



For the benefit of all...

Arts Council of Wales  
Corporate Plan 2018 - 2023



Cyngor Celfyddydau Cymru  
Arts Council of Wales



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## Who we are...

The Arts Council of Wales is the country's official public body for funding and developing the arts.

Every day, people across Wales are enjoying and taking part in the arts. We help to support and grow this activity. We do this by using the public funds that are made available to us by the Welsh Government and by distributing the money we receive as a good cause from the National Lottery.

By managing and investing these funds in creative activity, the Arts Council contributes to people's quality of life and to the cultural, social and economic well being of Wales.

We work to create an environment in which the arts are better able to flourish – an environment which:

- identifies and nurtures creative talent, to its full potential, fully embracing equality and diversity
- supports and celebrates imagination, innovation and ambition
- nurtures creativity through the medium of Welsh and English
- enables artists to develop a professional career in Wales and organisations to exploit new markets for their work
- inspires young people to develop their creative potential
- offers a range of arts experiences for audiences to enjoy and take part
- finds new places and ways for people to participate in the arts
- is international in outlook and ambitious for the international success of Wales' artists
- recognises the fundamental importance of sustainability



Take a look at our short animation explaining why The Arts Matter

[www.arts.wales](http://www.arts.wales)

## In the five years 2013 to 2018...



we invested  
**£177m**  
of Government funding and  
**£87m**  
from the National Lottery to support  
and develop the arts across Wales



the Arts Council's national network  
of annually funded organisations, our  
Arts Portfolio Wales (APW) presented  
**104,390**  
events and  
**331,508**  
participatory events



our events were attended by  
**19.5 million**  
people and  
**4.3 million**  
took part in the participatory events



we supported  
**2,607**  
Night Out performances, bringing high  
quality arts to local communities



we invested in the Nation's stock of  
arts facilities, providing capital funding,  
money for building work in over  
**30**  
projects across Wales



we received and processed  
**7,496**  
applications for funding



we made  
**70**  
Creative Wales Awards to artists for  
them to personally develop their work



we made  
**5,168**  
interest-free loans through  
Collectorplan, a total of  
**£4.2m**  
to members of the public, facilitating  
sales of contemporary art and craft

1

### Being bold and creative

We support the best and most exciting arts that Wales has to offer. By creating an environment in which the arts can flourish, we help artists and arts organisations to make their best work.

2

### Working for everyone

We want as many people as possible to enjoy and take part in the arts. In a fair and equal Wales we believe that the arts should be widely and easily available to everyone. We're determined to champion diversity and to break down the barriers that currently prevent this from happening.

3

### Winning the public's trust

As a public body we must be effective and accountable custodians of public funds. We're not reckless with this money. We aim to behave with honesty, integrity and fairness. We explain clearly and openly the decisions that we take, and we make sure that the investments we make are good value for money.

4

### Being the best we can be

At the heart of any successful organisation are motivated and passionate people. Our staff respect and encourage each other. We approach every day with a positive attitude and a willingness to grow, learn and challenge ourselves. We learn from each other, and from those who we work with. Working together we achieve outcomes that make a difference.

5

### Taking the long view

Many individuals and organisations share our values. Wales will be a better place if we work together, sharing the best of our knowledge and expertise. We're aware of our place in the world, and our responsibility to the planet and to future generations. We work in ways that demonstrate the best in sustainable development and in preventing future harm.

6

### Being proud of what we do

Every day people see and experience exciting and extraordinary work. The arts bring meaning, authenticity and enjoyment to our everyday lives. They create and sustain jobs, enrich education services, bring people together, improve our quality of life. The arts matter. We will communicate clearly and openly, telling the stories of our achievements and of those who we support.



## For the benefit of all...

2018 is a big year for remembering the needs and hopes which bind us together as a society. We've been celebrating the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the NHS and Nye Bevan's colossal achievement in creating a health service free to all at the point of use.

But all of us are concerned with the common good, with the well being of our fellow citizens, must be deeply anxious about the inequalities and social exclusion around us.

The Arts Council remains committed to excellence and to supporting bold, innovative and provocative art. We care about the individual voice and personal expression. This is crucial and definitive, but so is reaching a wider range of our fellow citizens with the transformative power of the arts. Access and excellence of various kinds must go together – that's our challenge; and it's one we relish.

But in practice, this proves more challenging than it sounds in principle.

The brutal fact remains that too many people are effectively denied the opportunity to enjoy, take part or work in the arts. In a fair, prosperous, healthy society this simply won't do. If we believe that the life-enhancing experiences of the arts, of imaginative expression, are crucial for a healthy and dynamic society, then they should be available to all.

Earlier this year, in a series of gatherings and events, we talked with people across the country – our All Wales Creative Conversation. What we heard in that conversation has shaped this Corporate Plan.

It's a Plan based on two priorities.

The first is developing the capability and potential of those working in the arts, helping artists and arts organisations to do their best work. It's about nurturing talent and growing the skills that enable success in a complex and competitive world. Whether you're a writer, a musician, a visual artist or our largest national company, our job is to help you to thrive and make your work more sustainable.

But we have a second priority, equally, if not more, important.

We heard a lot during the All Wales Creative Conversations about the ways that artists and arts organisations are building community and civic life. Just when we need it most, just when we're seeing a worrying disconnect between people in the street and the institutions that shape public life, the arts are showing the way.

At the Arts Council of Wales, an organisation that belongs to all of us, we're determined to push forward with broadening access to the arts. You'll see this determination feature more prominently in our future plans.

