



Creative learning through the arts

Arts Council of Wales

Re-setting the dial

Responding to Covid-19



Cyngor Celfyddydau Cymru
Arts Council of Wales



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Foreword

Covid-19 has had an unprecedented impact on our economy, our culture and our way of life. Overnight, this global pandemic led to the suspension of all public activities and a collapse in the living and working environment for everybody.

It's now clear that the arts will be one of the last sectors to re-emerge fully from 'lockdown' and social distancing restrictions. This is having a worrying impact on the financial resilience of organisations and of creative freelancers. Our task, therefore, is to get to grips with the challenges that we now face and develop positive responses that protect and sustain the sector. This means working with our stakeholders, partners and those working in the arts to agree specific actions that respond with imagination, practicality and openness to the Covid-19 crisis.

Many of you have already contacted us to suggest things that you think we should be doing. Your thoughts and ideas have been enormously helpful, even if the number of proposals has been a little daunting. Nevertheless, as we work our way through them it seems appropriate to share with you the range of issues that we're currently considering.

This paper isn't a strategy – that will come in the weeks ahead. Instead, we want to reflect back some of what we've been hearing. And as we plan future programmes of work, we'd be interested to know what you think. Do let me know.

Finally, I want to take this opportunity to offer my sincere good wishes as you grapple with the challenges that Covid-19 continues to throw at us. There's never been a moment when the capacity of the arts to offer enjoyment, solace and wellbeing has been more needed. Thank you for the important work that you do.

Regards

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Nick" with a small dot above the 'i' and a horizontal line underneath the 'k'.

Nick Capaldi
Chief Executive
Arts Council of Wales

What we've done so far

- provided urgent emergency funding of £5.7m to over 780 individuals and organisations through an **Arts Resilience Fund**
- provided £20m of revenue and capital funding through a **Cultural Recovery Fund**, helping 209 organisations to protect themselves against the impact of the Covid-19 emergency
- supported the Welsh Government to develop a new support programme for individuals through the **Cultural Recovery Fund**
- advised the Welsh Government on its guidance on **Rehearsing, Performing and Taking Part in the Arts**
- started the phased **re-opening of National Lottery funding programmes** during 2020/21
- launched a £4m National Lottery fund, **Connect and Flourish**, encouraging organisations, individuals and creative professionals to work together to re-build public arts activity
- re-opened our **Creative Learning** programme's **Lead Creative Schools** scheme, exploring creative approaches to teaching and learning within schools
- continued to support the development of Disability led and organisations led by Black Asian Minority Ethnic people and People of Colour through our **Creative Steps** programme
- re-opened our **Sharing Together** fund, supporting new and existing networks to connect and exchange ideas and experience
- set a new date for our **Investment Review** allowing more time for organisations to apply for the new Arts Portfolio Wales that will be funded from April 2023

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Re-setting the dial...

The world looks very different today to how it did before Covid-19. Venues remain closed, artists and creative freelancers are without work. So as we consider “what next?”, we’re not talking about “business as usual” – instead, we must take a fresh look at how we can achieve a strong and resilient arts sector that properly reflects culture and society in modern-day Wales. It’s what we mean by “re-setting the dial”.

It’s not just a question of how quickly venues can re-open or audiences can return to public events, important though this is. It’s about what happens when they do.

We’re seeing a profound questioning and re-shaping of values across all aspects of public life. And as these values shift and evolve, we mustn’t find ourselves caught between nostalgia for a ‘comfortable’ past and the worries of an uncertain future. If we do, we risk stumbling into the new landscape as a weaker version of our former selves. Those working in the arts are well aware of this risk. Many aren’t talking about a post-Covid-19 ‘new normal’ – ‘normal’ being neither possible nor, perhaps, what’s needed.

The fact is that ‘normal’ hasn’t served us well for a while.

Areas of Wales blighted by poverty and economic disadvantage have been harshly affected by Covid-19. And the heightened attention in recent months given to the lived experiences of Black Asian Minority Ethnic and People of Colour has filled our newspapers and television screens. No-one can now be unaware of the disproportionate impact of the Covid-19 virus on diverse communities and disabled people. But if our culture is the reflection of who we think we are, then the Black Lives Matter and We Shall Not be Removed movements are telling us that we still haven’t recognised that society continues to reinforce discrimination and lack of equality. Entitlement to culture shouldn’t only be for the entitled.

