ARTS AND PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT

Cofio Remembrance - Rhondda Cynon Taf Community Arts (photo: Huw John)

Patterns, processes and levers for change

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1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This research has been commissioned by the Arts Council of Wales (ACW) to develop an understanding of the reasons for a general decline in public engagement in the arts in Wales and to explore the reasons for lower levels of participation in key social groups, including those living in areas characterised by deprivation.

The research has employed a triangulated methodology with survey, interview, case study and focus group components. Considerable emphasis has been placed on deriving qualitative data directly from participants to illustrate some of the perceptions which hinder arts engagement, particularly in lower socio-economic groups, and to provide insight into mechanisms to overcome socio-cultural barrier to arts engagement.

Key Concepts

The research has employed a number of key concepts to inform analysis of arts engagement in Wales:

- The term **'engagement'** has been used to describe both attendance and participation in arts activities. Participation has been defined as involving an act of creativity by the participant, often with the support of practicing arts professionals.

- The **'engagement career'** is used to describe the changing levels of engagement which occur for individuals as they progress through distinct life stages.

- The research has identified a **'two tier'** definition of the arts in which respondents initially identify a very formal definition of what they term the 'proper arts'. However, on further exploration they provide a wider definition associated with acts of creativity which includes a broader spectrum of activities they associate with as art in practice.

- The term **'engagement continuum'** is used to describe the wide range of levels of engagement with the arts that this study had encountered. Engagement for individuals varies from complete lack of interest in any art to those who depend on arts practice for their livelihood.

Research aims

The aims of the research were to:

- Assess the reasons for the decline in arts participation in Wales.

- Explore the issues that inhibit active engagement with the arts.

- Identify opportunities for broadening access to the arts for all socio- economic groups, in particular the lower C2DE social group and those living in Wales' most deprived areas.

- Provide examples of good practice where broader engagement has been facilitated.

These aims are primarily addressed in the Key Themes: Section 5 of the report. However in addressing the first aim, any explanation of the declining levels of participation in the arts must take into account the socio-economic changes evident in Wales from the early 1980s onwards. The demise of key industries including mining and agriculture saw a corresponding decline in their key cultural institutions which provided considerable opportunity for arts engagement. This loss of a rural and urban infrastructure is accompanied by the emergence of the 'new' poverty in the last two

decades of the twentieth century which saw poverty levels peak at 27% of the population, with a corresponding corrosive effect on the cultural and social values in Welsh communities. Rising crime and substance misuse were the most visible manifestations of a general disengagement from civil society by our poorest communities. These patterns of poverty and social exclusion inevitably have an impact on the levels of arts participation given.

These trends were accompanied by competing leisure activities for the more affluent ensuring that declining participation, although more marked in disadvantaged communities is not exclusive to them. However, the report focuses on key themes identified in this study as the primary, contemporary determinants of non-participation. These are the general and perceptual barriers to engagement as well as the changing patterns of arts infrastructure.

Key Themes

The research has identified a number of key themes which are critical for understanding arts engagement and which provide explanation for declining participation in the arts in Wales and identify the primary factors inhibiting arts engagement.

Barriers to participation

- In both rural and urban areas the lack of **public transport**, especially during the evening is a critical barrier to both attendance and participation in arts activities. Many communities resolve these difficulties by self-organising 'trips' to local, regional and national arts venues.

- **Community safety** issues currently prevent some people attending and participating in even highly localised provision as they do not feel safe enough in their community at night.

- **Cost factors** demonstrate a complex relationship with attendance and participation. For those who are not engaged in any way it is not presented as a notable cause of their disengagement. For those who are currently engaged, cost is a significant reason why they do not participate more than they currently do.

- The primary reason for non-engagement is **lack of interest**. This study suggests this results from a lack of perceived **relevance** of arts activities to those who do not currently engage.

Arts infrastructure

The **role of arts venues** is of critical significance to the level of engagement in a given area. Large scale venues provide critical mass for activities to be sustained, provide experience of a range of genres and allow opportunity for the public to experience 'taster' activities. Where venues adopt an 'outreach' approach they extend their activities into a wider hinterland with particular impact where socially disadvantaged groups and communities are involved in outreach provision.

The **role of community venues** in supporting regional venues provides a mechanism for delivering arts engagement to socially, economically and culturally isolated communities. Local access to arts provision is essential to promoting greater arts engagement. Community venues provide experience of 'low threshold' activities in safe and familiar contexts. They are not perceived as formal arts and provide opportunities for experience of creativity which can lead to higher levels of artistic expression. This report proposes a hub and **spoke model** which links regional venues with community venues to provide a consistent and high quality opportunity to both attend and participate in arts activities.

Routes to participation

This report also points to a wide range of factors which influence engagement with the arts and provide opportunities to increase public participation, particularly in populations experiencing economic disadvantage and social exclusion.

- **Early life experience** is important in shaping future attitudes and has an effect on levels of engagement.

- **Community development** activities and arts promotion activities are intricately linked and there is a need to develop closer policy links and more formal partnership structures to capitalise on their shared goals and modes of working with disadvantaged communities.

- The distinction between **formally defined arts** and **creativity** identified in this report and the use of a **two tier** model points to the need to promote more opportunities for public experience of many different levels of creativity as expressed in craft and skills based provision. This will provide a 'bedrock' of creativity which can underpin higher levels of artistic expression and build towards greater participation in the more formally defined arts. However, the report identifies the need to establish a **funding boundary** in which the ACW does not directly engage in craft and skill promotion but works in partnership with other agencies to ensure that such activities are extensively available.

- The report identifies a number of reasons why the public does engage with art and these focus on **enjoyment, interest, and social interaction**. Action to promote greater engagement with the arts must recognise these important motivating factors and avoid highly formal activities which unduly challenge and alienate potential participants.

- The research has identified a critical role for the **County Arts Officers and Arts Development Officers** who are currently promoting a wide range of activities which are increasing engagement in the Arts and particularly widening participation by socially excluded groups. There would be advantages in better networking and sharing of good practice between county based arts development teams.

- **Arts umbrella organisations** provide an important alternative to local authority based teams for community groups that prefer to work with a stronger voluntary sector perspective. There is a perception that their resource has diminished in recent years.

- The report also identifies an emerging role for **new technologies** in the development of greater levels of public participation. Digital Story telling has provided considerable gains for projects working with disadvantaged communities. Film, video and mobile phone technology are also emerging in ways which promote a democratisation of visual production.

The report also identifies **Ten Actionable Findings** which identify opportunities for broadening arts engagement, especially for lower socio-economic group who are more likely to have no interest in the arts. The Actionable Findings are summarised here. However, it is recommended that they are read in the context of the full report.

- Support for community organised 'trips' to arts events.

- Promoting partnership between community arts and community transport providers.

- Ensuring that costs are not a major barrier to participation especially for threshold activities.

- That ACW develops long-term funding partnerships with competent community arts and community development organisations which in turn accept and develop their partnership role to achieve greater public participation in the arts.

- That ACW reviews the terminology of the arts to recognise the two tier public perception of arts and public affinity with creativity and reflect this in its Communication Strategy.

- That ACW explores the hub and spoke model suggested here which links regional venues with community venues to replicate the recognised value of venues in promoting participation.

- That opportunities for non-threatening and threshold level experience of the arts are fully promoted and developed by the ACW and a wide range of partner organisations.

- That ACW recognises the craft and skills level of creative expression as an entry point for engagement career development and develops partnerships that can promote this level of activity.

- That ACW should maintain and develop its support of the local authority based Arts Development Officers.

- That ACW strengthens its relationship with umbrella organisations and develops a network of relationships between community artists, VAW, WACA and the county based Arts Development Officers.

Collectively, these recognise good practice and develop a range of approaches to widen engagement and increase public participation in the arts. They build on existing ACW strategies and enhance the current level of ACW engagement with community arts and community development as a primary method of engaging disadvantaged populations in Wales. They underline the developmental role for the arts council which supplements its sponsorship and development of national companies, venues and productions in the musical, visual and performing arts. The report also points to an advocacy role for ACW, bringing to the attention of government and public services the barriers to participation experienced by populations resulting from issues such as poor transport and concerns over community and personal safety.

2. BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

In July 2007 a research team led by Professor Dave Adamson and Professor Hamish Fyfe of the University of Glamorgan were commissioned by the Arts Council of Wales (ACW) to carry out research into public engagement with the arts across Wales. This research is set against a background in which previous research for the ACW had identified a general decline in participation in the Arts, with the following populations demonstrating the lowest levels of participation;

- People with Disabilities

- Black and Ethnic Minorities;

- Women, and

- People living in areas characterised by high levels of deprivation

This research has been commissioned at a time when the role of the arts in the lives of all the people in Wales has been brought into particularly sharp focus with the recent publication of the Stephen's Report (WAG 2006) which foresaw a change in the role of the ACW from that of a 'gatekeeper' for the arts to a more developmental role. This reflects wider change in social policy which is increasingly emphasising public participation and engagement. The Welsh Assembly Government is currently engaged in developing policies designed to increase public participation in all areas of life, a direction given momentum by the Beecham report (WAG 2006). The arts in Wales are not exempt from these processes and indeed provide fertile ground for highly participative models of management and delivery. However, the available evidence pointing to declining engagement provides some challenge to this potential major role for the arts as a model of participatory engagement. Full understanding of the complex factors which contribute to this identified decline is therefore essential. An inevitable component of this wider change of climate in social policy is a shift of emphasis from delivery of services to the 'enabling' of services by key policy institutions. Holden writes of arts bodies:

> "In place of being responsible for the delivery of culture, in future funding bodies will be enablers, with responsibility for encouraging public participation in culture, expression through culture thereby strengthening the public realm and society. At present, the system of public funding is saddled with a history and language of dependency and patronage. In the future cultural professionals will need to engage in a greater dialogue with the public " (Holden 2005:12)

Consequently, the background to this research is one of a complex policy environment as well as a deep complexity in the reasons why arts engagement might be in decline.

2.1. The aims of the research:

The research briefing document identified a number of central aims:

- Assess the reasons for the decline in arts participation in Wales.

- Explore the issues that inhibit active engagement with the arts.

- Identify opportunities for broadening access to the arts for all socio- economic groups, in particular the lower C2DE social group and those living in Wales' most deprived areas.

- Provide examples of good practice where broader engagement has been facilitated.