We have to change hearts and minds across the arts in Wales so that the cultural, moral and social benefits of embracing equality of opportunity are given higher priority in the ways we run our affairs.

Beyond questions of social justice, we're simply wasting talent and creativity, joy-giving and change-making energies, when we exclude so many from the arts workforce, from boards of management and from arts experiences as spectators or participants.

We have to do things differently, and that difference starts here.

Earlier in the year we asked Gary Raymond, critic, editor, novelist and broadcaster, to scour the country seeking out individuals with an important story to tell or experience to share. These are voices which focus our minds and actions on the crucial matters of equality of access, social inclusion and community development.

We hear challenges and aspirations from BAME artists; from disabled artists; older creatives. We hear challenges to middle-class dominance of arts creation, attendance and participation. We hear challenges to patriarchy and old colonial attitudes. We hear passionate declarations of belief in the value of the arts in education, in community empowerment, in rural as well as urban or post-industrial Wales.

And we hear a conviction that we have huge opportunities as an engaged small nation with big imaginations.

A number of these people have engaged with Arts Council funding and programmes and with the organisations we support. But for certain, these are the kinds of people who we want to do more to support. And the messages that they convey carry an urgency and authenticity that no bureaucratic strategy could match.

The hard choices and disagreements about arts funding will not disappear. But our Plan offers a vision of the coming years. We hope that it will energise and excite all who care about the arts and their place at the heart of life and well being in Wales – for the benefit of all...



Phil George  
Chair, Arts Council of Wales



## Strength through diversity...

From the outset, public funding for the arts has had twin goals: the pursuit of excellence, and the promotion of access to enable more people to enjoy and benefit from the arts. Until comparatively recently, it was the former which was traditionally favoured at the expense of the latter.

For many people, any reference to “the Arts” still carries with it perceptions of an elitist activity that is for the few and not the many. We’ve worked hard to dispel the myth that the value and benefits that the arts bring are limited to an exclusive minority. But the evidence shows that in spite of some success, we’re still not doing enough.

Three years ago the Warwick Commission highlighted the totally unacceptable statistic that the wealthiest, better educated and least ethnically diverse 8% of society make up nearly half of the live music audience and almost a third of theatregoers and gallery visitors. It also noted a downward trend in participation levels in the arts.

There are, it seems, still too many barriers that impede people’s access to the arts, whether cultural, social or economic. Breaking down these barriers will be one of our defining priorities over the duration of this Plan. It will require specific action – in all areas – if our agenda is to be credible. But we’re determined that this should be less about compliance, and

more about the creative and moral principles that underpin all our work.

If the arts in Wales are to take advantage of these opportunities, they’ll need strong, entrepreneurial leadership. This means building a sector that is imaginative, innovative and able to make the most of its public investment. A resilient organisation is embedded within the community that it serves, focuses on its audience and adopts a business model that can withstand change, whether planned or unexpected. A resilient organisation is one that has the skill, capacity and resources to endure in the longer term.

So what does this all mean in practice? What will we do and what will need to change?

We will continue to champion excellence and to encourage the best in the arts in Wales. And we will do this by:

- providing packages of funding and support to encourage the resilience and durability of artists and arts organisations
- increasing our investment in the creative work of black and minority ethnic artists, disabled people and those wanting to work through the medium of the Welsh Language
- ensuring that the Arts Council itself lives up to the values of fairness, equality and diversity

- campaigning for greater diversity within the arts workforce and in the governance of its portfolio of revenue-funded organisations
- exploiting the opportunities of working internationally
- extending our work with children and young people, securing the legacy of our “Creative Learning” programme
- developing a new Arts and Health strategy

Each year we’ll publish our Operational Plans, explaining what we’ve done in the previous year and looking ahead to what we’ll be doing in the year ahead.

This Corporate Plan takes the longer view – 2018 to 2023. It’s about change, new energy and a willingness to disrupt habitual ways of working where this is needed. The conversations that we held earlier in the year showed an appetite across Wales for artists and arts organisations to work with us, to build a stronger, more resilient and more diverse arts sector. We welcome such an approach – and the arts will be stronger for it.



Nick Capaldi  
Chief Executive, Arts Council of Wales

## Our Mission

# Making the arts central to the life and wellbeing of the nation

## Our strategy



## Our priorities

Council has committed itself to two priorities:

1

Promoting Equalities as the foundation of a clear commitment to reach more widely and deeply into all communities across Wales.

2

Strengthening the Capability and Resilience of the arts, enabling creative talent to thrive.

Council has also identified an action to support delivery of these two:

3

Enabling the Arts Council to work more effectively, collaborating more imaginatively with like minded partners across Wales.

## Measuring our progress – five commitments

We have big ambitions for the arts in Wales. We want to support the very best arts that we can. And we want more people from all walks of life to feel that the arts can be a meaningful part of their lives, whether as audience, participant or artist themselves.

Arts development doesn't lend itself easily to targets and numbers. Nevertheless, it's important that we're able to explain the impact of our work and to demonstrate that we're making progress towards our goals.

As you'd expect, a variety of more detailed plans and strategies guide our work. However, we've identified five commitments that will enable a quicker and more straightforward basis for measuring our progress.

(Our statistics use 2016/17 as the 'base' year.)