Work is underway to plan for a different future, and not just at the Arts Council. Individuals and organisations across Wales have formed themselves into groups to explore practical solutions to the current challenges. We welcome this. We’ve taken part in these discussions where we could, and our response is based on what we’ve heard so far. We look forward to continuing these discussions.

That change is needed is inarguable. But it’s about making ‘good’ choices. This will require our clear understanding of what needs to change, our most well-defined solutions and our most committed determination to build a better future for the arts in Wales. By working together, we have the opportunity to “re-set the dial”.

A generous, fair-minded and tolerant society is instinctively inclusive. It values and respects the creativity of all its citizens.

If we want Wales to be fair, prosperous and confident, improving the quality of life of people in all of its communities, then we must make the choices that enable this to happen.

The arts help us to understand difference. They help us to express what's distinctive and singular, but also what unites and binds us together, helping us to explore and articulate our common humanity, our place in the world. Diversity strengthens and invigorates the arts.

Fairness and equality

Public health crises aren't equal opportunities events – the most marginalised, and people with the fewest economic and social advantages, are generally the worst affected, while the wealthy, connected and healthy are usually better able to weather the storm. We must expect the future to look, and feel, very different. And by this we mean better – more diverse and more representative of the social and cultural richness of contemporary Wales.

There's no hierarchy of equality. We should embrace equality and celebrate difference, wherever it's found in race, gender, sexuality, age, disability, language and economic poverty. We mustn't ignore ableist behaviour or the systemic and structural oppression of individuals and communities who have experienced discrimination. Neither should we ignore the impact that poverty can have on people's opportunity to enjoy and take part in the arts. Poverty is one of the worst injustices that anyone can face and it pervades many communities in many parts of Wales.

Change is long overdue.

At the moment, too many Deaf and Disabled people, Black Asian Minority Ethnic people and People of Colour and Welsh speakers are denied opportunities to enjoy, take part in and work in the arts. Funding statistics tell their own story – and it's not a good one. All too often public funding reflects the pattern of what has been, rather than what should be.

Current Covid-19 conditions amplify the risks to people, their health and their livelihoods. Many Deaf, neurodiverse and Disabled creative practitioners will need to continue shielding long after restrictions on the general population have begun to ease. This could, for example, turn back the clock on progress made over many years to establish Deaf and Disabled peoples' legitimate rights to benefit equally from opportunities to enjoy, take part and work in the arts. This mustn't be allowed to happen.

As we make these changes, we acknowledge structural inequalities within our own organisation and across the arts in Wales, particularly the pain and trauma that structural racism inflicts. Power and privilege can be a serious barrier to equality, representation and inclusion. The onus shouldn't be on those who we've shut out to fight their way in. The time for urgent anti-racist action, for structural and permanent change and for processes of truth and reconciliation is now. The Arts Council accepts its responsibility to make sure that this happens.

The actions that we're looking at:

1. Implementing the commitments in our [Black Lives Matter statement](#) and publishing a plan setting out the timetabled actions that we'll take
2. Endorsing the [Seven Inclusive Principles for Arts and Cultural Organisations](#) developed by the We Shall Not Be Removed campaign
3. Including, immediately, Deaf and Disabled people, and Black Asian Minority Ethnic people and People of Colour at the centre of our conversations about strategies for future action
4. Respecting the value of the contribution of people who we ask to help us, making appropriate payment for their time, work and lived experience
5. Improving the diversity of the Arts Council's members as part of the current recruitment campaign, ensuring that diverse perspectives are properly represented in our governance and decision-making structures
6. Improving the diversity of Arts Council staff, including creating an "Agent for Change", a senior role mandated to initiate and encourage reforms across the arts sector that meet the needs and expectations of Ethnically and Culturally diverse people and those with protected characteristics
7. Revising our National Lottery applications processes and assessment criteria in time for the start of the new financial year (2021/22) making it easier for our funding to reach further into all the communities of Wales
8. Creating new funds to invest in the creativity of artists with protected characteristics, with a specific focus initially on Deaf and Disabled artists, Black Asian and Minority Ethnic artists and artists of colour, and Welsh speakers. This will start in the current financial year (2020/21)
9. Extending our "Creative Steps" programme to provide new funds for the development of the skills and capability of new creative talent amongst Deaf and Disabled artists and artists from Black Asian Minority Ethnic backgrounds and artists of colour
10. Beginning work now with our Arts Portfolio Wales organisations to agree binding commitments that improve the diversity of their boards, workforce and programmes of activity. These will be agreed through the renewal of new funding agreements for 2021/22
11. Supporting the Welsh Government's "Nation of Sanctuary" plan for refugees and asylum seekers, encouraging engagement, education and employment

Few things make Wales more distinctive than the Welsh Language. But if we're to help sustain the language, it's very important that there are opportunities to socialise, discuss, debate and engage with a broad range of artistic activity and experiences – and that these reflect the diversity of Welsh speaking communities across Wales.