Furthermore, six specific objectives set important detailed outcomes for the research and indicated key areas of knowledge which the project had to develop to allow the Arts Council Wales (ACW) to fully understand and respond to the causes of the decline. Specifically these were to:

- help ACW to understand why those who never attend/participate in the arts, and those who only do so infrequently, are not being engaged;

- explore the changed behaviour among those who have been engaged with the arts in the past but are not taking part currently;

- assess different perceptions and barriers among the various socio economic groups (including C2DE social groups, those living in Communities First areas and ACORN 'moderate means' group);

- determine the issues and perceptions for different art forms (drama, music, dance, etc.);

- investigate opportunities to overcome barriers, to get people involved and address the decline in arts participation;

- explore the benefits that can be gained from arts participation and attendance and provide a number of case studies of good practice.

These aims and research objectives have been approached from a triangulated methodology which places considerable emphasis on securing qualitative data directly from a representative study population which reflects the characteristics of the Welsh population in general. It also specifically targets the social groups of most concern in some of the most disadvantaged communities in Wales. The methodology is explained fully in the following section (Section 3)

3. METHODOLOGY

Four research methods have been deployed as the basis for achieving the aims and objectives of the study:

3.1. The Survey

A survey of over six hundred respondents underpins the research and provides a degree of comparability with previous research conducted for ACW, particularly the Annual Welsh Omnibus survey and the Beaufort Research, 2005 Arts in Wales Survey (ACW 2005) which provides much of the evidence of declining participation in the arts in Wales. The survey has been conducted on an all Wales basis and the sampling strategy has achieved a representative sample in terms of key characteristics including gender, geographical spread, Welsh language use and age. The survey deployed telephone and street interviews, the latter in locations throughout Wales. Full details of the survey methodology are provided in a technical appendix (Appendix 2).

Although the survey generally secured direct, choice based answers to key questions, respondents were encouraged to select secondary choices and to provide greater detail of their opinion in more open ended sections of the questionnaire. These produced more nuanced responses than is usually associated with survey methods and have permitted the research team to establish detailed understanding of responses. This approach required complex coding of responses which has generally been grouped into principle categories of response for the purpose of this report. However, the detailed data is reported where it provides illustration of key issues.

3.2. Focus Groups

A series of twelve focus groups have been held and collectively constitute a highly qualitative body of data exploring attitudes to the arts in Wales. This methodology was selected for its ability to explore in depth respondents' values and perceptions in relation to arts engagement. Focus groups are an established method for moving beyond the initial impressionistic responses often provided by respondents to surveys to secure more considered responses which are able to reflect on and evaluate scenarios and issues raised by the researcher. Consequently, although they involve fewer participants than survey methods, they compensate with more detailed and finely grained data which more closely reflects the considered opinions of the group members.

3.3. Stakeholder interviews

The issues raised by the study are central in any contemporary discussion of the arts in Wales and an important contribution to the research has been derived from interviews with key stakeholders in the arts professions in Wales. These have ranged from ACW personnel to representatives of umbrella agencies and practitioners providing services at community level. These interviews have provided insights into provider perceptions of the opportunities and barriers involved in increasing engagement with the arts, both generally and also with specific segments of the population that do not traditionally engage.

3.4. Case Studies

The research brief places considerable emphasis on identifying and exploring examples of good practice in arts engagement, especially with groups conventionally seen as 'difficult to reach'. The

research has conducted five case studies of arts organisations exploring innovative methods of increasing engagement and these are used in this report to illustrate strategies which may have a wider relevance for promotion of greater engagement with the arts in Wales. The five Case Studies are;

- Galeri, Caernarfon

- The Pembroke Dock Festival Group

- The Unusual Stage School

- CARAD, Rhayader

- Yale Centre for Digital Storytelling

3.5. Limitations of the methodology

Collectively, these triangulated research methods provide a robust data set which permits internal verification between the separate methodologies; however it is worth noting several limitations which derive from the methodologies themselves.

Firstly, the survey does not in itself provide full comparability with either the Welsh Omnibus Survey or the 2005 Arts in Wales Survey conducted by Beaufort Research. Although where possible similar questions and response categories have been employed, there is sufficient variation in questionnaire content and interviewer technique to prevent direct comparison in all aspects of this survey. The intention of this survey was not to verify or challenge previous research but more to provide a background to the qualitative research conducted in this study and to explore some of the specific aims and objectives associated with this research brief.

The survey will also contain some bias towards those with a degree of interest in arts activities. Respondents to surveys are inevitably more likely to complete the survey if they have an interest in the topic of the survey. The research team has overcome this to some extent both in street interviews and telephone interviews but it is inevitable that some component of bias remains.

In relation to the focus groups it is worth noting that the research team has met with pre-existing groups in Communities First areas. As such they are constituted of community members who have become engaged with the Communities First process in some form. This does not necessarily affect their situation in relation to arts engagement but they are distinct from those populations in their community who have not become engaged with the Communities First process. This may indicate a greater likelihood to be engaged when opportunities are provided and may reflect in their response to discussion about their relationship with the arts.

These are minor limitations inherently associated with any research methodology but it is important to consider research results with a clear awareness of these factors.

4. KEY CONCEPTS

Following the project inception meeting, review of the Beaufort findings, initial interviews and early discussions amongst the research team, several key research concepts emerged to inform subsequent stages of the research and to provide a means of structuring analysis around the key subject of engagement.

4.1. Attendance and participation: a distinction

One of the essential distinctions required for the design of the research instruments was to identify clearly the difference between attendance and participation. Both the questionnaire and the focus group design sought to secure information from respondents which distinguished between attendance at arts events and more direct involvement in creative activity.

In this study, attendance is defined as a relatively passive consumption of activities designed and delivered by arts based provider organisations. It is primarily an 'audience' based activity and is likened to 'consumption' of a product. There is likely to be a commercial component involved in the form of a charge for attendance.

In contrast, participation is seen as involving the creation of an outcome by the participant in a first hand experience of a form of arts practice. Generally, the individual will have been involved in an act of creativity, often guided by a practitioner artist or performer, but requiring creative input by the participant.

Arts participation refers to people taking an active role; doing, making and creating. (ACW Draft Arts Participation Strategy, 2007)

This distinction corresponds with commonsense use of the terms and the deployment of this distinction has met with approval throughout the full range of stakeholder interviews.

The general term 'engagement' is used in this report to describe both attendance and participation.

4.1.1. The relationship between attendance and participation

In the primary stages of the study the research team adhered to a working hypothesis that there was a connection between attendance at arts events and personal participation in arts activities. In the initial interviews with arts practitioners this view was challenged and an alternative model emerged of two distinct groups; those who attend arts events and those who participate more directly. This view has been supported to some extent by data from the focus groups and the survey. For the most engaged respondents who either attend arts activities or participate at least once a week, only 9% do both. There is more overlap in those reporting monthly levels of engagement, with some 28% reporting both attendance and participation. Focus group discussions suggest similar levels of separation between attendance and participation.

> "I've never seen the link between attendance and participation, I can see logically more of a link between them the other way, participation and attendance, but I think trying to get into the mind set, the psychology of potential audiences I think they are very different agendas on the whole. I don't think from my experience, which is not scientific but I can't think of any reliance on a natural link between those two, I think they are very different mindsets, different agendas, and different reasons behind it."
> **Interviewee**

The evidence also points to a strong connection between past experience of participation and present/future participation. Interview evidence suggests that those who are already participating in arts activities are more likely to try new activities if the opportunity exists. This is evident in the success of taster sessions favoured by the majority of practioners and organisations interviewed in this study. Focus group discussions also pointed to a strong connection between being involved in arts activities as a young person in schools and youth facilities and later participation as an adult. Additionally, in the survey, 6.3 % of respondents cite experience in school and as a young person (11.2%) as their two most significant reasons for originally becoming involved in arts participation.

Whilst this evidence does not fully support the view that 'attendees' and 'participants' are two entirely distinct groups it does point to a notable degree of separation between the two. The evidence also further suggests that it is participation which promotes further participation and that there is a weaker link between attendance and participation. This points to the value of community development initiatives and their provision of opportunity to directly experience arts practice (discussed in Section 5.4.2).

4.2. The Engagement Continuum

Discussion of the distinction between attendance and participation led the research team to identify the concept of the **engagement continuum** which provides a means of recognising and placing in context the different levels of engagement encountered in this study. The continuum can be seen as being between the two points of **complete disengagement**, where the arts play no role in an individual's life, and **full participation** in which arts practice provides an important component of an individual's lifestyle and may provide their primary source of income. In between are intermediate levels of engagement. The study has identified the following key points along the continuum:

- Non attendance

- Infrequent attendance

- Occasional attendance

- Frequent attendance

- Venue / company / event supporter status

- Support for participation of family member / friend

- Private personal participation

- Organised personal participation

- Organisational role

- Practice instructional / developmental role

4.3. The Engagement Career

The second concept employed is the **engagement career** which recognises the differing levels of engagement which might occur over the individual lifespan. The very first focus group revealed a complex relationship between engagement and competing demands on time, including work related obligations, family demands, child rearing and caring duties and changing patterns of income associated with these issues.

> "I used to do dancing as a child but I am not sure as an adult- you need to be committed to that and I've got three children, I can't commit a 100% commitment." **Focus group member**

As these and other factors varied then so did the time, financial and physical resources available to the individual to allow for engagement with the arts. Consequently, in these early discussions we could identify biographies emerging which charted healthy levels of engagement during youth, a fall during early adulthood with some return in relationship to support for children's activities; followed by an upturn in the years after parenthood; followed by a decline as care for elderly parents ensured. This is an ideal type model and no-one respondent will follow this typical trajectory perfectly. However, the central issue is that arts engagement is not a fixed component of lifestyle and will be dependent on a complex range of issues within any individual lifestyle profile. Illustration of the concept of the engagement career can be found in considering the life history of John, a 67 year old member of a focus group.

An Engagement Career: John
Despite describing himself as an infrequent attendee and non-participant in arts activities, further conversation with John suggested a 'life-stage ' model of engagement at a variety of levels. He had briefly been a member of a brass band as a young boy but had left because of the shortage of instruments before he had actually received any tuition. As a young and middle aged man he had regularly attended 'go as you please' events in the community and had sung Irish Ballads and Country and Western songs but always as an amateur. Currently, he attends a 'sing-along' every Saturday night in his local club where he enjoys the communal singing and compares the event to musical hall singing. He also regularly attends another club in the area as an audience member for what he calls 'artist nights' where professional singers are hired by the club. He finally, pointed with some pride to his support for a grandson who played guitar in a local rock band. He also described his own long term desire to learn to play the organ which he has never realised.

