

## Considering the health and wellbeing benefits of engaging in the arts

### A response to the Culture, Communications, Welsh Language, Sport & International Relations Committee's consultation on 6<sup>th</sup> Senedd priorities

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The Arts Council of Wales welcomes the opportunity to respond to the Culture, Communications, Welsh Language, Sport and International Relations Committee consultation into its priorities for the Sixth Senedd. This response fully supports, complements (and is in addition to) the Arts Council of Wales' over-arching and main response, *Protecting & Renewing the Arts in Wales*.

#### About the Arts Council of Wales

1. The Arts Council of Wales was established by Royal Charter in 1994. We're a Welsh Government Sponsored Body funded largely by grant-in-aid from the Welsh Government. We're also a registered charity subject to Charity Law and one of the four Distributors in Wales of money to "Good Causes" from the National Lottery.
2. In 2021/22 the Arts Council is expected to receive 'core' funding of £32.4m from the Welsh Government and c.£17m from the National Lottery.
3. Our mission is to make the arts central to the lives and well-being of the people of Wales. Our Corporate Plan, "For the Benefit of All" sets out three priorities which underpin all aspects of its work:
  - i. **Promoting Equalities** as the foundation of a clear commitment to reach more widely and deeply into all communities across Wales.
  - ii. **Strengthening the Capability and Resilience of the sector**, enabling creative talent to thrive
  - iii. **Enabling the Arts Council to work more effectively**, collaborating more imaginatively with like-minded partners across Wales
4. The planning, delivery and monitoring of the Arts Council's activities are undertaken within the framework of the Wellbeing of Future Generations legislation and the Welsh Government's Programme for Government.

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

5. Alongside our partners at the Welsh NHS Confederation and WAHWN, we ask the Committee to consider **undertaking an Inquiry into the role of the arts in supporting people's health and wellbeing** as a priority for the Sixth Senedd.

The powerful contribution the arts can make in supporting our nation's health and wellbeing is becoming increasingly recognised. Perhaps never more so than over the past 18 months when people and communities have been turning to creative activities as a crucial source of enjoyment, connection, solace and meaning during the pandemic. Since September 2017, the Arts Council of Wales has had a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the Welsh NHS Confederation. The aim of the MOU is to raise awareness of the benefits that the arts can have on people's health and wellbeing and to embed arts and health initiatives across the NHS in Wales. The MoU has provided the springboard for a dynamic partnership as this [infographic](#) (which summarises our joint actions) demonstrates. Covid-19 has underlined the value of our Arts & Health work across Wales and revealed the need for more people to benefit from creative activities as we look to recover from the pandemic. Undertaking an inquiry into arts and health, would enable the Committee to fully consider the evidence that is currently available around the benefits of the arts and culture on people's health and wellbeing. It would also offer the potential to further grow and share these benefits more widely across Wales.

#### **Recent developments in Arts & Health in Wales and the context for this work**

6. Since publishing [our study](#) that mapped the arts and health landscape in Wales, we've been working closely with colleagues in Health to explore how creative activity can help build a healthier Wales. Responding to the challenges of the pandemic, our partnership with the Welsh NHS Confederation has enabled us to make great strides forward and the approach and model in Wales is now being increasingly noticed by other countries. The Baring Foundation's forthcoming publication, *Creatively Minded and the NHS*, 'commends to other Arts Councils the strategic approach taken in Wales.'
7. With our funding support, every Health Board in Wales now has an **Arts & Health Coordinator**. The pandemic has highlighted how critical these roles are in developing greater connections between our sectors, in sharing good practice nationally and helping to identify where creative interventions can best help support NHS strategic priorities.
8. Our [Arts, Health & Wellbeing Lottery Programme](#) is supporting partnerships of arts organisations, health, social care and third sector organisations, individual artists and practitioners and local authorities to deliver a range of original initiatives and programmes that are improving the outcomes for participants and patients in exciting ways. Recently-funded projects respond creatively to a range of current health challenges including a singing and breathing project to support people recovering from long Covid; song-writing workshops for people experiencing poor mental health and loneliness; outdoor art activities for people processing loss and bereavement and a creative engagement programme to better connect vulnerable and marginalised communities with NHS services.
9. Our programme of Arts & Health activity has gained momentum during the pandemic and now extends to:

- i. Investing in training, networking and the sharing of best practice and case studies through WAHWN Wales Arts Health & Wellbeing Network;
  - ii. Collaborating with all seven Health Boards on a national programme to support people's **mental health** through the arts with partnership funding from the Baring Foundation;
  - iii. Backing innovation through our partnership with Y Lab and the HARP Programme to test hybrid delivery models and new ideas and that can be sustained and scaled;
  - iv. Developing a website of creative resources – **the Cultural Cwtsh** – to support the wellbeing of frontline NHS and social care staff in Wales as we emerge from the pandemic.
  - v. Through a joint programme of work with Amgueddfa Cymru – Celf ar y Cyd – finding new ways to share and exhibit artwork from our national collections within healthcare settings across Wales;
  - vi. Acting as the secretariat for the National Assembly's Cross-party Group on Arts & Health.
10. Partnership is at the heart of all Arts & Health work – and by working alongside partners in Health and Social Care, we are able to reach wider. The NHS is the ultimate universal service and Arts and Health projects often involve people and communities who might not consider themselves to be regular arts participants (although they could be frequent users of healthcare services). By their very nature, Arts and Health projects are often designed to benefit some of the most marginalised and vulnerable people in our communities and can help us extend the benefits of the arts to those who stand to benefit the most. With Covid-19 disproportionately impacting certain communities (including those from ethnically and culturally diverse backgrounds as well as those from poorer communities), Arts & Health interventions can also make an important contribution to extending equalities.

**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?**

11. The Arts Council's over-arching response to this consultation, *Protecting & Renewing the Arts in Wales*, sets out in detail how the arts sector, both Arts organisations and creative individuals, have been significantly and adversely affected by the Covid-19 pandemic (please refer to paragraphs 6-17 in particular). The cumulative loss of income to the sector has been extremely serious – both to organisations themselves and to the economy of Wales. Many venues and festivals have been particularly badly hit. Individual artists and creative freelancers have also suffered acutely from an immediate loss of income with work being cancelled when Covid restrictions were imposed. Many are still without income and without promise of future work.

12. Arts organisations and individual artists who work in healthcare settings and on Arts & Health projects form part of this wider arts ecology and have similarly had work cancelled or curtailed, with some struggling to survive and suffering severe financial hardship throughout lockdown. For many, assistance via the Cultural Recovery Fund and other Urgent Response and Stabilisation Funds proved the only lifeline to withstand the immediate crisis. However, longer-term recovery will require additional significant investment going forward especially as audience confidence to return to performances and face-to-face activity is not going to be instant.
13. Despite the brutal financial impact of COVID-19 and the introduction of social distance restrictions that halted public performances, exhibitions and face-to-face participatory creative engagement overnight, artists and arts organisations still found ways to reach out to people throughout lockdown. Within the Arts & Health field, partnerships across Health, Social Care and the Arts held firm, and artists found new and inventive ways to connect with people and communities (especially vulnerable and isolated individuals) turning to digital and hybrid delivery models; using doorstep arts; staging performances in car parks and over Zoom to continue to provide support and stimulation, meaning and hope when it was most needed. Arts & Health coordinators within Heath Boards experienced a massive upsurge in demand for creative projects to support both patient and staff wellbeing. Many arts practitioners found a new sense of urgency, relevance and meaning to their work within health contexts and many clinicians and members of the public realised how music, poetry, dance (and all forms of creative engagement) could offer a vital tonic for our health and wellbeing. We worked closely with the Welsh NHS Confederation and Wales Arts Health & Well-being Network (WAHWN) to share examples of how the arts responded and supported the Welsh health and social care response to COVID-19 through briefings In **May 2020** and **July 2020**.
14. As we look to emerge from the pandemic, first-and-foremost, vital investment is needed in the arts so that it can continue to contribute to everyone's quality of life in Wales, to safeguard jobs and contribute to the vibrance of the Welsh economy. In addition, a Committee Inquiry into the benefits of the arts on our health and wellbeing would help us recognise the wider contribution that the arts make to society and how to develop this further. It would help us build on the significant momentum and learning that has been generated throughout Covid-19. Areas of particular relevance that the committee might like to explore include the impact of creative engagement on people's:
  - i. mental health and wellbeing (including loneliness and social isolation)
  - ii. physical health and wellbeing
  - iii. health inequalities
  - iv. the wellbeing of our health workforce and creative workforce

15. The inquiry should also explore how strong cross-sector partnership within Arts & Health (fully embracing the spirit and letter of the Wellbeing of Future Generations Act) can help generate new models and approaches to old problems; be a catalyst for system change and wider post-pandemic recovery (eg through creative activities being central to social prescribing as we move forward).
16. There is a growing international interest in Wales' approach and achievements within the field of Arts & Health that is not always as readily recognised at home. As we look to emerge from the pandemic, there has arguably never been a better moment to advance and invest in this work further. All the conditions are in place for the health benefits of the arts to be shared more widely across Wales:- an arts network / infrastructure embedded within the NHS; long-standing, cross-sector partnerships with shared objectives; an appetite and need to do things differently within health and an arts sector teeming with ideas and an urgent sense of purpose emerging from the pandemic.

Arts Council Wales  
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