We'll insist on the fair and equal treatment of Welsh. It's not just a matter of compliance with the requirements of Government language legislation. It's about committing to development and seizing the opportunities that Welsh language creativity offers.

The Welsh language provides the means to understand and enjoy an extraordinarily rich literature and culture. We must bring creativity and imagination to the challenge of keeping the language flourishing, telling its story as the everyday language of generations of people and its relevance to Wales' place in the world. Without this, it will be difficult to ensure that the language is inclusive and survives for future generations.

Welsh language

We're many 'Wales', culturally, geographically, economically and linguistically. The arts thrive on this and occupy a vital place at the heart of Welsh life. Wales is a bilingual nation with English and Welsh having equal status in law. However, it shouldn't take a legal obligation for us to recognise the entitlement of those who want to lead a full cultural life through the medium of Welsh.

People must be able to attend and take part in Welsh language events and activities close to home. We're aware that the current distribution of opportunities across Wales is uneven. And provision in our key cities – Cardiff, Swansea and Newport – is poor, relative to the population. We must change this through specific, targeted action.

We're committed to providing opportunities in all aspects of the arts for practitioners to work in their language of choice. The Welsh language is fundamental to our priorities, across all areas of the Arts Council's work. But we know that it isn't always easy to sustain an artistic career through the medium of Welsh. We have a key role in helping to improve this.

Through those individual artists, organisations and projects we fund, and through our government and National Lottery funded programmes, we have the ability to influence the everyday use of the Welsh language. We also work with a range of organisations with a specialist expertise in Welsh language development including the Urdd, National Eisteddfod and Tafwyl. If we plan imaginatively, we can increase its visibility, create opportunities for work and develop our advocacy for Welsh language culture through our network of partners and funded activity.

We want to see Welsh language arts reflecting contemporary Wales. It's often wrongly assumed that the Welsh language community is a homogenous one. What about disabled Welsh speakers? Welsh speakers from culturally diverse backgrounds? A piece of new writing about the LGBTQ+ community, Dafydd James' "Llwyth", and its sequel, "Tylwyth", were amongst the most successful Welsh language plays in recent years. This is an important reminder of the depth of diversity and inclusivity that can be achieved through the creation of Welsh language work, across all artforms.

Any artist or arts organisation in Wales should find it as easy and rewarding to work in Welsh as in English. This isn't always the case. So we want to fund more work in Welsh.

Ultimately, keeping the language alive for future generations requires a "hearts and minds" effort. It's important, therefore, that we acknowledge our responsibility and create a positive environment in which the Welsh language can be visible and thrive.

The actions that we're looking at:

1. Ensuring that Welsh Language speakers are well-represented on our Council. This commitment will be pursued in our current recruitment of new Council members
2. Aiming for a target of ensuring that at least 50% of the Arts Council's staff are Welsh speakers
3. Working to support the Welsh Government's ambition to create a million Welsh speakers by 2050
[Cymraeg 2050: Work programme 2017-21](#)
4. Ensuring that we're meeting the Standards established through the Welsh Language (Wales) Measures 2011, reporting on our compliance through the publication of an Annual Welsh Language Report
[Welsh Language Strategy](#)
[Welsh Language Annual Reports](#)
5. Encouraging our Arts Portfolio Wales organisations to adopt ambitious Welsh Language plans that include clear and binding targets for the inclusion of Welsh speakers in their governance structures, workforce and activities. We'll agree these as we renew funding agreements for 2021/22
6. Implementing the recommendations in our recently commissioned "Welsh Language Mapping report"
7. Increasing, and reporting on, the Welsh language activity that we fund, creating specific funds to invest in developing, making and presenting Welsh language arts
8. Supporting and promoting the [UNESCO Decade of Indigenous Languages](#)
9. Forging a much stronger partnership with the Welsh Government's Language Development Unit and those organisations active in Welsh language development including the Urdd, National Eisteddfod and Mentrau Iaith

The abrupt end of activity in March 2020 has had a profound personal impact on artists and arts workers.