This career model is also supported by data from the survey. For those who **are** engaged with the arts, lack of time (11.5%), and other commitments (10%) which includes family commitments (3.6%) and work commitments (5.5%) are primary reasons why respondents don't attend more often than they currently do. For those who are not engaged such reasons are slightly less significant but still important (See Table 1)

Table 1: Reasons for infrequent or non-attendance

Reason	Currently attending	Non-attending
Lack of time	11.5	10.8
Work Commitments	5.5	5.4
Family Commitments	3.6	2.7

This concept of the engagement career has implications for strategies to promote and develop arts engagement. Firstly the research suggests that such life stage barriers to engagement will be very resistant to attempts to promote greater engagement. Secondly, those attempts will need to be finely focused on specific life stage groups, e.g. by providing child-care or carer respite support. Finally, even if successful, the gains from such strategies will be relatively small. Policy may also simply have to recognise that poorer levels of engagement by key life stage groups is inevitable.

4.4. Defining the 'arts'

"There is huge disconnect between the publics idea of culture and what it is for and the way that government talks about it." (Holden 2005:7)

Difficulties of what is meant by such a generic term as 'the arts' has raised a number of research challenges for this study. The Arts in Wales Survey (ACW 2005) has established some precedent with its listing of activities presented to respondents in previous research and this study has followed that precedent when offering respondents choices from lists. However, in all the research instruments employed in this study the definition of the arts has been deliberately kept broad and research respondents have been encouraged to provide their own definition.

In practice, in the majority of cases, a 'two tier' definition of the arts has emerged. Initially, survey respondents identify a predictable listing of the visual (63.7%), performance (56.3%), and musical (50.9%) arts, often termed by them as the 'proper arts'. They then tended to follow through with additional examples from categories such as film, photography and poetry. Focus group participants also initially identified the 'proper arts' often associated with a sense of 'externality' to them as individuals.

“When I see some things that they classify as the Arts like that brick wall, it fascinates me, I can't understand how they think that is Art . . . I think- what the hell is going on? and that other thing, a cow hanging up . . . I can't argue with them that it is not Art . . . They know what they are talking about.” **Focus Group Member**

The 'proper' arts tended to be seen as activities which took place elsewhere (e.g. in distant geographical locations such as London or in distant social settings such as Theatre Clwyd). They also tended to comment on their personal lack of skills in such activities or their inability to acquire such skills. The predominant view was that such activities were innate and not acquired. The recognition of this distinction is also evident in the wider literature:

“The arts are perceived as a smaller set of clearly defined and more traditional activities - theatre, ballet, art galleries. For many people 'art' is a part of the fabric of their lives, while 'the arts' are something institutional and separate from their day- to day experience of the world.” (Bunting 2007:13)

However, following further exploration, focus group participants tended to identify additional activities including choral singing, brass bands, creative writing, sewing, crafts and for some respondents the expression of creativity for women through domestic activities such as cooking. In such discussions the term 'creativity' tended to replace the use of the term 'arts'. The term creativity had a clear resonance for focus group participants and enabled them to both describe their own activities as 'art' but also to challenge their own initial observations that they were not artistic or interested in the arts.

“You forget that you like the arts - I read for hours my son laughs at me - how can you read for so long- but you don't really think of that as being the arts I suppose, I don't - when I think of the arts I think of boring TV presenters on BBC 2 (laughs).”

> "Did a lot of Welsh poetry recital - I've never thought about it as the arts - did a Welsh festival where you competed."

> "No I see myself very much as the arts and crafts rather than the high arts, you know."
> **Focus group members**

The policy implication of such observations is that the term the 'arts' may have an alienating characteristic for many people which externalises traditionally defined 'high' arts activities from the lives of a significant proportion of the population, especially those in lower occupational categories C and D, the subjects of the majority of our focus groups. The term 'creativity' may offer a more fruitful terminology in policies developed to promote greater engagement and a more broadly accessible terminology to describe what the ACW is in existence to champion and support.

4.5. Declining engagement with the arts

The background for this research is one of concern about declining participation in the arts in Wales. Evidence from the Welsh Omnibus Survey and the Arts in Wales Survey (ACW 2005) point to a general decline over ten years, of participation, especially in key groups such as people with disability, ethnic minority communities, women and people resident in deprived areas. Also of note are the lower levels of participation by socio-economic groups C2DE. In contrast, levels of attendance at arts events have risen over the same period but still demonstrate variation between socio-economic groups.

This research has employed qualitative methods to explore some of the underlying causes of the identified decline and particularly to work with groups living in disadvantaged communities to discover the factors which hinder their engagement with the arts generally. These issues are explored fully in Section 5 of the report. Before considering these in detail it is useful to examine carefully the view that participation in the arts in Wales is declining.

Without exception the arts practitioners interviewed in this study have challenged that perception and have argued that participation is not in decline. The majority have expressed views to the contrary and believe participation to be increasing. This gap between perception and research evidence requires some explanation. Given that many of the interviewees bear responsibility for promoting arts activities we might conclude that such a view simply reflects a direct interest in 'talking up' the levels of participation. However, this would be highly cynical and represent an unfair and unjustified criticism of respondents' professionalism and objectivity. Consequently we have to arrive at a more satisfactory explanation of this dissonance between professional opinion in the sector and the research evidence.

The research instrument deployed in the Arts in Wales Survey is rigorously designed and, specifically, the questions related to participation provide ample opportunity for respondents to list a comprehensive range of activities. There is a possibility that the initial questions about attendance which focus on more formal activities may have set an idea for respondents that this was the concern of the survey and might lead them to exclude community-based activities from their later replies. However, the introduction to Q5 of the Arts in Wales Survey (ACW 2005) offers clear opportunity to identify these levels of activity in their responses on participation. Consequently, after careful consideration we do not feel that the research deployed to date inadequately records community-based arts, a belief expressed by several interviewees. The Welsh Omnibus Survey is also a recognised research instrument which is rigorously designed and implemented. However, there are questions of continuity raised by this type of research instrument and its changing overall content over the ten year period, which can shape responses to specific sections within the survey. There are also issues raised about the process of consideration given by respondents to specific

components of the questionnaire and a greater likelihood of less thought through and convenient answers being provided, in contrast to surveys specifically about the arts. Pettit (2000), when investigating the implications of resourcing surveys of arts engagement, highlights the issue that omnibus surveys generally contain few questions about the arts and that the order of questions may impact on results. However, in compensation the Welsh Omnibus Survey is more likely to secure the views of a wider section of the population and be less biased than specific surveys about the arts which are inevitably more likely to be answered by those interested in the arts. Two explanations are possible for the divergence between the views of arts professionals and the research evidence.

- The development of new locations, delivery groups, organisational frameworks and policy vehicles for promoting community-based arts activities has directly engaged the community arts sector and instigated multiple demands on arts workers, arts development officers and umbrella organisations charged with promoting the arts. Much of this provision is externally funded and requires more accountability and a higher profile. Consequently, overall a perception of highly increased levels of activity is easy to arrive at. In contrast more traditional levels of activity at the community level were likely to be self-organised and self-funded and connect less with the agencies concerned. They were likely to go largely unnoticed outside of the immediate locale and connect less with development agencies. They are also the kinds of activities which might be most likely to go into decline as the participating population ages. Consequently, it is feasible that a decline of such broad-based community arts activities is obscured for professional workers by the increased demand on their resources by emerging groups.

- Additionally, since the 2005 Arts in Wales Survey, Communities First partnerships throughout Wales have become active and are developing arts based interventions in partnership with other agencies. Key initiatives such as Creative Communities in Rhondda Cynon Taff and the general role of county based Arts Development Officers are clearly having considerable impact. Arts Council support for 24 key community arts organisations such as Valleys Kids are promoting activities in highly deprived areas. Additionally, Community Touring and the Night Out scheme have had a noticeable impact. Consequently, it is possible that since the Arts in Wales Survey 2005 the trend of decreasing participation may have been slowed or even reversed.

Finally, it is worth observing that although there is robust evidence for declining levels of participation up until 2005, the same research instruments provide grounds for optimism and point to high levels of attendance, a clear value placed on the arts by the general public and a general level of 20% of the population participating in arts activities at least once per year with strong indication that for most of those it is a far more frequent activity. Support for that optimism is also provided by this research study. In our twelve focus groups only one was found to have no engagement with the arts. In some of the most disadvantaged and social and geographically isolated communities we found high levels of both attendance and participation in arts-based activities. In our survey we found both high levels of attendance and participation (See Table 2 and Table 3). Participation levels are higher than in the Welsh Omnibus Survey or the Arts in Wales Survey and reflect the broad self-definition of the arts that respondents were allowed to use in our **two tier** model.

Overall 86.6% of respondents to this survey reported that they had attended at least one event in the last year with 57% of respondents reporting that they had participated in at least one arts activity recently. Results for the survey conducted by TNS (2006) for the Scottish Arts Council indicated a 77% attendance within the last year (concurrent with the results from the Arts in Wales Survey (76%) and a participation rate of 76% within the general adult population (although the latter figure includes the category of buying and reading books (51% overall when discounting this category).

Table 2: Have you attended any of the following types of arts event in the last year?

Type of arts event	Percentage of respondents who had attended
Live Music Events	61.6
Carnivals / Festivals	49.0
Visual Arts Exhibitions	47.4
Craft Exhibitions	45.9
Theatre / Drama / Play	45.9
Musical theatre	35.7
Dance / Ballet	24.1
Eisteddfodau	17.0
Poetry / Storytelling / Literature Events	13.9
Opera	11.0

Table 3: Have you recently participated in any of the following activities?

Type of arts activity	Percentage of respondents who had participated
Helping 'behind the scenes'	27.5
Photography /film/ video	20.8
Crafts	19.8
Painting / drawing	19.5
Playing a musical instrument	19.5
Performing publicly	18.9
Creative writing	17.5
Singing	15.9
Dancing	13.1
Acting	9.2

4.6. Explaining the decline in participation

This report identifies a wide range of factors which influence the level of participation in the arts, at both community and individual level. We have not been able to identify a sole factor which can offer the primary explanation of declining participation but rather a complex interrelationship between societal levels of change and the community experience of that process. Additionally, individual factors associated with life stage, interest, motivation and opportunity further complicate outcomes at the level of the individual. This section explores the background social context of declining participation and its impact on community and individual engagement with the arts in Wales.

4.6.1. Socio-economic change and arts engagement

Wales has been characterised by rapid and damaging economic change since the early 1980s, with the demise of key industries such as coal-mining and significant reduction in employment in heavy manufacturing and steel production. In the rural context agriculture has suffered repeated crises and the rural economy has been significantly reduced since 1990. These trends in themselves may have impacted on arts participation as each sector of the economy historically gave rise to an institutional expression of the workplace culture. Stereotypically, Welsh society characterised by mining, steel production, heavy manufacturing and agriculture had a corresponding pattern of social and cultural institutions which created multiple opportunities for arts participation. The demise of institutes, welfare halls, village halls, farmers associations, local agricultural shows, chapels, working men's' clubs and much of the associated voluntary youth provision has simply removed venues and opportunities for arts participation in many communities in Wales. This inevitably has a negative impact on the levels of participation. The loss of this social and cultural infrastructure peaked in the 1980s. Demographically, we would expect the child population which first experienced that loss of participation infrastructure to now be the adults reporting lack of interest in the arts. We have identified in Section 5.4.1 the influence of early life experience of the arts on later patterns of engagement. Loss of infrastructure in the 1980s would therefore continue to impact on the levels of arts participation in those generations who have not benefited from the opportunities which previously existed.

