such as the Furlough Scheme, the Self Employment Income Support Scheme and the Arts Council of Wales' Arts Resilience Fund with its urgent response fund for

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individuals. The economic impact and the wellbeing of artists should be considered by Welsh Government in any COVID-19 recovery proposals.

10. The introduction of social distancing, self-isolation, and lockdown policies meant that many, if not all, arts practitioners in Wales had to change the way they provided their services. Many of our members have switched to delivering services online and, at pace, were able to implement digital service techniques such as online classes through platforms such as Zoom, YouTube, and various social media channels. Some included creative activities within food parcels distributed by local authorities and charities. This was an effective way to ensure people remained connected to each other and still engaged in artistic, creative activity. Studies have demonstrated the many physical and mental health benefits of participation in the arts, which is especially critical during times of social isolation.
11. Throughout the pandemic Health Boards continued to work with their Arts Co-ordinators as well as working with commissioned artists. These relationships played a vital role to ensure that a strong connection with the arts was maintained for both recovering patients and frontline staff.

What issues should the committee prioritise in planning our work programme for the immediate and longer term?

Arts and health

12. One of the key priority areas is around the role that arts and culture can have on supporting people's health and wellbeing and therefore we are calling on the Committee to undertake an inquiry on this area. Through having an inquiry into arts and health it will consider the evidence that is currently available around the benefits the arts have on people's health and wellbeing and the barriers to further implementation across Wales.
13. Over recent years, Wales has led the way in developing arts and health initiatives which enhance the lives of the most vulnerable in society, keeping people healthy and close to their communities for longer. [Research](#) highlights that access to arts opportunities and participation in the arts can dramatically improve health outcomes and wellbeing, counter inequalities and increase social engagement. As a supplement to medicine and care, the evidence suggests that engagement with the arts can improve a person's physical and mental wellbeing. The benefits of arts activities are being seen beyond traditional settings, and their role in supporting communities and individuals who would otherwise be excluded is increasingly being recognised.

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14. As highlighted within the Arts Council of Wales report, [Arts and Health in Wales: Mapping study of current activity 2018](#), there has been a significant amount of work happening at an individual Health Board or NHS Trust level, with a number of positive examples of collaboration between Health Boards and artists. This led to the Welsh NHS Confederation developing and signing the first Memorandum of Understanding with the Arts Council of Wales in September 2017, with the second MOU signed in October 2020. The MOU is an opportunity to develop joint areas of work that contribute to our shared goal of improving the awareness of the benefits that the arts can bring to health and wellbeing. The agreed areas of work includes advancing good practice; promoting collaboration, co-ordinating and disseminating research; and working together to identify how arts can contribute to people's health and wellbeing, including the mental health and wellbeing of artists and NHS Wales workforce.

15. A lot of arts in health work happens at grass roots levels, in community-based programmes that address both the clinical and social determinants of health. There is a need to scale-up this work and increase public awareness and understanding of the role of arts in health. We need to encourage best practice, shared ethics, research and evaluation, while celebrating and supporting the passion and drive of the many arts in health activities that make a difference.