An overwhelming majority of individual artists reported the wholesale cancellation of work in 2020 and beyond. The continuing uncertainty is having a real – and significant – impact on people’s financial security and personal well-being. Many feel that they have little choice other than to leave the arts altogether.

That would be a tragedy. Big organisations might attract the media headlines, but without individual artists and creative professionals in sufficient numbers, many arts organisations will struggle to present work, and the public will be denied opportunities to enjoy and take part in the arts.

Valuing the individual creative professional

Artists not institutions create art. Who writes the poem, composes the music, acts the play, sings the song, dances the line, dreams the novel, sketches the drawing, shapes the pot, lights the stage, inspires children and young people, thrills audiences? It's the artist, responding to the world in its hopes and disasters, in its changes and disruption, in its lived experience, who's going to reinvent cultural expression appropriate for these difficult times.

The individual is the primary agent of artistic creation everywhere. Yet Covid-19 has removed from artists and creative freelancers the very thing they exist to do – present work to an audience. Freelance artists and creators are the ultimate “gig workers”, moving from project to project to find the next pay-cheque. They do so without the protections routinely enjoyed by employees. Most creative freelancers have had 100% of their work cancelled. They're without income and without promise of work. And they're less likely to have savings to fall back on.

While creative freelancers are unable to work – and the general public isn't able to access live performance – audiences will instead grow accustomed to receiving content online, and for free. Given time, audiences will find their way back to our arts buildings and re-discover the unique joy of the communal experience of the live event. As they do, artists and freelancers will be needed to bring life to our spaces with purpose and excitement.

Artists and creative freelancers are inventive and flexible. For example, the digital delivery in schools of our Creative Learning programme has shown how programmes of work can be re-formulated and adapted, and the continuing demand for artists to support our Arts and Health programme shows that demand is there across the wide range of civic priorities.

Similar demand exists the many areas where artists are usually active. The arts illuminate and give life to the wide range of activity that underpins public life. They create and sustain jobs, enrich education services, bring people together, offer solace through the interplay between arts and health, improve our quality of life. The creative individual is fundamental to all of this.

As the industry recovers after Covid-19, safeguards will be required to ensure that public funding for the arts organisations benefits the freelance workforce. All those involved in the arts must pull together to protect the precarious freelance workforce as recovery begins to take root. If we don't, we risk the diversity and success of the wider arts and creative industries.

The actions that we're looking at:

1. Working with the Wales Freelance Task Force to support implementation of their recovery strategy, "[Rebalancing and Reimagining](#)"
2. Working with the Welsh Government and the Wales Freelance Task Force on the development of the "Freelancers' Pledge" (part of the Government's [Cultural Recovery Fund](#))
3. Encouraging and supporting the work of campaigning organisations, such as the Creative Industries Federation, who are pressing for reforms to employment rights and protection for freelancers
4. Promoting opportunities for creative professionals to work in our Creative Learning through the Arts and Arts and Health programmes
5. Using our partnerships with BBC Cymru Wales and S4C to develop and promote creative talent
6. Ensuring that the fundamental principles of fair pay and gender equality are embedded across the arts in Wales
7. Ensuring from now on that the Arts Council's funding explicitly encourages more opportunities for creative professionals to develop their own work and to be better represented within the projects of organisations
8. Funding childcare as an "access" need in the projects that we fund with immediate effect
9. Exploring with the Future Generations Commissioner for Wales proposals for a [pilot initiative](#) to explore the idea of a Basic Income for creative professionals

Arts organisations are currently involved in a daily fight for survival. Those who've been most successful at diversifying their income and reducing their dependence on public funding have been especially badly hit.

We don't yet know when the Covid-19 pandemic will end. When it does, there will be a need to re-open, re-vitalise and re-engage.

As this happens, new ways of connecting through the arts will need to have be tried and tested. We need to work towards building an arts sector that's professionally stronger, fairer and more inclusive, better connected to the communities it serves.

Resilient, stable, vibrant arts organisations

The creative and cultural industries are a vital engine for Wales' economy. They contribute directly in terms of jobs and the generation of wealth through the creation, distribution and retail of goods and services. They also contribute significantly to our well-being and quality of life.