However, more significant than the loss of the cultural institutional provision is the rise of poverty and social exclusion associated with the loss of the agricultural and industrial base of the Welsh economy. As unemployment rose in the 1980s the incidence of poverty in Wales increased dramatically. In 2005/6 22% of the Welsh population lived in poverty measured as an income below 60% of the national average. This compares with 27% in 1995/6. Similarly, child poverty has reduced from 36% in the late 1990s to 28% in 2005/6 (JRF 2005 and 2007). However, these figures have to be compared with the 7% of the population living in poverty in 1979 (Gaffikin and Morrissey 1992)

The rise of the 'new' poverty throughout the 1980s and 90s had major impact on the social experience of life in Welsh communities with rising levels of crime, substance misuse and a general process of disengagement from society (Adamson 1999 and 2008). The phenomenon of long-term unemployment and incapacity benefit status has had a corrosive impact on the levels of engagement of disadvantaged communities with the civic and cultural life of Wales. This pattern of social exclusion inevitably has had an impact on the levels of arts engagement and participation in Wales. Ironically, the regeneration initiatives and community development activities tackling this social exclusion are now giving rise to much of the community based arts activities identified in this report.

This same period also saw a decline in statutory youth provision and the shrinkage of school extra-curricular activities in the face of the developing national curriculum. These two factors would further undermine the opportunities for early life experience of the arts and in turn lead to increased levels of disinterest in contemporary adults,

In contrast to the collapse of the traditional economic base of Welsh society we have witnessed a diversification of the economy within particular the growth of retail and leisure sectors. For those who avoided the unemployment of the late 20th century, relative affluence has provided a wide range of lifestyle choices and leisure activities which have competed with the arts. Declining participation is not limited to the disadvantaged and consumers are now faced with an increasing range of activities which compete with the arts for the financial and time resources of individuals and families.

Consequently, we can identify a socio-cultural climate in which the arts are less favourably placed than in past times and in which declining participation can be seen to be the outcome of major social and economic change in Wales.

4.6.2. Barriers to participation

Despite the identification of what is effectively an economic and cultural environment which does not favour arts participation, this report places the major explanations of non-participation firmly in the realms of perceptual barriers to participation which are embedded at a cultural level and bear considerable influence on the attitudes of individuals. These cultural values have a clear link to the processes of economic change identified here. In the next section we thoroughly explore these issues and specifically identify the general and perceptual barriers to participation. We also look carefully at the infrastructure of arts provision in Wales and in particular the role of arts and community venues for the promotion of arts engagement.

5. KEY THEMES

A number of key themes have emerged which demonstrate considerable consistency in the interview programme, the survey and the focus groups. These are explored in this section of the report. In keeping with the requirements of the Tender Brief a number of Actionable Findings are identified to inform future policy and strategy to enable the ACW to 'address the decline [in arts participation], in particular, with people in lower socio-economic groups and those living in the most deprived communities in Wales.' The key themes are:

5.1. General barriers to participation

At the project inception meeting it was felt that knowledge about conventional barriers to participation was already well developed and that this research would deal more with cultural, perceptual and psychological barriers to participation. However, inevitably discussion about key issues preventing attendance and participation will involve some identification of the role played by some of the more predictable barriers. These are discussed briefly here.

5.1.1. Transport

Whilst transport issues do not feature significantly as a causative factor for those who do not engage with the arts at all, it is a significant factor affecting the frequency of attendance and participation for those who are engaged. Over 10% of respondents who do attend arts activities cited transport issues as the primary reason why they did not attend more frequently than they currently do. In all 16.4% of respondents cited transport issues as the reason for not attending more frequently. Similar views were not evident in the survey in relation to participation but focus group discussions suggest that poor local transport links prevented engagement with local participation opportunities.

Transport barriers to attendance are an issue for urban and valleys urban communities as well as for rural communities. In particular, the absence of early and late evening public transport militates against attendance at even quite local venues. In South Wales, inter-valley transport appears most difficult with inadequate transport links with key venues from neighbouring valley communities which are relatively close in distance. Similar issues have been raised in the rural context where quite small distances may prevent any form of engagement if transport is not available.

> "There is the transport side though too, how are we going to get there."
>
> "Have a bus service every hour- evenings have to drive- could not get to Merthyr- heck of a potch and you could be standing in Merthyr bus station - the last bus is 6 o'clock and its not that healthy."
>
> "The Howardian centre is excellent but tell me about accessibility for that, the last bus, (it's only the no. 2, the Bay circle), is gone before 9.30 when the classes finish." **Focus group members**

Interviews and focus group data reveal that transport (both lack of private transport and poor quality of public transport) is a particularly powerful barrier for people with a disability, for those with small children and for more elderly respondents.

In relationship to attendance at arts events, the organised 'trip' is the most common community-based response to this problem. The dominant pattern is that of an individual or small group in the community self-organising a collective visit to an event in either the nearest city based venue, or further afield to popular shows in London. The emphasis is on popular musical theatre although 'trips' from a remote Merthyr community to the opera have been identified. This approach seems to offer most participants a ready made solution which simply involves them paying for a place on the trip. Ticket purchase and transport hire are dealt with by the organisers. This practice is community driven and reflects interests and tastes within the community.

> "What I find with some groups, like the 'old age' is that they take a group of ladies to see Stan Stenett - and they include a meal and they are willing to pay because they are being fetched - that's right - now if they did that for the opera, they would love to do something probably, but they only give them the programme that they feel will appeal its very popular - its full when they do it." **Focus group member**

The sociability of the event is significant and is a key component of its attraction to participants. This reflects some of the reasons given for both attendance and participation in the survey component of this study, when 7.6% of those who attend arts events cited their attendance with friends and family as a key motivation. Evidence of the importance of the social character of participation activities is also drawn from the focus groups.

> "Have a laugh, it passes the time - some body brings the cakes, we did the arts classes all on one day - a Wednesday - 1 till 3 - came all through the summer holidays even though the class was not there- brought our knitting instead."
>
> "Its very important the social aspect, we all have children so we know why if you're in a bad mood, we all know well enough." **Focus group member**

It is further confirmed by the views of practicing professionals who see the social development of participants in their activities as one of the key outcomes.

> "The reason women participate is often to do for social reasons - social interaction very important - noticed in south riverside project where often the project provided the only means of interaction outside of the home - women find that they are able to make friends."
> **Interviewee**

It is for this reason that this approach has potentially greater impact than venue-driven transport initiatives which are less able to capitalise on the existence of community networks of friends and families to promote successful uptake of transport opportunities. This also points to a theme we will return to in Section 5.4.2 and underpins the need to promote and support activity which is based in the community rather than attempt to introduce activities via external initiatives.

However, the future of this communally driven activity faces pressures from rising ticket costs and the increasing expense of transport hire. Community based organisers of these activities face

increasing risk of personal loss if the numbers needed for viable trips are not achieved. Consequently, there is a need to support such activities.

Actionable Finding: this approach could be formally supported in a number of ways

- Subsidy of ticket and or transport costs

- Free tickets for organiser(s)

- An underwriting of such activities by a Night Out type scheme which would guarantee costs for organisers who fail to fill the places booked.

5.1.2. Community Safety

For some correspondents concerns about community safety appear to be raising barriers to attendance and participation at even very local events. Concerns about personal safety, especially after dark are preventing people leaving their homes. This factor emerged very clearly in the focus group discussions but is less evident in the survey data. This has primarily been reported by older participants in focus groups.

> "Lots of productions are in the evening times - it's not safe to go out - not our age groups." **Focus group member**

Other research by the Programme for Community Regeneration in key areas in South East Wales (e.g. Maerdy, Dowlais, Thornhill Cwmbran, Ynysowen and Rhydyfelin), suggests that this concern about community safety represents a major restraint on after dark activities for many residents. This is true even where crime rates are very low and the risk to personal safety almost non-existent. This wider research also indicates that this insecurity is not limited to elderly persons but also experienced by the young who fear extension of school based bullying in their own communities.

There is also a link here with the absence of public transport to facilitate movement around communities within the public domain. The idea of the 'trip' also has a potential role to play here in providing safe transport in the company of other community members. Additionally, links to more localised patterns of community transport could play a critical role in enabling community members to travel to and from local provision of arts events and opportunities for routine participation in daytime and evening arts based learning activities. Organised transport which removes the sense of vulnerability associated with walking access to activities or use of public transport might provide a means of increasing engagement

Actionable Finding: partnership between community arts providers and community transport providers could contribute directly to the development of transport support for participation in the arts by populations who feel restrained in their movements within their community by community safety concerns.

5.1.3. Cost factors

The evidence derived from the various data sources on the impact of the cost of attendance and participation is not as consistent as in other aspects of the study. This complexity is supported by wider literature on the subject, Gayo Cal (2006) points to the difficulty of assessing cost as a potential barrier, partly due to the fact that impact of cost seems to affect attendance differently for

different arts forms, for instance the impact of cost on cinema going is more definite than the impact of cost on attendance at the opera.

Focus groups rarely raised cost as a major issue and the self-reported level of attendance on community organised trips to arts venues suggested that, even in low-income communities, attendance for participants was relatively frequent. This suggests that there may be cost flexibility if the event is relevant and if arrangements are facilitated by local organisers.

Cost is not a significant factor for those who are not engaged, with only 2.7% of respondents citing it as their primary reason for not attending arts activities. In relation to participation, only 0.4% stated that cost was their primary reason for not participating in the arts. However, for those who are engaged, 22.4% state cost as their primary reason for not attending more frequently. Additionally, 24.2% of respondents state that having more money would encourage them to attend more frequently and 10.4 % said having more money would encourage them to participate more frequently.

Consequently, cost factors do not appear to be a barrier for non-engaged populations. As identified in the Arts in Wales Survey (ACW 2005) lack of interest and low cultural relevance are the primary barriers (see Section 5.2). However, costs do represent a major barrier for greater attendance and participation by those who have a current interest in the arts. It is also reasonable to assume that should the non-engaged become engaged in the future, costs are likely to increase in significance as an influence on their level and frequency of either attendance or participation.