Our commitments	Where are we now?	Where do we want to be by 2023?
<p><b>1</b> We will use our public funding to increase the number of people enjoying and taking part in the arts.</p>	<p>The majority of our funding is invested in our nationwide network of 67 annually funded organisations – our Arts Portfolio Wales (APW). Over the past five years, the activities of the Portfolio have delivered attendances of between 3.8 million and 4.2 million, and Participation of just over 1 million.</p> <p>Our other main source of funding is through our Lottery programmes. The large number of individuals and organisations that we've supported mean that we haven't always been confident of the accuracy of data relating to Attendance and Participation. We intend to address this. However, we <u>do</u> know that there is insufficient work of quality in Welsh, especially theatre.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Using the higher figure for APW Attendance, we want to achieve a target figure of 4.5 million</li> <li>• We want to achieve a level of APW Participation in APW activities of 1.2 million</li> <li>• We want to have established, by 2020, statistically reliable data for Lottery programmes, with increases in Attendance and Participation by 2023</li> <li>• We want to reverse recent declines in audiences for Welsh language theatre and to achieve a ten percentage points increase</li> </ul>

## Our commitments

**2** We will enable a greater number, and a wider diversity, of people to enjoy, take part and work in the publicly funded arts.

## Where are we now?

Our research shows that the presence of people with protected characteristics in the population as a whole is not always being matched in the activities that we're funding. We want to reach the widest possible cross section of people, whether they're Welsh speaking, from a protected characteristic group, or experiencing the consequence of economic or social disadvantage.

We are concerned that the arts might increasingly be accessible only to the most affluent in Welsh society. Over the past five years, the gap in Attendance and Participation between the most and the least well off has remained stubbornly fixed, with Participation at around 6 percentage points and Attendance widening from around 7 percentage points to 11 percentage points.

Demographic gaps are especially striking in the very low number of disabled people and those from BAME backgrounds employed in the arts or represented on boards of management.

At present, the number of disabled people working in our 67 APWs is just 102 (2% of the workforce), while the corresponding figure for people from BAME backgrounds is 159 (3% of the workforce).

The figures for membership of boards of governance are equally disappointing. Out of 700 Board members, 17 are disabled people and 12 are from a BAME community. The figures for Welsh language speakers are more encouraging at 222.

## Where do we want to be by 2023?

- We will be able to demonstrate clearly that all our funding programmes promote and contribute to equality and diversity
- There will be a narrowing of the gap between those in the most and least affluent social sectors as audiences and participants
- We will develop the creative work of disabled artists by funding "Unlimited" commissions and developing a scheme similar to "Ramps on the Moon" operated by Arts Council England
- We want to introduce a "Changemakers" scheme placing BAME and disabled people in senior executive positions in the arts
- We want to see a doubling of the number of disabled people in the arts workforce
- We want to see a doubling of the number of Black and Minority ethnic backgrounds in the arts workforce
- We want to have introduced an Arts Council Apprenticeships scheme designed to provide opportunities for people from diverse backgrounds
- We will have achieved a trebling of the number of BAME and disabled and on APW boards of governance

## Our commitments

- 3** We will nurture and develop creative talent, raising the quality of the arts in Wales and enabling artists and arts organisations to be more resilient.

## Where are we now?

The success and quality of the arts depends on the vision and creativity of our artists and the value we place on them. They will be our essential partners in achieving the ambitions set out in this Plan.

The development of creative talent starts at an early age. And whilst we're interested in developing the creativity of all young people, we have a particular interest in supporting the development of those who demonstrate particular talent and potential and to counter barriers which can occur for talent development throughout society.

Whether working singly or together, locally or internationally, our goal is to create the circumstances in which our artists can pursue viable, sustainable careers from a Welsh base.

Resilience, and lessening the dependency on public funding, is a key challenge for our APW. Over the past five years, earned income as a proportion of total income has increased by 6 percentage points to 47% in 2017. We believe that a further modest increase is possible.

Research commissioned two years ago (from Fieldworks) into the viability of artists' careers presented a picture of an industrious and committed creative sector. But artists are struggling to be properly recognised, and the average income earned solely through people's work as a creative professional was less than £21,000 in 2017.

## Where do we want to be by 2023?

- We want to see average earnings for individual artists increased by 10% in real terms
- We want to see the impact of our "Resilience" programme, with the Arts Portfolio Wales able to show increases in earned income as a proportion of turnover by 5 percentage points
- Wales artists will have an international presence at 12 international showcase or trade fair events
- Our Wales:China partnership will have grown to the extent that up to 10 companies each year are able to work in China
- We are working in partnership with the Welsh Government and other relevant bodies to find an appropriate means of securing post Brexit funding for European collaboration in the arts
- We will extend the range of our international activities and encourage our artists and arts organisations to explore new international markets for their work

## Our commitments

**4** We will develop better ways of assessing the quality and value for money of the activity that we invest in, and our progress in meeting goals.

## Where are we now?

Quality matters, and the Welsh taxpayer has a right to expect the best for its investment. Supporting work of excellence, in a variety of places and contexts across Wales, will therefore be a continuing priority.

Our research and assessment programmes will provide information to ourselves and to our funded organisations on the quality of the work that we're investing in. This will include organisations' self assessment, independent critical reviews, and the professional judgements of our Council, staff and National Advisers.

We are establishing new processes for quality appraisal. At the heart of this will be the development and piloting of a national set of quality measures, co-authored with the sector and designed to supply us all with better data on how organisations, their peers and the public view the quality of the work that we fund.

We also need to understand how much progress we're making in reaching our strategic goals. We've set an ambitious agenda and we must expect to be challenged on the extent to which we're achieving real change.