Everyone wants publicly accessible activity to resume. But with uncertain prospects for the recovery from the Covid-19 pandemic the road-map to re-opening is difficult to read. Social distancing measures could reduce the available seating in theatres, concert halls and arts centres to such an extent that they might only have between 15% and 30% of seats available to sell. There's a clear capacity below which it will be uneconomic for venues and theatre buildings to re-open without the need for a level of additional funding that could simply be prohibitive.

Restrictions on the size of public gatherings affect all types of activity. For organisations working with communities, and the people who benefit from that work (including young people who take part in creative activity), a destabilising uncertainty remains about how and when it can start again.

The arts sector is wider, of course, than the organisations currently funded by the Arts Council and includes those operating commercially. Community music-making has been especially hard hit by the restrictions as choirs and bands are prevented from rehearsing and performing together. Such an important part of the cultural DNA of Wales, it's a sector that will need help to get back on its feet.

As the sector adapts and tries to establish a viable level of activity, some will struggle to keep buildings open or to sustain livelihoods. Until the arts sector can operate at full capacity, it will be necessary to stabilise the sector, maintain employment and work opportunities, enable art to continue to be created individually and collectively, and prepare for the resumption of public activity. The funding strategies being enacted by the Welsh Government and Arts Council are intended to support those goals.

Arts Council funding programmes such as "Connect and Flourish" will aim to make up for lost time, championing creative talent and re-building the partnerships and collaborations that sustain the arts. In pursuit of this goal "Connect and Flourish" anticipates working with a wider range of organisations, including local authorities, Health Boards, Housing Associations, Mentrau Iaith, community development or environmental organisations.

"Connect and Flourish" promotes the concept of a "Cultural Contract". Although in its early stages of development, the Contract provides a framework for organisations to respond to the concerns raised by "Black Lives Matter" and "We Shall Not Be Removed".

It also identifies the importance of enabling more opportunities for freelancers, promoting projects in Arts and Health, and addressing the lack of opportunities to make, enjoy and take part in work in Welsh.

An important part of the Arts Council's funding is its support to the organisations who make up its Arts Portfolio Wales. These are the organisations across Wales who receive annual revenue funding. Every five years we look again at the organisations that we fund through a process that we call our Investment Review. This was due to happen in 2020. However, in the face of the unprecedented impact of Covid-19, Council decided to suspend Investment Review 2020.

Organisations applying as part of the Investment Review will want to feel confident that they're able to put forward their best possible case for inclusion in the Portfolio, setting out their strengths and achievements. If Covid-19 related problems continue, this will be difficult in the short term, especially if the daily fight for survival remains an ongoing preoccupation. We've therefore decided to re-schedule the date for the introduction of funding arrangements for the new Arts Portfolio, and this will now happen from April 2023.

This means that the Review process will begin towards the end of 2021, with the assessment of applications and Council decision-making taking place during 2022. We expect to announce decisions in Autumn 2022, in time for new funding agreements to be negotiated for 2023/24.

Our next Investment Review will fully embrace the priorities in our corporate plan, "For the Benefit of All". And we'll look at how we invest National Lottery funding to build the capacity of organisations outside the current Portfolio. When the Investment Review happens, we hope that there will be a wider diversity of organisations able to compete for inclusion on a more equal basis.

We'll discuss and consult over the details of the Investment Review in the coming months.

The actions that we're looking at:

1. Adapting our financial support as necessary, providing an agile response to the Covid-19 pandemic, as it evolves
2. Agreeing targets with the Arts Portfolio Wales for the inclusion of Deaf and Disabled people, Black Asian Minority Ethnic people, people of colour, and Welsh speakers in their governance, workforce and programmes of work
3. Working with the arts sector and other partners, including local authorities, to address the challenges of adapting existing physical spaces and exploring new ones
4. Working with the arts sector and relevant trade and representative bodies to persuade the UK Government to extend tax relief for cultural activities
5. Exploring with organisations and freelancers the potential of the Cultural Contract, negotiating new funding agreements with organisations that promote the values and priorities that the Contract represents
6. Exploring ways of supporting community music-making by working with specialist agencies such as Tŷ Cerdd on programmes that can be rolled out in the current financial year
7. Promoting learning around effective ways of developing digital presentation and distribution, exploring new ways for people to make and engage with the arts

The arts don't only make Wales attractive and contemporary to ourselves, they make us distinctive and desirable in the eyes of others. Art produced in and of Wales – and achieved at the very highest standard – is the best promotion of the culture of today's Wales on the world stage.