Additionally, both interview and focus group data suggested that cost may have a more significant impact when looking at participation levels of women on low incomes, disabled people on fixed incomes, or when family groups with a number of children either attend or participate in arts activities. When asked if sessions should be initially free (particularly when working in areas experiencing high levels of deprivation or with people in receipt of benefits) many interviewees thought they should if the funding was available.

> "Yes it means that people can just come in and taste it - they don't have to make a commitment-women tend to put their own expressive needs on the back burner they come way down on the list so its just breaking another barrier." **Interviewee**

Actionable Finding: Costs are a significant determinant of continued engagement with the arts for those who are already engaged. Whilst funding of the arts will always raise critical issues relating to subsidy and sustainability, it is important to ensure that costs of participation especially, are not so high to prevent engagement. This is particularly true of threshold activities through which people find entry points to arts engagement. It is here that subsidy may have the greatest impact on future levels of attendance and participation, rather than subsidy of established audiences.

5.1.4. The Impact of funding patterns

For the practicing professionals who were interviewed as part of this study project-based funding systems were seen as a major barrier to the aim of retaining individuals' engagement with the arts. Whilst this is an often repeated complaint within the sector, it is a very real concern and was supported by participants in focus groups who expressed frustration with projects which came to an end without follow though activities. They also experienced gaps in their activities as funding gaps worked through the system. The consequences of time limited funding include:

- The loss of follow through activities which can build on initial participation.

- The loss of a ladder of opportunity which can raise the skill level further.

- The damage caused by gaps in provision between funding rounds leading to disengagement and failure to re-engage when funding becomes available.

- It was felt that opportunities for people to participate were there in many areas but that they were economically fragile.

It was also clear that a considerable amount of funding for community-based arts activities is beyond the control of ACW and is derived from a diverse range of sources including Communities First funding, European Union funding, and community focused Lottery programmes. We also recognise that ACW has established longer-term funding relationships with key providers at community level.

Actionable Finding: ACW should further explore and develop long-term funding partnerships with competent community arts and community development organisations which have demonstrated the ability to deliver arts activities in the long-term. Partners in turn should demonstrate willingness to work with ACW and to share the objective of further developing public participation in the arts. Funding might include non-hypothecated funding which would allow flexibility of provision and the maintenance of groups even through periods when numbers of participants were low. Training of Arts Development Officers in securing funding would also potentially boost the non ACW funding streams which currently contribute significantly to community-arts provision.

5.2. Attitudinal and perceptual barriers to engagement

Although technically attitudinal and perceptual barriers are simply further examples of barriers to engagement with the arts, they are of central concern to this study and have consequently been separated from a discussion of general barriers in recognition of the key role they play in shaping public engagement with the arts. The Arts in Wales Survey (ACW 2005) explored these issues and developed a number of insights which have been reinforced by the results of this study. However, this study has not sought to replicate the Arts in Wales Survey but rather to explore some of the attitudinal issues in greater depth. One area of common enquiry was to ascertain the level of interest respondents have in the arts in Wales. Table 4 compares results between this survey and the Arts in Wales Survey.

Table 4: Levels of interest in artistic activities or events

Level of Interest	Arts in Wales Survey	This survey
Very Interested	16	41
Quite Interested	39	36
A little bit interested	-	15
Not at all interested	17	8

The different levels of interest recorded in the two surveys are largely a result of the exploration in this survey of the **two tier** definition of the arts outlined in Section 4.4. Respondents were encouraged by the interviewer, in their response to the first question on the survey, to provide a definition of the arts which went beyond the initial identification of the 'proper arts' which is how many respondents termed the visual and performing arts. Instead they were able to discuss and

identify with a wider range of activities than presented to them in the Arts in Wales survey. In comparison with the seven activities provided as a prompt in the Arts in Wales survey, respondents to our survey identified forty three activities which they defined as the arts. These forty three categories have been grouped in Table 5 and presented in descending order of occurrence

Table 5: Activities respondents thought of as 'the arts'

Response category	Percentage of respondents
Visual arts	63.7
Performing arts	56.3
Music	50.9
Dance / ballet	20.4
Art galleries & arts centres	17.5
Libraries / museums / exhibitions (general)	11.4
Opera	10.6
Films / cinema / media general	7.0
Literature	6.7
Crafts	6.2
Conceptual replies: e.g. creativity	5.9
Design / architecture	4.9
Creative writing	4.5
Video / Filmmaking / Photography	2.4
Public art	2.2
Cited particular artist	0.9
Singing	0.8
Decorating / fashion	0.8
Computer art	0.4
Eisteddfod	0.3

In moving beyond a definition associated with the core of visual and performing arts respondents were able to include activities they were interested in which might not have been available to respondents in the Arts in Wales Survey. Respondents were able to list their areas of interest, resulting in expressions of interest in more than one arts genre. In this way the survey was able to record quite minority interests to provide a comprehensive review of interest in 'artistic activities or events'. The **'two tier'** definition also has an impact on the levels of attendance and participation reported in Tables 2 and 3 in Section 4.5 of the report, as respondents were able to report a wider range of activities based on their broadened definition of the arts.

In contrast to this significant majority of the population who have some interest in the arts, we have a combined group with 'little' or 'no interest' which constitutes 23% of the survey population; 8% of these have 'no interest' at all. The characteristics of this group show little differentiation between genders. There are no major patterns associated with age other than a dip of approximately 10% in the 'very interested' category in the age range 30-44 years old. The small numbers of respondents from ethnic minorities prevents comparison.

However, this survey confirms previous research findings of lower levels of interest in groups C2DE.

Table 6: Social Classification of those with no interest in the arts.

Level of interest in the arts	Social Grade classification			
	AB	C1	C2	D
Very interested	55.4%	41.3%	29.3%	19.6%
Quite interested	31%	31.2%	37%	46.4%
A little interested	9.9%	17.4%	21.7%	21.4%
Not at all interested	3.8%	10.1%	12%	12.5%

* Note: Classification E has not been reported. Very few respondents fell into this category and percentage comparisons would exaggerate difference with other classes.

Respondents in this disengaged group were also asked to agree with a pre-determined statement which best described their reasons for their lack of interest in the arts. The following responses were recorded (Table 7).

Table 7: Response to survey prompted reasons for lack of interest in the arts

Reasons for lack of interest in the arts	Percentage of respondents not or only little bit interested (n=140)
'I am interested in other activities'	66.1
'Arts activities are boring'	11.0
'I don't understand them'	8.7
'I would feel out of place'	7.9
'I don't fit in with people who go to arts activities'	6.3

However, when provided with an open ended response in which they could describe their own reasons for their lack of interest in the arts, a more detailed response was achieved (Table 8). Here the 'lack of interest' category features significantly as the primary reason and reflects the findings of the Arts in Wales Survey (ACW 2005) and the more recent National Survey of Culture Leisure and Sport, 'Taking Part', currently being undertaken by BMRB research for the DCMS (2007). Additionally Gayo-Cal, in a recent cross comparison of survey findings into leisure participation in the UK, finds that the most common reason for not participating more is 'lack of interest or dislike' . He writes that,

"Most of those who do not attend regularly do so because they have no interest in the activity, rather than for reasons of cost." (2006:179)

Additionally, 'lack of time' and 'other commitments' are major reasons for lack of interest, which reinforces the **engagement career** model outlined in Section 4.3.

Table 8: Self-reported reasons why respondents had little or no interest in the arts

Respondents reasons why they had little or no interest in the arts	Percentage of respondents
Lack interest	23.1
Lack of Time	16.7
Other commitments	10.3
Lack of confidence	6.4
Never experienced / no info	6.4
Poor perception:	6.4
Opportunity	5.1
Other interests	5.1
Poor Health/Disability	3.9
Definition	3.9
Lazy / no motivation	3.8
Age:	2.5
A bit involved but that's enough	2.5
Locality: not on doorstep	1.3
Lack of Talent	1.3
Money	1.3

This survey data and discussions in the focus groups suggest that some of the conventional and stereotypical explanations for non-engagement with the arts are not supported by this study. There is little evidence here of attitudes which see the arts as elitist, inaccessible or difficult to understand. This may in part derive from the broad conception of the arts employed by respondents. However, in the focus groups participants were more likely to discuss their engagement with the arts in terms of **relevance** to them and their lifestyles.

This concept of **relevance** provides a more nuanced understanding of why focus group participants were not engaged with the 'proper arts' as they saw them. They felt the arts defined in this narrow way had no connection with their life experience and cultural interests. It was not that they did not like them or could not understand them but simply they could not connect culturally with them or see their relevance to their social experience. In contrast there was constant reference, in South Wales focus groups, to the plays of Frank Vickery as mirroring their lives and social experience.

> "Go to see Les Miserables - and used to have dramas in Cymmer- Frank Vickery - he's a good laugh - he has our sense of humour - typical Rhondda humour - we know who he is."
> **Focus group member**

Similar views were expressed about musical theatre which was the entertainment of choice for a clear majority of focus group participants. The popular music shows connected through spectacle and music and provided major opportunities for social engagement with friends and family. Attendance at such events was a communal activity rather than one of individual consumption (see section 5.1.1).

There are complex policy and strategy implications of this discussion of attitudinal and perceptual factors. In essence, two population groups can be identified.

- **The engaged:** a significant majority of the population with an interest in a broadly defined concept of the arts and creativity. This group both attends and participates in the arts to varying degrees. For the majority engagement is limited by financial considerations, competing work, social and family responsibilities and the balancing of their arts interest with other interests.

- **The disengaged:** a core section of approximately a fifth of the population who have little or no interest in the arts. They are not constrained by financial or other competing factors but simply find no relevance for them in arts activities.

The easy option for policy and strategy is to work more intensively with the first group to ease the restraints on the level of their engagement to promote both greater attendance and participation in the arts. Their interest is relatively easy to capitalise on and there are relatively straightforward mechanisms which could develop further their engagement. Hayes & Slater (2002) support this view. When looking at audience development projects they propose that arts organisations should concentrate on strengthening the franchise with existing arts audiences rather than pursuing the 'missionary approach' to audience development, which they saw as both less productive, more resource intensive and as a higher risk strategy. Some of the Actionable Findings in this study address this approach and point to potentially major gains in public engagement with the arts from within this already interested section of the population.

In contrast, the major challenge for policy and strategy is the second group. The evidence from this study suggests that conventional barriers of cost, accessibility, and availability are not as critical as the socio-cultural factors which determine the perception that the arts have no relevance to this group. Significantly for this core group of non-attenders, 51.7% stated that 'nothing' would encourage them to attend arts events and similarly for non-participants, 44.4% felt that 'nothing' would encourage them to get involved with the arts in the future. The primary task in promoting greater engagement by this group is the development of motivation and opportunities to experience the arts in order to challenge the perception of their irrelevance. Approaches to this difficult task are identified in Section 5.4.