## Where do we want to be by 2023?

- We have recruited and trained a new cohort of National Advisers and individuals with specialist skills and contacts who can help the Arts Council reach more widely
- We will have worked with the arts sector to encourage a more collaborative approach to assessing the quality of activity that we fund, based on some form of peer appraisal
- Pilot research will have been completed into the development of processes for encouraging public feedback on the quality of the arts that they are attending or participating in

## Our commitments

- 5** We will reflect the Welsh Government's policy priorities in our programmes of work.

## Where are we now?

The Arts Council operates under the long standing convention of the "arm's length principle". However, as a Welsh Government Sponsored Body it is perfectly reasonable for us to work with Government to develop programmes of work that meet the priorities of the Welsh public. Key to this is the Government's Well being of Future Generations (Wales) Act which provides the overall framework for the public sector in Wales.

The Welsh Government's expectations of us are set out each year in a Remit Letter. This letter sets the context each year for our work, including key areas of partnership where we will work in partnership with Government.

Although arts and culture are matters devolved to the Welsh Government, we follow with interest any relevant initiatives in the rest of the UK. We will therefore support new UK Government initiatives in this area including the work of the Department for Work and Pensions Arts Disability Champion.

## Where do we want to be by 2023?

- We will be confidently reporting on our achievements against the seven goals set out in the Well being legislation
- We will be engaged in collaborative projects with other public sector bodies designed to deliver the well being goals
- A legacy programme will have been established following the completion of the five-year Creative Learning through the Arts strategy
- We will be implementing an action plan for Arts and Health built on our Memorandum of Understanding with the Welsh NHS Confederation
- We will have agreed three new joint strategies with the Welsh Government for:
  - i. International working
  - ii. Creative Industries
  - iii. Tourism



**Gary Raymond,**

critic, editor, novelist and broadcaster.

“For the Benefit of All...” marks an important moment of change. It reflects our belief that Wales is stronger, socially and culturally, if more people enjoy and take part in the arts.

People encounter the arts in different ways and we want to celebrate the diversity and richness of their culture, their ambitions, their creative imagination. Put simply, we want to broaden the ways that we work, and the people who we work with.

We commissioned Gary Raymond to seek out inspiring individuals across Wales, whose experiences of the arts reveal a journey that might be less familiar. Each is different. Some are away from the well beaten track. But all demonstrate a hunger for the arts and the determination to be heard that an Arts Council should be celebrating.

“Over the course of a few months, I spoke to a wide range of people from a diverse demographic pool, all of whom have had the privilege of placing creativity in at the centre of their lives. Our discussions were boundless, from the personal to the global, from the psychological to the political, but all of them took place on a foundation of passion, honesty, and hope. The conversations continuously came back to the transformative power of art, to the integral role art must play in the wealth and health of a nation, and how the future must be about diversity, access, and creating an open-mindedness in regards to form and medium, and how creativity can take on endless shapes and have countless consequences. The conversations were marked with boldness, fearlessness, passion, and above all, a ferocious energy. This is both a look at the creative landscape of Wales as it is, and how it could be.”



**Taylor Edmonds**, 23,  
is a writer and performer based in Cardiff.

I was privileged enough to be the first in my family to go to university, and despite having understanding and supportive parents, with this privilege came the pressure to succeed. Back home after graduation, my 'voice', once full of confidence and constantly evolving, didn't really feel like a voice anymore.

The world of art can often feel white, male and dominated by the middle-class; somewhere that didn't feel right for me and my work. I knew that I had something to say; I just wasn't sure where to say it.

To find my place, I began researching literature events in Wales, followed people and organisations on Twitter that made me feel like I was in the loop of Wales' creatives. I was searching for a safe, inclusive and diverse space to share my work and be inspired by others. The answer to this was *Where I'm Coming From*, a series of spoken word events in Cardiff that aim to promote BAME writers in Wales, a space in an artistic community where we might otherwise feel under-represented.

**I knew that I had something to say; I just wasn't sure where to say it.**

I attended the first WICF nervous and timid, with a poem that I had never read aloud before, about my mother's experiences as a black woman - a poem that I would have felt wary of sharing in other spaces. I was shaking as I read, I tripped and stumbled over my words, but it felt right to tell my mother's story there. The audience listened intently; they were warm and encouraging. Afterwards, a listener told me that she was touched by my poem; she found my mother's experiences mirrored her own childhood and her struggles to come to terms with her racial identity.

My favourite part of these events is observing how the audience's nature encourages people to open up about themselves. As a performer, I love the feeling of sharing such intimacy with strangers. Somehow, it feels natural to stand behind a microphone and open yourself up, to share a piece of yourself. Afterwards, you carry on the small talk with the people around you as if nothing out of the ordinary has happened. Above all, I think creating art is a delicate, fragile thing, and it deserves to be treated as such.



**Mandy Lane, 38,**  
is an artist and lecturer based in Carmarthen.

## **Exhibiting these works has created a dialogue between not only artist and viewer, but between our stories and the stories of those women.**

My sister and I grew up in local authority care. I have thought long about the poverty and hardships we faced, and particularly what it means to be a woman in poverty. My alcoholic father once said to me, "Thank God you're pretty; at least you can get married or become a Page 3 model." My most successful project to date, drawing on the life and work of Amy Dillwyn, have taken me back to examine my own story.

It seems that the women in my life were symbolic of the rigged cultural gender framework, and the men symbolic of the overarching misogyny and control. Although there is much evidence that things are changing and that gender is becoming more fluid and equality becoming evident, many institutional prejudices and barriers to equality also remain as strong as ever. I was compelled to shed a light on hidden stories, to highlight areas of change but also those areas where no change has occurred.