However, international collaboration faces the “double whammy” of Covid-19 and Brexit. Brexit has specific practical implications for working with European partners. And decisions taken in the months ahead will define Wales' economic, cultural and social interests for many years to come.

Whether you believe that exiting the EU presents opportunities or risks, artists and arts organisations will need to have a clear-eyed view of the new challenges to international working, across Europe and further afield.

Meeting the Brexit challenge

Brexit represents a fundamental change to how we engage with our European neighbours. Since we joined the European Union (EU), we've taken for granted porous borders and the free movement of creative talent and products. This will now change – exactly how, isn't clear.

The EU is a source of key talent and expertise for the arts and creative industries in Wales. The easy two-way flow of this talent is currently part of the success of the creative industries as a major growth area of the UK economy.

The arts thrive on innovative and specialist expertise and technologies. By their very nature, such skills are not widely available. Exceptional talent in the arts and creative industries is as vital to the success of the sector as other areas such as science and academia. European workers provide a steady stream of skills in areas where we currently lack capacity or expertise.

It will be difficult for Wales and the UK to attract and retain talent from the EU if freedom of movement is restricted. The free flow of talent and ideas fosters the innovation and experimentation that drives the growth of the arts and creative industries. Curtailing this could lead to a substantial loss of important skills to Wales and to the Welsh economy, especially in those parts of Wales blighted by economic disadvantage. The strength, diversity and innovation of the arts depend on the free movement and exchange of ideas, talent and creativity.

Opportunities for a global approach to UK arts and culture are currently significantly over-shadowed by the magnitude of the potential impact of Covid-19 and Brexit. They are also framed by the climate emergency on the one hand and the Black Lives Matter/

We Shall Not Be Removed movements on the other, and the enduring need to celebrate Wales' bilingual culture. However, there's an opportunity at this historic moment, to re-think, re-set and re-brand the UK's global approach and relationships through Wales' diverse cultures and languages. The excellence and creativity of Wales's arts contributes powerfully to the development of our cultural relations with the rest of the world.

In time, current Covid-19 restrictions and quarantines affecting international travel will ease, and international working will once again be possible. When this happens, it will be essential that those Wales-based artists and organisations who depend on international work for their livelihoods are able to take advantage of whatever opportunities exist.

The actions that we're looking at:

1. Championing the work of our international team, Wales Arts International, in promoting the international ambitions of Wales and its arts
2. Campaigning for the agreement of practical solutions to potential Brexit issues affecting freedom of movement, 'frictionless' borders, visas for creative professionals entering the UK, digital rights and protections for Intellectual Property
3. Monitoring Brexit developments and provide intelligence on opportunities and risks as they become clear
4. Campaigning for successor funds to the EU's Creative Europe programme (the Global Britain Fund, Digitising Culture: Innovation Fund and the Shared Prosperity Fund) to offer the widest possible benefits for the arts in Wales
5. Pressing for Wales to become a third country member of the Creative Europe programme as part of current post-Brexit financial planning
6. Supporting the Welsh Government's international ambitions through delivery of our own international strategy – "[Wales: A Bridge to the World](#)"
7. Supporting the inclusion of cultural content in all future Welsh Government sponsored Trade Missions and Delegations
8. Deploying the expertise and contacts within Wales Arts International to build and strengthen our relationships with key European Networks such as Informal European Theatre Movement (IETM), "On the Move" and Culture Action Europe
9. Establishing an "Info Point" to offer advice and intelligence on artists mobility and visa issues
10. Strengthening our partnership with British Council through programmes of collaborative and complementary activity.

Wales faces numerous complex social and economic challenges. Many of these are legacies of the past. But enshrined in the Welsh Government's Well-being legislation is a determination to ensure that this generation doesn't, through indifference or carelessness, leave them as challenges for the next.

The landscapes and seascapes of Wales are the foundations of all the villages, towns and cities we live in. It's intrinsic to the way that we live, it's the thing that sustains us and, for many of us, the thing that defines us. It's impossible to separate culture and the natural environment in Wales.

They're an interlocking part of the same system. They create a community's sense of place and sense of identity. A healthy and biodiverse environment lets us feel happy and connected. So we must be prepared to behave and do things differently – looking forward into the future so that the choices we make today secure a safe, fair and sustainable future for us, and for future generations.

Environmental sustainability

Culture shapes the landscape as much as landscape shapes our culture. There's so much of our tradition in Wales that has come out of our relationship with our environment from the Mabinogion; to poets such as T H Parry-Williams and R S Thomas who painted our landscape in words; to internationally renowned works such as the David Nash's Ash Dome that continues to evolve with its environment.