Actionable Finding: Consideration should be given by ACW in its Communication Strategy to the ways in which the arts are presented to ensure that the image of the arts conveyed is not limited to the 'high' arts but reflects the **two tier** public definition discussed in this report. This will assist the public to more easily identify the potential relevance of a wide range of activities.

5.3. The role of arts venues and facilities

The role of arts venues and facilities has emerged in this study as a major determinant of arts engagement. Clearly the existence of a well located venue, accessible by public transport, can do much to raise the level of opportunity to attend arts events, exhibitions and performances. Additionally, a major venue can offer economies of scale and critical mass of participants which is more able to support specialist facilities. One focus group had been creating in ceramics but were forced to stop when their only available kiln in a local school closed for the summer break. The role of a venue is also enhanced when it develops outreach mechanisms which go beyond its immediate social and geographical borders to engage and involve the section of the population described in Section 5.2 as the disengaged.

This valuable role for a venue with a clear philosophy of outreach and community development is confirmed by its absence in other areas. The lack of a major arts venue in Merthyr Tydfil is credited by the local ADO as a major factor in the difficulties of promoting arts engagement in the area.

Whilst numerous participative groups exist in the area they meet in separate facilities and demonstrate an insularity, both in terms of group membership and the art forms participants tend to engage with. He describes a process where participants stick with their known activities, often staying with a group at the same level of achievement for many years. They fail to cross social and genre boundaries to try new activities. He feels that a venue would offer inevitable exposure to other groups and other practices which would break down such barriers, simply by the increased contact generated by attendance in a multi-purpose facility.

This view is supported by views expressed in the focus groups. One Abergavenny group was able to point to its member's direct involvement in a number of theatre and cinema based projects originating from the two theatres in the town. They painted a picture of a vibrant community of arts enthusiasts promoted by the theatres. These activities extended to disabled arts groups and into youth theatre in local schools. The theatre operated as a hub of activity promoting satellite activities throughout the community. In contrast an Aberfan based focus group discussed at length the lack of opportunities to attend arts events and to participate in arts activities in the wider area of Merthyr Tydfil. They outlined a decline in local opportunities to participate as very local venues had closed over recent years.

The value of a venue is also reinforced by our earlier observations that participation is most likely to be promoted by previous participation (Section 4.1.1). The ability of arts venues to provide direct participation in taster sessions and opportunities to try different activities is a clear path to increasing participation by the already engaged. There is also a clear role for such activities in working with the most disengaged to provide low threshold activities which begin to challenge the perception that arts have no cultural relevance. In our **two tier** definition of the arts, acts of creativity can be found in craft activities and simple skills based activities which can act as pre-cursors to more directly artistic achievements. (See Section 5.4)

Evidence of the major potential of an arts venue to increase engagement is also clearly derived from one of our five Case Studies, Galeri in Caernafon. (See Appendix 1 for full details). Key features of the case study include:

- Its mission to develop artistic and creative activities throughout the North Wales region.

- Its intention to act as a 'centre point' in relation to further hubs of activity in its hinterland.

- Its promotion of a wide ranging portfolio of arts activities and events within well resourced and high quality facilities.

- An approach which mixes 'higher' arts with 'popular' events.

- A clear focus on young people through its Sparc and Cwmni Cofis Bach music project for 7-11 year olds.

- Active relationships with six Communities First wards to support community and arts development in the community.

- Innovative practices such as the Pas Pobol Peblig offering free places to the Peblig Communities First ward.

- Galeri also points to the role of community enterprise in developing income sources to support arts activities

The cross fertilisation of activities between the sixteen organisations housed in Galeri has been important in developing this major portfolio of innovative engagement strategy.

This discussion illustrates the value of well funded and resourced arts venues for the provision of opportunities for both attendance and participation. However, such resource intensive provision constitutes a level of investment which cannot be replicated in all areas. Such developments are inevitably regional in scope and scale. However, the **hub and spoke model,** suggested by the discussion above, points to a way to maximise the impact of regional arts centres and venues. The creation of such centres of excellence working closely with small venues and community facilities in their wider hinterland provides a potential route for maximising public contact with quality arts provision. Many community venues already provide effective arts experiences often as a vehicle for community development. More formal linkages with regional centres will improve quality, maximise impact and ensure higher levels of engagement by linking local venues into national and regional programmes of activity including touring exhibitions and productions. These issues are addressed in an Actionable Finding in the following Section (5.3.1)

5.3.1. The role of community venues

This approach places considerable expectations on the ability of local community venues to provide quality arts experiences. Working in partnership with a hub venue they would be required to offer both events and opportunities for participation. Their real value lies in the opportunities they provide for people to experience creative practice within their own community.

> "We try to do it in a venue where people are already comfortable, i.e. a youth café or a leisure centre - the young people are already happy there, then we only have to over come the barrier to arts, its just the activity that's new and we can take that out to venues, again people are comfortable in that environment and the activity is available to them so if they want to take part they can." **Interviewee**

We have seen ample evidence of this happening during our focus group and case studies research. Local venues are often familiar to potential participants and as such are not as daunting in the way that walking into a theatre or dance studio can be. Interviewees often recognised the importance of localness and familiarity of venue in terms of encouraging participation

An additional advantage of this approach which can be learned from adult learning initiatives such as the Gates project in Merthyr Tydfil is that low threshold activities in safe and easily accessible community venues can provide entry points to higher levels of engagement in regional centres. Such experiences not only enhance the arts practice and participation of individuals but also impact on their competence in wider arenas such as education and the labour market. These links were clearly identified in examining the regenerative role of the arts for the Hand In Hand Report for the ACW (ACW 2007).

This pattern is exemplified by our Case Study of CARAD (Community Arts Rhayader and District: see Appendix 1 for full details). CARAD is a community cultural organisation which grew from a community theatre project in 1989. From an initial project a local group sought funding for a community play involving professional support with a playwright, director, designer, musical director and choreographer. Key features of the development evolving from this process include:

- Community skills development in all aspects of theatre performance and production.

- Development of related skills in fund raising, health and safety and marketing.

- The involvement of 125 local people in performance and 120 people in production roles.

- The continued development of CARAD to operate two buildings offering drama studio, music and recording facilities and office space.

- The development of CARAD as a major local employer.

Actionable Finding. Further exploration of the hub and spoke model and the creation of a small number of demonstration projects could validate the approach suggested here (and in Section 5.3) and create models of best practice. The Galeri example is distinct and not entirely replicable elsewhere. Similarly, CARAD has emerged from specific local circumstances which could not be replicated in all community based venues. However, key features of the hub and spoke approach illustrated by these case studies can be adapted to local conditions and form the basis for strong platforms for increased arts engagement.

5.4. Routes to engagement and participation

One of the primary concerns of this study is to understand some of the reasons for declining levels of participation in the arts and the development of actions which can increase participation and engagement. During the course of the study a number of issues have emerged which relate to what we have termed 'routes to engagement'. It is evident that the different attitudes and perceptions individuals have are in part a consequence of their personal experience of the arts. An understanding of experiences which promote and reinforce an interest in the arts and creativity can inform the design of interventions that attempt to replicate those experiences for other. This study has identified a number of factors which inform a discussion of routes to participation.

5.4.1. Early life experience

Initial evidence from the focus groups and interviews suggested that early school and youth experience of participation might be important in forming attitudes to participation in later life. Respondents in the Ynyshir focus group detailed the multiple opportunities for participation available in their youth in the 1950s and 1960s. These included school based drama, local brass bands and orchestras and diverse activities in local youth organisations such as the Boys Clubs. This view was further supported in several of the interviews when practitioners expressed a view of the value of early life experience. For example, a school-based project in Flintshire in 2005/6 worked with schools on the theme of legends and folktales to produce a book, Land of Stories. In 2006/7 the theme was visual arts and it will be the performing arts in 2007/8.

Youth engagement can also work outside the school arena. In Powys, a project, On the Bandwagon, delivered a 'youth music industry project' familiarising young people with the skills and requirements of working in the music industry. Following a poor take up in schools and youth facilities the project worked directly with young people in bands to deliver 32 learning modules on skills required for success in the music industry.

In the wider literature Borgonovi (2004) states that the receipt of arts education has some correlation with levels of participation in later life. Kracman (1996) finds that schools' provision of exposure to the arts has a significant effect on students' long-term cultural orientation, independent of measures of family influence, whilst Barton (2004) cites adolescent experience as a major determinant of future arts engagement

The anecdotal evidence provided by interviewees also suggested that arts participation seems to have a more naturally integrated place in Welsh speakers' lives because of the extra curricula activities of Welsh medium education and links with the activities of organisations such as the Urdd and local and national eisteddfodau. This anecdotal view could provide explanation for the high levels of engagement amongst those who 'speak Welsh' or 'understand spoken Welsh' in the Welsh Language Cluster demographics identified by the Arts in Wales Survey. Our survey supports this view and demonstrates a correlation between competence in the Welsh language and interest in the arts. Of respondents who reported 'speaking Welsh, 48.9% also reported being 'very interested

in the arts'. In contrast, 34.9% of those who reported having no Welsh speaking ability were 'very interested in the arts.

Table 9: Welsh Language use and interest in the arts

Level of interest in the arts	Speak Welsh	Understand Spoken Welsh	Read Welsh	Write Welsh	None of the above
Very interested	48.9%	48.3%	51.3%	53.6%	34.9%
Quite interested	34.3%	32.7%	35.0%	35.1%	38%
A little interested	9.9%	12.2%	9.4%	7.2%	18.1%
Not at all interested	6.9 %	6.8%	4.3%	4.1%	9.0%

5.4.2. Community development and arts engagement

There is also considerable evidence from the research that direct experience of participation offered by 'taster' type sessions is a frequent entry route for individuals into participation. Most of the ADOs interviewed have referred to the value of this approach and the experience from Galeri and CARAD supports this view. There is a parallel here with the sphere of adult education where low levels of engagement are tackled by providing informal opportunities for learning which are not packaged as courses but rather, enjoyable events. This approach identifies 'low threshold' activities which overcome the low confidence and resistance to learning by providing 'learning by doing' opportunities that bear no resemblance to school and other negative educational experiences. There is considerable opportunity in arts activities to replicate this approach and provide informal opportunities to experience first hand artistic activity in all genres.

This discussion points to the importance of having the opportunity to build on an individual's 'cultural capital' whether this be in childhood or at a later point in adulthood. The role of early arts / cultural education, whether formal or informal, experienced via institutions such as the school or via the family, seems vital. Community-based organisations can provide such experience where school and family fail.