Learning of stories of women living in the South Wales Valleys from more than 60 years before my own story begins, surviving hardship,

domestic abuse, hunger, alcohol abuse, halted education, and limited prospects, completely empowered me. And I wanted to share this empowerment.

Visually communicating *her-story* holds weight. Exhibiting these works has created a dialogue between not only artist and viewer, but between our stories and the stories of those women. Time did not exist, only the power of the stories told.

It is the exploration of the artist that opens up these dialogues. Artists are curious people, and they perform a service in this respect. I gave a talk in Swansea about Amy Dillwyn to a room of people seemingly expecting a lecture on her remarkable achievements in industry. But I was talking of her romantic love for Olive Talbot, the turmoil she went through in being forced to conform to society's norms, and her final liberation from all this. The stories of women need not be told within the framework of patriarchal control. And it is art and creativity that can set us free.



**Tiernan Miles, 28,**

is a designer and tech creative based in London, and is CEO and co-founder of the global enterprise, Hello Lamppost.

On a macro level, no matter what sector you look at, be it education or finance or whatever, ultimately creativity equals innovation, and innovation benefits everyone. On a more micro level, taking city-living as an example, when increased creativity and therefore innovation starts to take effect, it has a whole host of knock-on advantages. Tech for example, can encourage people to change behaviours. If you're sharing stories and sharing experiences then people are becoming more social, they are given empathy without having to be close to one another. Our cities are designed to be functional, not social. Look at people on the tube in London, and you have this density of people, and yet people in general hate the experience. Why is that? Why are people not encouraged to enjoy it, and to get something from it beyond the function of getting from one place to another?

**There's a crossroads happening at the moment with urban design specifically, where more and more people are beginning to realise cities are created for and by the 1% - there is very little thought for the people who use that city in the design process.**

The more creative input that can be had on the design of cities, then the more they will be created for the people that are using it.

Where art sits in the world, ultimately that it is the baseline of creativity. There is no explicit end goal for art, no cap, no ceiling - this enables continuous out-of-the-box thinking and therefore, innovation. Starting by obsessing about the 'end user' when conceiving new creative projects is a growing movement and this process can help any aspect of any industry. 'Art projects', be it a painting or a digital installation, *should* be created for the experience of the end user.

There is a certain demographic who are stereotyped as "who art is for". Artists and public/private organisations are currently still thought of as separate worlds from one another. I think in 10 years time that will be different. In the future every public sector team, every corner of industry, will have a "creative", whether you want to call them an artist or not. Giving them the freedom to create concepts and ideas is exactly what the world needs, in order to keep improving.



**Rabab Ghazoul, 49,**  
is an Iraqi-born Cardiff-based artist and activist.

## **Being on the receiving end of colonial subjugation whilst also being the beneficiaries of the wider colonial project puts Wales in such a powerful position to affect change.**

What is missing a lot of the time is honesty about the fact that Wales has benefitted from the wider European colonial project. We must understand our history, and step away from the dominance of the Welsh-English binary in public debate. We must take apart and rethink the ideas of what “the colonial” is because it’s much more complex than how we are dealing with it now.

There is a painting in the National Museum in Cardiff at the moment, *Rembrandt’s Portrait of Catrina Hooghsaet*, and the only reason it’s there is because the Pennant family of Penrhyn Castle in Gwynedd who brought the painting to Wales in the 1860s earned their enormous wealth from the transatlantic slave trade. And yet the Museum describes it as the product of Wales’ “great industrial age”. But these things are a real part of Welsh history. And I think it’s important we see how those stories resonate with parallels in other country’s stories.

There are many examples of Wales’ international focus, and that is a good thing, but the truth is these connections can be awkward

and dishonest. How do you take into account the imperial legacy that led up to that cultural exchange? There are different power dynamics, and different points of privilege, and I think a lot of cultural exchange often erases or diminishes recognition that there are power dimensions between European cultural systems and non-European cultural systems. They ignore the fact that Europe’s impact on those non-European cultural systems is real. For me a strong Wales is a Wales that is very much engaged in all of that.

Being on the receiving end of colonial subjugation whilst also being the beneficiaries of the wider colonial project puts Wales in such a powerful position to affect change, because we literally have those two experiences. It gives Wales massive empathy and massive responsibility.

The countries that are going to model radical change will be small nations because they will be able to model it in scalable ways – we can do things in Wales that in England will take decades because there is just so much more institutional bedrock to shift.

Everything I say  
Mae popeth a ddwyllu

becomes euph  
brin fwythacia



## Nicky Arscott, 35,

is an artist and poet based in Llanbryn-mair in mid-Wales.

### I think we should cultivate dissent in the little children and then send them out into the world to rage against us.

How do we support this dissent? The more people that are doing it, the better. Dissent must be about engagement, about inclusivity, and progressive. Dissent needs exposure, it needs a platform, but it also needs a culture, and the challenges in creating and sustaining such a culture are very different in rural Wales than they are in a city where there is more likely to be a community of artists supporting and understanding each other. Most art in these rural areas is either lovely landscapes for the tourist market, or it comes through Arts Council funding (think galleries like MOMA, Oriel Davies, occasional ACW-funded performance).

The mainstream has little interest in contemporary Welsh artwork of political activism in rural Wales. There is slightly more interest in work that uses the issues of language politically, but really galleries are only happy to show 'political' work of 50 years ago, or from a different place. There is no attitude of risk-taking in these spaces for now. This is obviously frustrating in terms of exposure, and has made me reliant on the internet – Facebook in

particular – when it comes to sharing this sort of work. Having a physical space would be a huge statement from and about Welsh culture.