The future of our planet will define us as a society. Protecting both our cultural relationship with nature and our environment - not just today but for our children's children - is of vital importance to us all. Climate change and environmental protection are, without question, amongst the most urgent issues of our time. There can be no doubting that they require urgent and focused action.

If we're to avoid irreversible global warming that has devastating economic and social consequences, "rapid, far-reaching and unprecedented changes in all aspects of society" will be required. This was the message set out in a special report from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change published in October 2018. We're all responsible for creating a more sustainable world. The arts sector is no exception,

Many organisations have environmental policies. But policies alone don't necessarily change behaviour, although they do have an important value in demonstrating intent. However, the danger is that a commitment to sustainability is embedded in a company policy, but not practiced. We need to encourage a generous, forward-looking and progressive approach.

As well as monitoring their own performance, arts organisations are well-placed to inform, challenge and engage people in conversations about environmental sustainability. Effective dialogue is inherent in any working definition of sustainability. The vision of a sustainable Wales needs to bring everyone into the conversation, on an equal footing.

The actions that we're looking at:

1. Promoting the opportunities offered by our Memorandum of Understanding with Natural Resources Wales.
2. Working with specialist agencies such as [Julie's Bicycle](#) and the Future Generations Commissioner to devise benchmarks and protocols for monitoring (and reporting on) carbon consumption by Arts Portfolio Wales organisations
3. Encouraging major events and festivals to develop and publish specific proposals to reduce their environmental impact
4. Providing support for arts organisations who need assistance in establishing benchmarks and learning how to monitor the environmental impact of their activities.
5. Encouraging publicly funded organisations to undertake training in how to benchmark their carbon consumption, to complete that benchmarking by April 2022 and to report annually against the benchmarks from that date
6. Pressing all publicly funded arts organisations to take an 'ethical trading' approach to supply chains, ensuring that organisations evaluate their suppliers, including touring product and work from freelancers, as a step towards helping the goal of reducing carbon emissions

The public rightly demands that the institutions they fund are efficient and cost effective. Those who we work with expect us to get the basics right and to ensure that we manage our affairs in a straightforward and business-like way.

However, they also expect us to operate fairly and accountably. We're committed to improving what we do and how we do it. The Arts Council should be leading by example. But in some areas we lack sufficient knowledge and lived experience within our organisation to be leaders of change on our own.

We must become more diverse as an institution, more transparent, accountable and informed. Only then will we be able to successfully drive the ambitions in our corporate plan, "For the Benefit of All" and play a real role in helping to deepen a commitment to equality and engagement across the arts in Wales. This is a priority, and not just in the short term.

Changing the way we work

One of the interesting aspects of Covid-19 is the way that artists and organisations have banded together, providing a powerful mechanism for mutual support, the sharing of intelligence, surveying the needs of members and co-ordinating advocacy. New models have been established for discussing and shaping policy. They're widening the range and diversity of people and organisations who are taking part in the debate, and the conversation feels more connected and diverse. If there's to be a 'new normal', this should be it.

The Arts Council should be prepared to play an engaged role in these conversations. It must be about a new, mature relationship with artists and arts organisations – one based on openness, trust and mutual respect. This means that we must be more inclusive, inviting artists, arts organisations and advisers to work more closely with us as equals on the development of policy and strategy. Artists, arts workers and arts organisations should be involved by taking part in the definition of those measures designed to support their work and to strengthen the sector.

“For the Benefit of All” commits us to creating an environment in which the arts are better able to flourish – an environment which:

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

But the Arts Council can't achieve these goals on its own. It's why we already work with a range of local, national and international partners to deliver our work – artists, arts

organisations, local authorities, umbrella bodies, the Urdd and National Eisteddfod, academic institutions, other arts councils in the UK and abroad, Voluntary Arts, Nesta, Health Boards and the NHS Confederation, local authorities, and many more. We're also working with the Welsh Government on our major school's programme, Creative Learning through the Arts.

With some bodies we have specific partnership agreements or memorandums of understanding. These include organisations as varied as BBC Cymru Wales, British Council and National Resources Wales.

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

All public bodies, including the Arts Council, operate within the framework provided by the Welsh Government's Wellbeing legislation. This defines "Five Ways of Working" designed to promote behaviours that encourage and support principles of collaboration, long-term planning and sustainable development. It's fundamental to our approach – taking sufficient time and care to build sustainable relationships and ensure that new initiatives can graft on and take root.