> "Childhood experience is fundamental to the adult perception of what they can or can't do. Family support or some other sort of institutional support is important in keeping the young person engaged and having opportunities to expand experience." **Interviewee**

The provision of accessible, informal, local opportunity throughout the various life stages allows people to, either first engage and recognise their own creativity, or to continue to engage and explore creative activity that has relevance to their own lives. This enables the expansion of cultural capital at an individual level across a wider section of the population.

> "You need to have a lot of things on offer - formal and informal opportunities - if people choose not to go that is fine also - you need provision of an all round programme, the vast majority of people will choose the more accessible but you also have to work hard to make things accessible." **Interviewee**

This suggests the value of a strong linkage being created between community development activities and arts activities in Wales. This has previously been referred to in the Hand in Hand (ACW 2007) report and close ties between community development activities and communities arts activities is of benefit both to general community engagement in the regeneration process as well as the promotion of arts participation.

Further illustration of the value of this relationship is evident in work brought to our attention during interviews with practicing arts development officers. In Denbighshire, for example, there is an active relationship with the Communities First Partnerships and a wide range of taster sessions and workshops being delivered in Communities First areas. In Rhyl this process has involved youth and 50+ age groups. It has also supported an artistic approach to a local history project and aided residents to design a new play area.

This value of the relationship between the arts and community development is clearly exemplified by our case study of The Pembroke Dock Midsummer Festival which combines a community based approach with the development of a major arts festival. The festival provides carnival and live-music events, a Night Out Theatre production, a beer festival, a family day, street procession and finale concert. Key features of the project include;

- A strong partnership base between local residents, the Llanion Communities First Partnership, Pembroke Dock Town Council and Planed the Narbeth based development trust.

- The creation of a programme of activities based on 'enthusiasms' arising from the community.

- The generation of community interest and participation in a wide range of organisational activities.

- A growing attendance pattern culminating in a successful 2007 event

This case study demonstrates the value of harnessing activities within the community and responding to community interests and enthusiasms. This links with points made in Section 5.1.1 about enabling and facilitating community organised trips. Such approaches which build on existing community activities are more likely to be successful than initiatives developed externally and promoted by organisations that have poor connections with the community. This is most critical in disadvantaged communities.

Actionable Finding. This discussion points to the major role of approaches which provide experience of arts practice in informal and non-challenging environments. This is clearly already reflected in much of the community based arts activities in Wales and is perhaps most notable in the engagement with young people in a host of initiatives. Community development settings will provide the most accessible contexts for this level of activity and modes of operation should be further explored in relation to the most difficult to reach groups. In particular, in addition to local provision of opportunities to participate, the importance of having pro-active, energetic and dedicated development personnel available at local level is a critical ingredient of this approach. Strong links between arts development activities and community development programmes will constitute a major component of any attempt to improve arts engagement by disadvantaged communities. Such approaches are best able to challenge the perceptions that arts are irrelevant by providing direct experience of arts activities at community level. This is not solely an ACW responsibility and again underlines the need for active and reciprocal partnership between ACW and relevant community arts and community development organisations.

5.4.3. Creativity and arts participation

The two tier definition of arts referred to throughout this report has suggested a distinction made by the public between formal or 'high' arts and more general creative activities. The evidence from this study suggests that it is a sense of creative expression which most resonates with the public and that opportunities for general creativity provide an entry point for people who would not usually become engaged with the 'arts', which they see as separate from them and practiced by gifted or skilled people.

For many members of the focus groups their initial and current participation was at a craft level with low entry skills required. There were groups engaged in knitting, sewing, painting, papier mache sculpture, card-making, and pottery. The respondents gave a strong sense of achievement they felt from even very limited skills acquisition. They had experienced a sense of creativity which they had not thought possible for them. They were interested in developing this initial discovery and moving forwards into higher levels of skill and creativity.

> "I started knitting and making cards and knick-knacks, because I was involved with the parents association about two years ago, it's the first creative thing I have done since I was in the brownies." **Focus group member**
>
> "We approach people in a range of different ways - don't title the project as Arts- its is all about creative expression I think - that's what it all boils down to and art seems to be more putting pressure on people - if you say 'creative expression' everyone has the ability to be creative and to express themselves and nobody judges." **Interviewee**

Recognition of the role of such activities in promoting a 'bedrock' of creativity at community level is essential and funding of such activities in sustainable and consistent ways is a necessary ingredient of increasing public participation at a higher level of artistic endeavour. The issue of funding is a critical one for the ACW. Currently much of such activity is funded by community development and regeneration processes and consistently targets poorer communities. This has a beneficial effect on raising participation levels amongst the most disadvantaged members of Welsh society. Similarly TNS (2006) also reported a rise in arts engagement in Scotland's most deprived communities.

However, tensions between the requirements of 'quality' and 'quantity' make it difficult for ACW to fund such activities and the difficulty of establishing a **funding boundary** is raised. To what extent can the Arts Council move funding towards activities which are best described as creative rather than more conventionally recognised arts provision? In interviews a view has emerged which sees the involvement of a recognised, community-based artist as a useful boundary for ACW involvement. Group facilitation by a practicing artist in all genres, from painting to dance and sculpture to photography, marks a distinction between groups engaged in skills acquisition and those moving beyond that into artistic creativity.

Actionable Finding: However, we have suggested here that it is essential to recognise the role of the more skills based, craft style provision in promoting entry into higher levels of creativity. This should be recognised by the ACW and active relationships developed with agencies, community groups, and individuals who promote this level of activity. Again this points to the ACW being involved in community development partnerships especially with Communities First partnerships as they move into a more focused and target related Communities Next Phase.

5.4.4. Reasons why people engage with the arts

In the survey the main reasons respondents gave for engagement with the arts were:

- Enjoyment

- Interest

- Social reasons

- Supporting a family member (usually children)

- Appreciation of a particular art form

Enjoyment is by far the main reason for attendance (58.9%) and is the most common of the reasons cited for participation (27.4%). This finding is in line with much of the existing literature on the issue (ACW 2005; Bunting 2007). Bunting (2007) describes the main reasons that respondents gave for engaging with arts activities as

> "The desire for fun, relaxation or excitement; to escape the pressures or tedium of day to day working life; to experience some thing unusual, uplifting or surprising; and for the opportunity to learn something new" (2007:8)

Further to this Bunting describes an emphasis on the social aspect of participation, friendship and sharing experiences (See also Section 5.1.1), and writes that for many participants engagement with the arts offered a chance to express themselves and an important part of their personal identity.

Focus group data concurred with these findings and also revealed an additional factor, that engaging with the arts is a way for many people to get some time both to and for themselves.

> "It's a private experience, I have a young child and I know it sounds horrible but it gives me a break, Monday mornings are my mornings."
>
> "I find the groups inspirational, when you get to know them and can relax, I have friends to talk to, it's a set time for me to do that thing, rather than go home and think that there are so many other things to do." **Focus Group members**

This study also points to factors that support the retention of participation. Activities have to be informal enough, particularly at threshold level to allow for the elements of enjoyment and sociability to come through and whilst activities can be challenging, they should also not be too daunting. Focus group data reveals informality of classes as an important element in the retention of participants

The language used to both describe and publicise activities is an important element of presenting activities as do-able. As discussed in earlier sections (Section 4.4), terms associated with the 'proper arts' can have an alienating effect.

Interview data makes it clear that getting rid of as many barriers as possible will help create equity of opportunity and encourage people to engage with arts, this may include providing childcare, translators, providing transport plus less tangible efforts such as the creation of comfortable,

familiar and 'non threatening ' environments. A lot of these factors can be planned for in advance of a project and costs written into funding bids. Jermyn (2004) in 'The Art of Inclusion' covers all of these points and advocates that research and planning processes be built into all projects. Similarly Hassan (2004) provides a ten-point plan and guiding principles to cover the processes involved in planning for and delivering successful arts based projects. The Unusual Stage School provides an example where these processes were employed particularly successfully.

In terms of progression through activity levels, interview data suggests that it is best to engage individuals at levels with which they are comfortable and then to progress, possibly via a series of projects, to further experimentation and widening of the experience of the art form.

> "Start with the one thing initially and then try to introduce a different thing - say to them why don't you come and do this - sometimes with the dance stuff in the theatre we also offer a workshop so people can try it out and they get to see the performance, they get a chance to do something different and most people jump at the chance if it is given to them."
> **Interviewee**

5.4.5. Role of County Arts Development Officers

The funding of local authority hosted County Arts Development Officers by the ACW has already begun to meet the requirements of supporting community level creativity identified in Section 5.4.3. This research has identified a wide range of projects developed from this funding route, from the extensive provision of the Creative Communities strategy in Rhondda Cynon Taff, the festival based strategy in Pembrokeshire and to more localised examples such as the extensive links with Health Service facilities in Denbighshire. The scope and scale of activity emerging from this infrastructure of county level support suggest that this has been a very positive contribution to the development of engagement with the arts, especially in deprived communities. Officers interviewed have suggested the following key functions they perform:

- CADOs do an enormous amount of 'connecting' and 'linking' work, bringing artists into contact with other artists and with community organisations. They often say they are able to gain a privileged overview of all the things happening across the county and to see various opportunities to make connections and generate synergy. One described herself as a *"bank of information"* for people and organisations. Another said they help by "doing many of the things that people don't like to do" but which are essential to making things happen in practice.

- They provide a point of contact for artists to talk about new and developing projects, and without that there would be a loss of strategic thinking and coordinated initiatives across the county.

- Local artists benefit from the career development opportunities they are able to make accessible to them, including employment and funding opportunities. Some CADOs gave examples of the way they connect artists who have special talents with community initiatives that can hugely benefit from them.

- The internal influence that the Arts Service has on other parts of the local authority is very important. Many CADOs have developed strong and creative connections with social services, recreation and countryside and other departments. One said the *"creative buzz and ideas generation within the council would be lost."*

However, this view is not universally shared. For some arts practitioners the local authority is too rigid a structure to promote arts activities and is pushed towards politically 'safe' outcomes.

> "They seem to more focussed on the success of the semi- professional groups than the opportunity to work with people - they want success stories don't they - there is also something about ownership isn't there - a lot of the local authority way of thinking is to brand it as local authority with their logo on it" **Interviewee**

> "Communication needs to be improved - its not just us - community arts is historically political and it's kind of easier to have a show piece of Romeo and Juliet in a theatre rather than having some sort of controversial stuff coming out of a housing estate. It's not easy for the politician to stand there and watch that. They choose to put their money there where it's a guaranteed success not some kind of a criticism, a group of young single mum's saying it - it becomes more political." **Interviewee**

Wider literature confirms the requirement for effective communication, Evans & Shaw (2004) write that

> " .. the fact that the local authorities and partnership bodes responsible for regeneration schemes are rarely structured to facilitate collaboration between staff responsible for regeneration and for cultural activity and they may not naturally think of themselves as collaborators" (2004:2.)