As an artist making political comics I do feel vulnerable sometimes. The organisations and publications that support me are hugely important for me, because it feels like a safety barrier between me as an individual, and the people who might take against what I do. It's freeing, in a way. Art has a political voice, and it, and artists cannot be allowed to feel isolated.

There is actually a huge appetite for political art that is relevant to *local* politics. I have had people thanking me in the street (with tears in their eyes) for my comics, and that's the sort of thing that keeps it going. It's all done in a sort of state of despair. In the run up to the General Election in 2017, there was a flurry of dissenting street art in rural Mid Wales, and it made my heart swell.



**Briony Collins, 22,**  
won the 2016 Exeter Novel Writing Award, and currently  
studies at Bangor University.

I was very young when I discovered language. The way the words fit together in a story or the music in a poem created a feeling inside me that I was not sure other children felt. My grandmother told me that at four years old I had to use the biggest words possible when talking. Nothing was 'nice' or 'pretty,' but they were always 'marvellous' and 'astounding.' 'She did not know where I picked up these words, only that they seemed stuck in my head. She knew I would grow up to be a writer.

While literature is important to me, it does not appear to be as valued by the nation, particularly by those in charge. It saddens me that other subjects are pushed ahead of English. Grants can be received to teach maths and science, but English is among the humanities subjects that are neglected. English degrees are mocked and devalued as not being 'real' degrees or as a waste of time. I am not saying that maths and science are any less important than English subjects. Maths teaches valuable analytical and problem-solving skills. Science creates the foundation for understanding the

world around us. English though – particularly literature – holds *everything*. Reading and writing are skills that people in Britain cannot get by without. Books and poetry hold important lessons in music, psychology, and philosophy. Through art we learn empathy and history. The technical side of English shows us how to use and control words and the creative side empowers us put our knowledge into action.

It is important for the nation to start prioritising literature alongside maths and science. Reading is a life skill that people should not live without. Illiteracy undermines basic human rights and poor writing skills make self-expression more difficult. Literature is a subject many see as limited to books, but it creeps into every part of our lives. By ranking it as less important than maths and science, the wellbeing of the nation suffers.

I am currently studying English Literature at Bangor University. I'm not just looking at stories. I'm learning the innermost workings of global cultures through the power of art.

**Books and poetry hold important lessons in music, psychology, and philosophy. Through art we learn empathy and history.**



**Manon Steffan Ros, 35,**  
is an artist and author from Tywyn, Gwynedd.

I was somewhat bemused to be invited to take an artist-and-writer-in-residence post in Castell Penrhyn, a huge and imposing National Trust Property on the outskirts of Bangor. Anybody who knows me or my work could have testified that I was never going to create easy, accessible, pretty art about this place and its history. I decided to make the Penrhyn connection to Jamaican slave plantations the focus of my exhibition. The idea was to create a typical “National Trust feel”, all soft carpets, gilded trinkets and imposing furniture, but that elements would jar – photos of slaves on the mantelpiece, a throw patterned with slave ships on a side table. It was a subtle acknowledgment of the disreputable past we tend not to want to think about, and the beginning, I hope, of a movement towards facing the horrors of the colonial past of many National Trust properties.

What I was not expecting was the huge shift in my own perception of what it means to be Welsh, nor the questioning of my own identity. Having always considered myself to be politically astute, knowledgeable and liberal, I suddenly found myself wondering if I had given enough thought to slavery and colonialism in relation to my own Welshness. I realised that I had never considered Welshness to be a part of all that history of the Empire, the history that I despise so much.

The reaction to the exhibition has been as revealing as the creative process. Many times I saw the shock on people’s faces after they had visited it – the wool falling from their eyes as it had from mine. Some might have preferred not to know, and turned their faces away from the Wilberforce quote I had embroidered on cotton near the exit –

**“Having heard all of this you may choose to look the other way, but you can never again say that you did not know.”**

Somehow, unexpectedly, the opportunity to create art shifted something in me. I had thought myself to be a complete person, more or less done with learning and developing, but I now suspect I will never be finished, and through art, I changed.



**Sophie McKeand**, 41,  
is a writer and performer from Wrexham, and from  
2016-18 was Wales' Young People's Laureate.

## **This journey showed me how honest and visceral engagement with the arts encourages individuals to examine themselves.**

I had never written a poem until I was 28. I had no interest whatsoever in poetry. In school I'd found it boring, tedious, irrelevant to my life. I loved books, and although I read voraciously it never occurred to me that I might become a writer. I did all sorts of jobs after leaving school – cafes, bars, telesales, banks – I was a single mother at 20. I worked my way up to a well-paid sales executive job at 27, but still I felt deeply unfulfilled and unhappy, so I quit to undertake a degree in English Literature and Creative Writing.

I didn't want to take the poetry module, but it was compulsory, and I suddenly found myself surrounded by these amazing thinkers; these minds that were reaching out across time and space helped me to view the world and my place in it in an entirely new way. I felt a deep resonance with their approach and need to reflect the world through poetry.

The compulsion in me to write, and to perform the words, was as powerful as it was unexpected. I searched for anything that might support this and found the Dead Good Poets Society open mic nights in Liverpool. A few years later I discovered Literature Wales when I entered the John Tripp Awards which started a long and fruitful relationship with them. Already I am in that process of giving back, and me and my partner have been inspired to set up TheAbsurd evenings of music and spoken word in Mold.