It will require specific action with our partners – in all areas – if our agenda is to be credible. There are still too many barriers that impede people's access to the arts, some of them (sadly) created by ourselves. At the Arts Council of Wales, an organisation that belongs to all of us, breaking down these barriers, wherever they exist, must now be our defining priority.

The actions that we're looking at:

1. Ensuring that the sustainable development principles set out in the Welsh Government's Wellbeing legislation underpin all aspects of our planning, funding and delivery of work.
2. Developing and publishing Covid-19 recovery plans that have equalities at their centre and which require our Arts Portfolio Wales organisations to do the same
3. Continuing to take part in networks, task forces and practitioner groups
4. Revising and simplifying our National Lottery applications and assessment criteria to ensure that our funding reaches further into all the communities of Wales
5. Reviewing existing Memorandums of Understanding with partner organisations and reporting on our achievements
6. Committing to continuous processes of dialogue and learning, challenging ourselves and our institutional culture

The Covid-19 pandemic is changing the way we all live, our outlook and how we engage in the arts, culture and creativity. At its core, community engagement is a social experience. As the Covid-19 restrictions ease, audiences will seek out the social aspects of art and culture even more than usual. As they do, they're likely to take more of an interest in how we and our funded organisations work, and our connectedness to individuals and communities themselves.

People, organisations and communities working together to achieve positive change for themselves is our goal. It ensures that the activities we fund will be relevant to their needs and circumstances. If properly planned, the power and reach that local communities have makes it less likely that the vulnerable and overlooked will be left behind.

Re-building audiences, connecting with communities

Before the Covid-19 emergency, it was possible to travel to experience arts and culture regionally, nationally and internationally. For the moment, most of us are only able to experience the arts and cultures of the world virtually. And it's becoming increasingly clear that when public activity resumes, our cultural life is likely to be local.

Building public confidence and enabling a safe return to public activity will require patient planning and clear promotion. A number of organisations are signing up to 'kitemark' schemes such as SOLT/UK Theatre's "See it Safely" and UK Tourism's "We're Good to Go". We welcome these initiatives.

But we're also as interested in the way that communities engage with the arts as we are with those who've traditionally managed or delivered them. We're very aware that there are many people who genuinely feel that the publicly funded arts "aren't for them". So we're particularly interested to see if different ways of working make a difference to the way that communities are empowered through the arts to re-imagine and reconnect with their localities and places.

There are lots of ways that people engage with the arts. We know that community is very important – volunteering, taking part in creative activity, helping to organise local events, working in partnership with others all helps communities to feel more positive about where they live and take pride in their own culture or ethnicity.

Enabling individuals and communities to feel a sense of ownership over the provision of arts and culture ensures that it's relevant and representative of the community it serves. And in the future we won't confuse doing 'with' people with doing 'to' or 'for' people. Working together means moving forward together in a spirit of 'co-creation'. This requires care, openness and patience, but it's often the key that unlocks the pathway to real and sustainable engagement.

One final point.

One of the ways that we can help to encourage audiences and supporting the resilience of local communities is to do our bit as good 'civic citizens' to try and arrest the spread of Covid-19. No organisation in Wales has been untouched by the effects of the Coronavirus, some more severely than others. However, we want to encourage those arts organisations who might have temporarily under-used capacity to consider loaning staff to the Welsh Government as part of the Covid-response strategy. The huge impact of Covid-19 on all aspects of society in Wales requires a determined and publicly-spirited response. We hope that the arts sector will be able to contribute to this effort.

The actions that we're looking at:

1. Supporting the roll-out of 'kitemark' Covid-safe schemes such as SOLT/UK Theatre's "See it Safely" and UK Tourism's "We're Good to Go"
2. Publishing funding information that shows how Arts Council funding is distributed across Wales and the impact that it's having in encouraging public engagement in the arts
3. Investing in action research through our "Widening Engagement" programme that identifies new ways of working with diverse communities across Wales
4. Working with local authorities to ensure that arts development strategies are informed by their expertise, community contacts and local knowledge
5. Encouraging the arts organisations to consider whether members of their staff could be temporarily loaned to the Welsh Government and to the "Test, Trace and Protect" programme
6. Exploring with arts organisations if they would be able to make space available for the temporary housing of public health screening facilities