

Cynulliad Cenedlaethol Cymru / National Assembly for Wales
Pwyllgor Diwylliant, y Gymraeg a Chyfathrebu / The Culture, Welsh Language and Communications Committee
Cyllid Celfyddydau nad yw'n Gyhoeddus / Non-public Funding of the Arts
CWLC(5) ART22
Ymateb gan Laura H Drane / Evidence from Laura H Drane

MY WORK

I have been an independent (freelance) producer since 2002, and been the director of my own limited company since 2011. I generally say I do two things – make things, and make things happen. In ‘making things’, I work with artists, creatives, academics, stakeholders, audiences and more to create shows, festivals, tours, events, exhibitions, etc. In ‘making things happen’, I work as a consultant (scoping, feasibility, R&D, evaluation, etc) and facilitator (with networks, boards, leadership teams, senior management, staff, volunteers). I also undertake advocacy and campaigning, both in a paid capacity and as a volunteer.

Current and previous clients include Crafts Council, Royal Liverpool Philharmonic, University of Manchester, ATG (one of the UK’s largest commercial theatre organisations); plus the National Companies of Wales (WNO, WMC, NTW, Theatr Genedlaethol Cymru, Literature Wales, BBC National Orchestra of Wales, Ffilm Cymru Wales, NDCWales). I also work with and for award-winning individual artists and collectives, like Karol Cysewski, and Light Ladd & Emberton.

My work crosses the arts, culture and heritage, and STEM (science, technology, engineering and maths). Before moving to Wales in 2012, I was living and working from Manchester and West Yorkshire. Throughout my whole career I have worked across the four nations of the UK and internationally wherever I am based. I am a National Adviser to the Arts Council of Wales, on the board of Theatr Iolo, and a Fellow of the RSA.

I am also the co-founder of What Next? Cardiff, a local chapter of a national movement to articulate and strengthen the role of culture in society. We are made up of freelancers, companies and venues within the arts and culture sectors. Our aim is to find new ways of engaging with our audience and visitors: the ever-expanding millions who value and take part in the cultural work that happens day-in, day-out up and down this country. To date we have done this through beginning positive, informed and inclusive conversations with each other and community leaders, politicians, funders, academics and business people. What Next? is a movement, not an organisation or campaign. There is no central leadership structure and it is run primarily on a voluntary basis.

Through WN?Cardiff, I led on ‘Cardiff Without Culture?’, which successfully opposed Cardiff Council’s proposed cuts to the arts and culture budget, and positively engaged with the elected representatives and officials to build a more constructive view of how arts and culture could contribute to the city’s development. Also through WN?Cardiff, I co-created and hosted the Welsh Government Culture Hustings, the first of its kind and one of the largest held in Wales, with about 300 people present. Nationally, What Next? is also a founding partner of BBC Get Creative, a platform to showcase everyday creativity and culture, be that knit-and-nattering, or barbershop-singing.

VARIETY OF INCOME STREAMS

Within these specialisms, I work across the subsidised, commercial and voluntary/ third sectors, attracting a range of income sources – some National Lottery grants, some earned income (eg fees, ticket sales, teaching, running workshops), and some other sources (eg in-kind support, sponsorship, crowdfunding, investment). I bring my own and other private funds to ideas which might be primarily grant-aided projects, and often deliver work as a producer, consultant or facilitator for subsidised and commercial clients in a range of sectors in Wales, UK and beyond. Thus my income streams originate in the four UK nations and flow back to my base here in Wales.

I welcome the committee’s inquiry into this area of focus, and look forward to its findings in due course. I would also like to stress that, underlying this need for increased and more diverse sources of non-public funds, there is a strong base of public investment which helps us return an even higher yield from those public funds. Without this level of public investment, arts organisations cannot hope to leverage further monies which support outreach, education and learning, community engagement, artist and sector development, as well as world-class production, touring and promotion.

As a good example, ACW recently funded Light Ladd & Emberton to take our award-winning show CAITLIN to the Fringe as part of their Wales in Edinburgh strand. This is a show that was commissioned by the National Library of Wales in 2014, for the Dylan Thomas 100 celebrations, and has been in demand and touring on and off ever since. This includes a stint at Battersea Arts Centre, London for their A Nation’s Theatre festival with The Guardian. As a result of being selected as only one of 30 UK companies in the British Council Showcase, we are now planning a UK and international tour for the show in 2018 and beyond,

including to SW England, Yorkshire, Scotland (Dumfries, and Highlands), and to Chile, Brasil and Mexico. This will yield a high return for the artists and production team, leveraging an income from outside Wales on a show that is proudly made in Wales, and providing a return on previously invested public funds (in turn, making the show and artists less reliant on public funds).

I work very hard to ensure that we maximise income from a variety of streams in any given piece of work – cash match funds from a university, venue or other producing partner; ticket sales and crowdfunding from the public; in-kind support (eg free use of space, marketing and PR support); sponsorship and other investment from trust and foundations, organisations and stakeholders; Theatre Tax Relief claims when appropriate; merchandising; and more.

The Committee must be mindful not to compare arts organisations to each other, as there are a number of fundamental variations to an organisation's financial model – arts venues (receiving houses, producing houses), producing theatre companies (with buildings or without buildings) or organisations located in one place or working across the nation), where an organisation is within its business growth (start-up or established) – and its opportunities to secure alternative funds. This is also true for freelancers/ independents and SMEs, be they artists or producers, or small limited companies.

SUMMARY

I hope that this has given you an insight as to how this sort of variety of sources of income plays into the sector at the very smallest scale – for independents and SMEs. The majority of these people and small companies have to have varied and successful 'portfolio careers'; we must continually bring our skills, contacts, experience, knowledge and more to bear in a range of ways to earn a living, of which public funding is usually only one component part.