Because of these experiences I've spent the last decade working with the arts in communities. This journey showed me how honest and visceral engagement with the arts encourages individuals to examine themselves; empathy and emotional intelligence have to be engaged in order to truly reflect the world around us so that we can grow and evolve as people. Becoming an artist and discovering my creativity has radically transformed my life into a place I feel deeply connected to, and, taking this further, I have come to believe that encouraging creativity is one of the ways in which we can begin to better understand, and support each other in the wider community through these insane times in which we now live.



**Wendy Ostler, 62,**  
is a dancer and performer from Caernarfon.

This recent period in my life has been the first time I have really danced since I was in my twenties when I discovered the first wave of those community contemporary dance initiatives in Cardiff such as those with Rubicon. These experiences were back then, for me, such an important release from the rigid constraints of ballet. But eventually life took over – I had children etc. But when it came back to me, I realised I had not had anything creative in my life for 25 years, and having that opportunity to create was wonderful. We are really lucky in North Wales that us over-60s have the opportunities that we do to dance.

I had lost my partner two years before I started dancing again, and I was coming to the end of a long period of grieving, but I came to understand there was still quite a bit of that left in me. I realised that what I was doing was dancing it all out. It was incredibly therapeutic and freeing.

What I do is almost all improvisation, and it's become a really powerful way to express emotion, but also for me to understand where these emotions are in the body. It gives me the confidence to know when to express emotions, when to dance them out, and when to breathe. Sometimes I feel like I'm bypassing a thought-process, just feeling what wants to move, getting rid of the mind.

Coming back to dancing has helped me deal with life. The version of yourself that the world sees is two-dimensional, and this is particularly true as you get old, and I feel that when I dance I can be all versions of myself. Sometimes I am an 8 year old girl climbing to the top of the tree and believing I can conquer everything; sometimes I am remembering myself as that young mother, overwhelmed with love for this little creature and at the same time feeling completely incompetent not knowing how I am going to deal with everything. This creativity can allow us as individuals to become whole, and to remember the whole of ourselves.

**The version of yourself that the world sees is two-dimensional, and this is particularly true as you get old, and I feel that when I dance I can be all versions of myself.**



**Siôn Tomos Owen, 33,**  
is an artist, writer and broadcaster from the Rhondda.

## **If Wales is a nation of storytellers, we must understand that now there has never been more ways to tell those stories.**

For years I'd been working on an idea for a collection of stories about the Rhondda valley, in English, experimenting with form and language. When I was encouraged to apply for a Literature Wales bursary, I was working as a story editor for *Pobol y Cwm*, so was more immersed in Welsh writing and because of that, began thinking how the idea would work in Welsh rather than English. Because of the nature of the story being based in the Valleys, I initially didn't think it would work fully in Welsh but then that became the whole point of my application. I was going to write it in my Valleys Welsh with English intertwined. As soon as I entertained the idea of this being a bilingual project, it opened up for me and an idea that I thought was becoming stale became fresh and exciting.

It was the last minute decision to apply for the bursary that made me decide to make it a graphic novel. I'm a very fast drawer and 10 pages of storyboarding was far more doable than 5,000 words of text. I've been

drawing on the iPad for a couple of years now but when it came to this idea, it became the perfect platform. I used my Instagram photos of the valleys to Photoshop an amalgam of the streets, hills, chapels, clubs etc. into one landscape, making what would be one place that represented the whole valleys. Then I'd import them into ProCreate on the iPad and draw them as the one town where the story is based, Abercroma. What I find interesting is that this artistic process then affected the way I was thinking about how the language would work in the same way.

If Wales is a nation of storytellers, we must understand that now there has never been more ways to tell those stories. Most countries on the planet are bilingual, and people are now more and more consuming their stories without boundaries. Text, images, performance, technology – I use all of these elements in my work. Whatever the story needs, that's how it should be delivered.



**Tafsila Kahn, 34,**  
is a critic and campaigner for disability rights based in Cardiff.

It's only been the last few years I've come to change my thinking about art. When I think back to my experience of high school, "art" was painting and drawing, which for a visually impaired person, was not made to be inclusive. I think we need to rethink the way we educate. The teaching of art needs to draw on many different forms as well as cultures. If you had asked me what an artist looked like when I was in school, I would have pictured a middle-aged white man, most probably. There was nothing to tell me how I could access art, how I could be involved.

Diversity is crucial. The arts needs input from the classroom to the boardroom from people who understand the complex needs of different cultures, genders, and physical abilities. For me, like many people, my experience of art has been gradual. I was introduced to theatre when I became aware of the Sherman Theatre's shows that had audio descriptions. From that I have connected with artists who have put on tactile exhibition works. Normally the idea of art in an exhibition space is that it is sacred and must not be touched, but there are artists out there now who throw that idea out, and want you to experience their work in whatever way is best for you. For a visually impaired person this changes everything.

And that inclusive attitude can be felt even wider now. I have even been to visually described dance shows. There can be more done, but progress is being made. But it has to be a societal change, not just changes within a venue or for a single production. And it's not just about doing these things, but it's about creating a communication network so that people with disabilities can be informed of what is available for them.

Art is about empathy, it's about learning of other people, and I should not be disallowed that because of my impairments. You can draw messages from art, and I can learn about the thoughts and ideas of people from the other side of the world only if I am given access to them.