Actionable Finding: The evidence from this study points to a significant contribution to public engagement with the arts deriving from the work of the CADOs. This route to participation should be maintained and developed. As always there are greater opportunities for networking between these officers and for better dissemination of good practice and the ACW can take the lead in this and developing further training opportunities for county arts development teams.

5.4.6. Role of Umbrella Organisations

The role of key organisations such as VAW and WACA can be critical in providing support for local groups to develop and increase local levels of participation. The existence of a strong support sector can provide mechanisms of direct support, dissemination of good practice and personal development for the staff they engage with in client organisations. Most respondents have spoken about their past links with VAW and recognised their diminished capacity in recent years.

> "we get emails every now and then but not really - would it be useful - possibly but I don't know - the real value was the training that they used to provide - funding etc - they used to have development officers which they don't seem to now." **Interviewee**

Generally, relationships between ADOs and either WACA or VAW appear to be limited, with many ADOs reporting having little or no contact with either VAW or WACA.

However, for many arts groups working with a partner from within the community arts field is preferable to working with local authority based ADO and it is important that such a choice exists.

> "The difficulty is the dialogue - understanding - different headsets - we are not saying arts for arts sake - we are not drama group - we are not putting on a musical so the understanding is not really there " **Interviewee**

There is a clear sense in which the work of umbrella organisations such as WACA and VAW is an important complementary element to the local authority development teams. They provide different models of working and are each equipped to respond to different needs in the arts and wider communities. However, it is important that they work closely together and avoid any sense of competition, overlap and duplication.

Actionable Finding: There is a need to build and maintain a network of relationships:

- Between ACW and the voluntary arts bodies

- Between Community artists, VAW and WACA and local authorities ADOs:

- Between ADOs and other departments within Local Authorities (especially community regeneration, and other agencies such as health trusts)

The example of the Gwynedd Arts Forum seems to demonstrate how good relationships can be developed and maintained. For example, the Forum has been able to prepare a strategy for the area and is now looking to draw up an action plan from this. It also organises the annual Gwynedd Arts Month. VAW were instrumental in the early development of the Forum and continued to provide support. This points to the value of strategic partnerships operating at regional level and is in keeping with the recommendations of the Stephens Report (WAG 2006).

5.4.7. New Technology Routes to Engagement

Although this research has not specifically investigated the relationship between new technology and levels of arts engagement one of our case studies points directly to ways of reaching both new participants and audiences for digital storytelling. The Yale Centre for Digital Storytelling is based in Yale College, Wrexham and developed from a relationship with the BBC Capture Wales project. Initially developed to provide digital storytelling opportunity for F.E students, the programme now targets general members of the public. Key features of the programme point to the potential for new technologies to promote participation including with traditionally difficult to reach groups:

- The project is exploring new form of narrative delivery including mobile phone capture with its potential appeal to young people.

- The project is linking digital storytelling with academic awards in Further Education and is offering BTec and National Diploma course in digital storytelling.

- The Centre is working externally with Communities First partnerships via a £20,000 award from Communities@One the WAG Digital Inclusion Initiative

The production of digital stories is part of a slough of nascent creative forms, which amalgamate, new technology, filmmaking, photography, music, story and social purpose. These activities cut across boundaries in the arts, democratising the process of media making and demonstrating the ability to attract groups who may not be attracted to more conventional literary and arts based activities.

5.4.8. Working with diversity

In the interviews and case studies we have identified some of the excellent work in Wales which addresses the needs of diverse groups. These vary from the support required by people with a disability to the adaptation of conventional ways of working to diverse cultural and ethnic groups. There is no 'one size fits all' approach to arts participation which can ensure the engagement of all sections of the population. Rather, participation requires flexibility and adaptation to the specific circumstances of individuals, groups and communities. Organisations working with diverse groups stressed their ability to assist the ACW reach wider constituencies.

Our Case Study of the Unusual Stage School provides a clear illustration of the benefits of working with groups with disability and the gains that could be made by individuals and the corresponding impact on levels of participation in groups which experience additional barriers to those experienced by the wider population. Key features of the Unusual Stage School are:

- It provides residential learning which ensures that the access and support needs of participants can be fully met.

- It is skills based training designed to equip participants for performance.

- The provision provides experience of performance with productions at Theatre Mwldan and Grand Theatre Swansea.

- The course provided 12 student places.

- There is an emphasis on the quality of outcomes as well as skills acquisition.

6. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This research has responded to the following aims identified in the briefing document:

- Assess the reasons for the decline in arts participation in Wales.

- Explore the issues that inhibit active engagement with the arts.

- Identify opportunities for broadening access to the arts for all socio- economic groups, in particular the lower C2DE social group and those living in Wales' most deprived areas.

- Provide examples of good practice where broader engagement has been facilitated.

The discussion in Section 5 of the report identifies a complex range of factors which influence and impact on the levels of public participation in the arts in Wales. In summary, this research has identified a number of significant conclusions:

- **The process of economic change experienced in Wales since the 1980s has led to a demise of key socio-cultural institutions associated particularly with mining and agriculture leading to a loss of opportunities for public participation in the arts.**

  Much of the loss of traditional opportunities for participation has been experienced by young individuals who are now adults reporting non-participation in the arts.

- **The rise of poverty and social exclusion in the 1980s and 1990s has led to a general disengagement with civil society by the most disadvantaged social groups.**

  The corrosive effect of long-term unemployment, high levels of economic activity and social exclusion leads to cultural change with higher crime levels and substance misuse as two highly visible consequences. Less visible are youth and peer cultures characterised by low aspiration and lack of engagement with education, health promotion, sport and leisure and the general civic life of the community. Arts participation is a clear casualty of this general pattern of exclusion and disengagement.

- **The public operates a two tier definition of the arts which distinguishes between the 'proper' arts and more general creative activities.**

  This suggests that the terminology of arts promotion and development is critical and the term 'arts' has an alienating effect for a significant proportion of the public. The term' creativity' has greater resonance with the public and facilitates their consideration of a wider range of activities which range from craft and skills acquisition to higher levels of creative expression.

- **There is a high level of interest in the arts when broadly defined and associated high levels of both attendance and participation.**

  Despite the evidence of declining participation, current levels are considerably higher than in comparable areas of public engagement such as adult and continuing education. This suggests fertile ground for the development of participation.

- **There is a small core group which has no or little interest in the arts and does not attend or participate. It is lack of interest which prevents participation rather than conventional barriers to participation.**

Consequently, for the disengaged it is 'lack of interest' which is the primary barrier to arts participation and conventional barriers such as cost are more associated with those who are already engaged.

- **That core group does not identify any action or support which would improve their interest in the arts or promote their participation, even in the broadly defined 'creativity' identified by the wider sample.**

  This group represents the most challenging section of the population in which to increase arts participation. Much of the discussion above has identified the value of low threshold entry points and a community development approach to arts participation. Working with key partners in the community development sector and in particular with the Communities First process represents an approach with the greatest likelihood of success.

- **Those who are engaged report a number of barriers to further participation which include cost, transport, access to venues and competing demands for their time and resources.**

  Promotion of greater participation in the arts is most likely to be successful with this engaged majority who report a number of barriers to greater participation which are susceptible to improvement by existing established strategies.

- **Most individuals develop an engagement career which reflects different levels of participation and attendance at different life stages. This career generally includes potentially extended periods of disengagement.**

  The pattern of engagement determined by life stages is complex but points to key ways to facilitate participation by supporting wider needs for caring roles and by recognising the competing demands for time and personal resources.

- **A key feature of the engagement career is early school and youth experience of participation which has a positive influence on levels of participation in later life.**

  Provision of well-funded school and youth experience of the arts is likely to promote a continuity of arts participation at the individual level or alternatively a return to arts activities at later life stages. Central to this is the provision of clear progression routes which allow individuals to develop their capabilities and sample a range of genres.

- **Consistent and long-term funding for community-based arts participation is essential to create a ladder of opportunity for those who engage.**

  Time limited and project based initiatives prevent progression and limit engagement career development. Funding of skill and craft levels of creativity raise critical questions about the funding boundary for the ACW and point to the need for stable partnerships with competent organisations able to provide, long-term effective opportunities for arts participation at community level.

These characteristics of the public engagement with art have prompted ten **Actionable Findings**. These are summarised here but it is recommended that they are read in context in the main report.

- Support for community organised 'trips' to arts events.

- Promoting partnership between community arts and community transport providers.

- Ensuring that costs are not a major barrier to participation especially for threshold activities.

- That ACW develops long-term funding partnerships with competent community arts and community development organisations which in turn accept and develop their partnership role to achieve greater public participation in the arts.

- That ACW reviews the terminology of the arts to recognise the two tier public perception of arts and public affinity with creativity and reflect this in its Communication Strategy.

- That ACW explores the hub and spoke model suggested here which links regional venues with community venues to replicate the recognised value of venues in promoting participation.

- That opportunities for non-threatening and threshold level experience of the arts are fully promoted and developed by ACW and a wide range of partner organisations.

- That ACW recognises the craft and skills level of creative expression as an entry point for engagement career development and develops partnerships that can promote this level of activity.

- That ACW should maintain and develop its support of the local authority based Arts Development Officers.

- That ACW strengthens its relationship with umbrella organisations and develops a network of relationships between community artists, VAW, WACA and the county based Arts Development Officers.

Collectively, these suggest ways of working and the development of partnerships between ACW and key community organisations which promote a bedrock of creativity at community level and lend support and facilitation to activities which exist at community level. The intention is to create a ladder of development which moves individuals from craft and skills based practice to higher levels of creativity and artistic expression. We believe that this is the only mechanism which can effectively engage the most socially excluded sections of society and challenge their perception that the arts have no relevance to their lives.

This suggests a strategic directional move for ACW to develop strong links with the wider community development process and regeneration policies of the WAG. The Communities First programme and its next stage of development as Communities Next is a critical entry point for ACW to engage with the most disadvantaged groups in Wales.

This potentially develops a dual approach for ACW:

- Maintaining its sponsorship and development of national companies, venues and productions in the musical, visual and performing arts.

- Developing a widespread and embedded platform of community activity which moves the level of engagement in the arts upwards. This will promote direct participation through a continuum of creative activities which start with simple skills acquisition and progress to high levels of artistic creativity.

In addition to these two key roles some of the findings of this report point to an **advocacy role** which brings the attention of government and public agencies to the barriers to arts participation which lie outside of the control of ACW but which have a clear impact on the ability of the public to participate. We have identified here issues of public transport, community safety, and the availability of community facilities. This is in keeping with the advocacy and facilitation role identified for the ACW in the Stephens report and the proposals in this report provide a range of potential mechanisms for rapidly developing this innovative developmental role.

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