**The arts needs input from the classroom to the boardroom from people who understand the complex needs of different cultures, genders, and physical abilities.**



**Bridget Keehan, 46,**  
is a theatre maker based in Cardiff.

## **Access to opportunity and the support to enable people to make choices for their lives, which help them flourish, is essential for a just society.**

The majority of my life is lived in middle-class-land – within theatres, arts centres, universities – environments associated with a middle-class identity. Such places were alien to me until my twenties, when I finally became a student. On occasion they still feel alien.

Growing up, the narrative in our conservative, Catholic household was that students were wasters, and art students a special kind of waster. I rebelled indirectly, became a troublemaker in school, and after being suspended, rarely went at all. I began shoplifting. Shame, a sense of injustice and, oddly, a desire for approval fuelled my habit. This was the late 80s, and as I saw it, only posh middle-class kids became students, and you had to be clever to go to college. When Dad joked that I was going to end up in Holloway, he didn't mean the Royal one.

Contributing to the family income from a young age and earning one's keep was, in theory, valuable training for when I reached 16, which was the age my parents expected me to leave

home and fend for myself. I thought about signing up to join the RAF, as my brother had done. I went to the RAF recruitment office and they gave me a list of jobs to look at. On my brother's advice I pointed to Air Traffic Control, but checking my qualifications, or rather lack of them, the Recruiting Officer suggested I join the clerical division. In other words I would be consigned to the typing pool.

The difference is simply one of opportunity and the cultural expectations of class. Access to opportunity and the support to enable people to make choices for their lives, which help them flourish, is essential for a just society. The sector I work in now still lacks diversity in myriad ways. People who feel they don't belong are highly unlikely to put themselves forward even when the opportunity might be there, if they look hard enough (and I'm not saying that they should have to look hard). So I'm drawn to making theatre in the criminal justice system, always on the lookout for someone who wants to rebel against a system that has cast them in a role that is less than that which they deserve.



**Rajvi Glasbrook Griffiths, 33,**  
is a deputy head teacher and campaigner based in Newport, South Wales.

*Creativity is as important as literacy.* What does this exactly mean, and how do we teach and foster it in classrooms bending under the weight of crowded curriculums, national testing, shrinking budgets and governmental, parental and media pressure? The power of raw performance data measure is so pervasive, it is difficult to find where education as a source of experience, opportunity and opener of worldview enters.

In Wales, the removal of GCSE English Literature from the attainment measure in 2017 saw three-quarters of pupils removed from the chance to study literature. Indeed there are thousands of young students who have not looked at a poem or piece of literary text beyond Year 8. It adds to a general feeling that the arts are in decline in schools.

Cultural capital is one of the most powerful modes of social mobility and progress – it is a leveller – and the arts are an undeniable vehicle. Plays, music, paintings, photographs, concerts, street theatre, museums, galleries, libraries, markets, and even conversations in pubs can be transformative. Beyond

preparation for the job market, access to the arts for all students is important in itself. Arts provide a means to make sense of the world and of self, and a life enriched with creative culture is a life full of possibility. At a time when mental health issues are a significant concern in schools, the arts provide emotional literacy.

If creativity is not to be reduced to classroom corners of beanbags, buttons and glue sticks, robust curricular emphasis and provision is essential. Professor Dai Smith's 2013 independent report for the Welsh Government into Arts in Education in the Schools of Wales made a series of powerful recommendations. Encouragingly, in March 2014 the Welsh Government issued a response agreeing to all twelve recommendations.

It is only through having rich arts and creative experiences in schools, and giving them their deserved place within a holistic curriculum, that we can create well-rounded young people. And it is only by ensuring that these are available to all, especially those from deprived backgrounds, that we can nurture the potential of our future citizens.

**At a time when mental health issues are a significant concern in schools, the arts provide emotional literacy.**

## The services we provide

- we support and develop high quality arts activity – we invest public funding, using these funds to create opportunities for people to enjoy and take part in the arts
- we distribute Lottery funds – through applications to our Lottery funding programmes we're able to fund projects that develop new arts activity, supporting individuals, communities and organisations
- we provide expert information and advice about the arts – we're the national centre of a network of information and intelligence about the arts in Wales. We also have strong international links in the UK and beyond. Through our Council, our staff and our National Advisers we have the largest concentration of specialist arts expertise in Wales
- we raise the profile of the arts in Wales – we're the national voice for the arts in Wales, promoting the quality, value and importance of the country's artists and arts organisations
- we generate more money for the arts economy – we manage initiatives such as Collectorplan (our scheme to encourage more people to buy art); we secure European funding to grow the arts in Wales; and we have a presence at international events - at home and abroad - that open up new markets for Welsh artists
- we encourage innovation and experimentation – we promote projects and initiatives that transform the arts in Wales. From our arts education partnership with the Welsh Government (Creative Learning through the Arts) to technological change (Digital Research & Development), we are constantly looking for new ways for people to encounter and discover the arts
- we influence planners and decision-makers – the arts take place in many different settings. They can have a dramatic impact on the quality of people's lives, and the places in which they live and work. The arts are also frequently at the heart of initiatives for economic and social regeneration. Our job is to ensure that the contribution that the arts can make is recognised
- we develop international opportunities in the arts – through our specialist agency, Wales Arts International, we develop partnerships with cultural organisations such as the British Council, we promote internationally the contemporary culture of Wales, and we encourage international exchange and collaboration between artists and arts organisations
- we promote small scale performances in local communities – our Night Out scheme provides financial incentives to encourage the promotion of high quality arts activity in local community venues across Wales

# Our Operational Plan

You can find more detail about our work year by year by reading our [Operational Plan](#).

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