

# What Matters to Us?

## Conversations about the arts and cultural sector in Wales



Image by Hazel Elaine Guppy [www.hazelaine.com](http://www.hazelaine.com)

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### **Introduction**

On the 30<sup>th</sup> July 2020 it was announced, by the then Deputy Minister for Culture, Sport and Tourism, that the Welsh Government would be investing £53 million to help the cultural sector in Wales deal with the impact of the coronavirus pandemic. This was seen as an opportunity to both support the sector through the pressures of the coronavirus, but also ensure the sector had a ‘targeted social purpose’ through the development of a ‘cultural contract’.

The Wales Culture Alliance (WCA) emerged as a loose alliance of arts and cultural organisations and freelancers that came together to support each other as the devastation of the pandemic on the sector became clear. In April 2021 the WCA was granted £40K from the Arts Council of Wales (ACW) to help shape the cultural contract so that the mission and values of the cultural contract could be developed in a meaningful way. On the 29<sup>th</sup> April 2021 a call went out from the WCA publicly inviting proposals to hold funded events and conversations with communities to discuss what the cultural contract should look like in order to fulfil its ambitious social purpose. The deadline for bids was the 10<sup>th</sup> May and successful applicants were informed on the 18<sup>th</sup> May. Thirteen conversations were funded. The deadline for the completion of the conversations and feedback was the 31<sup>st</sup> May. However, this deadline was extended by two weeks to the 15<sup>th</sup> June. In parallel, the Arts Council of Wales and Welsh Government sent out a survey to funded organisations and projects.

In late April 2021, Straeon Research Ltd was approached by the Wales Culture Alliance to conduct an evaluation of the process and findings contained in the call-out for conversations. The researchers held a drop-in Zoom where the conversation facilitators could come and get to know them, and ask any questions about how the research would be conducted. This was an important step in building trust between the researchers and the conversation facilitators.

### **Methods**

A qualitative approach informed the analysis of the process and outputs provided in the conversations. In other words, the researchers were concerned about how and what ideas were expressed rather than how many people held particular views. It was not possible for the researchers to observe all of the conversations due to factors such as time, ethics, and the conversation methods. Due to this, individual meetings were held with conversation leads to discuss their reflections on the process.

The researchers described each part of the process (and in the case of film and zoom recordings this also involved transcribing or providing close detail of what was said) as well as the outputs. They then coded both the process materials and outputs using a basic thematic analysis to assess what themes appeared to be emerging.

Survey responses were pasted into Word documents and thematic content analysis applied to the text. This involved cutting and pasting responses under different theme headings, and merging/splitting these themes until a thematic framework was established.

## **Ethics**

Conversation leads were asked to ensure consent had been given from participants relating to the research, and consent was given either via a form or verbally. Ethical issues arose during some conversations and in two cases it was felt that outputs could be potentially harmful if shared. In another conversation, controversial language was used which led to a discussion about confidentiality and ethics. This also raises questions about the ownership of conversations and the sometimes equally important requirement to feed back to communities and to share.

## **Key Findings: Process**

13 conversations were funded and a total of £20,000 given to conversation 'leads' to facilitate their conversations and report back. Five additional conversations were held and their feedback was included in the analysis. It was felt that there was a severe lack of time to engage properly with communities and that the timescale of the project caused some frustration. However, organisations and individuals were also grateful for the opportunity to hold conversations as the data could be used to grow and develop their own practice as well.

In terms of the methods used in conversations, the most successful were those where existing networks could be used to facilitate conversations or activities around the cultural contract. Those without an existing network, for example those relying solely on passers-by to participate, or recruiting participants from scratch, had significantly poorer engagement despite their good intentions. Zoom was often used and was a useful way of holding conversation given travel restrictions, its low cost, and ability for people to meet over a wide geographical area. Activity based forms of conversation also worked well.

It was found that terms like 'Cultural Contract', 'Arts Portfolio Wales' and even 'Arts Council Wales' were not always familiar to the public. It was mentioned by several facilitators that this project represented 'the beginning' of opening up conversations about equality, access to the arts and the cultural contract. Many places in Wales feel let down and abandoned by the state, which can explain some of the more negative responses to the conversations.

A common theme across some of the conversations with facilitators was the presence of unhealed trauma in some communities, relating to post-industrialisation but also to the history of arts in the area. Contextual factors of being ignored and belittled also need to be taken into consideration when engaging in conversations where existing power dynamics shape attitudes to perceived outsiders.

## **Key Findings: Conversations**

There is a widespread lack of understanding about what a cultural contract is, and some uncertainty as to whether the term should be used at all. In those conversations where the meaning and implications of the cultural contract were discussed, there was some consideration given to how it could be developed and implemented. It was strongly felt that one size will not fit all, with organisations of all sizes, business models, resources, expertise and staffing making up the sector.

The positivity of many conversations led to a feeling that some form of relationality should be at the heart of a revitalised, inclusive and socially responsible and just sector.

Relationships were felt to be important between organisations, artists and communities; between professionals working in the sector; and between communities, artists, ACW and Welsh Government.

### **Findings relating to areas of the cultural contract:**

#### **Language**

There were very emotional and juxtaposed perspectives relating to language, especially in relation to Welsh identity. Language was seen as a way to open windows, and to open up different ways of understanding the world. There needs to be better opportunities for learning Welsh and an appreciation of where people may be on their journey with regard to their understanding and use of the language. There was also a recognition of other languages, including non-verbal languages. There is an opportunity for the cultural sector to explore translation imaginatively and also to consider ways in which cultural experiences in other languages are not a barrier to their appreciation.

#### **Fair Work**

There was discussion about nepotism and bullying in the industry, and concerns that certain 'cliques' in the arts sector hinder artist integration and opportunities for work. Training needs for organisations to understand what their obligations are relating to fair work, including fair pay, were also highlighted. Pressure on freelancers to work for low or no pay in order to complete a project was highlighted.

#### **Diversity**

This was a major theme and highlighted a number of concerns in terms of communities, young people, perception of the arts, and venues. A cross-cutting theme was the need for organisations to reach out to communities that might not be included rather than waiting to hear from them. Cultural venues need to feel inviting, welcoming, and, in relation to the communities they are rooted in, as 'spaces of belonging'. In some communities the gendered nature of events or exhibitions determines whether people feel they have a right or permission to enter or participate. The arts are perceived to be 'just a hobby' and not a viable career path by some, who may be dissuaded from exploring careers in the arts by family members. Art is also seen by some as not being 'for them'. In terms of careers there

was a feeling that people want opportunities to develop their skills and passions in their home towns or, at least, in Wales, without having to move away. It was also said that arts organisations and their boards need to be held to account for their lack of diversity.

### **Health and Wellbeing**

There was an awareness for the need for the wellbeing of staff to be central to fair work, particularly as Wales recovers from the pandemic. It was stated that all arts organisations need to be concerned with the impact new forms of working have had on staff wellbeing and on the stress and burnout this has created.

### **Co-creation**

Community engagement tends to be devalued, is under-resourced and often unpaid. It is hidden work that is essential for co-creation or any inclusive process or practice. It was felt that all aspects of the co-creation process need to be funded including translation, transport, access to venues. The practicalities, in more rural areas, need to be recognised as resources are more dispersed.

### **Inclusive Leadership**

There was a call for leadership to be more equitable and relatable and for organisations to be transparent and honest about policies, so they are seen not to be tokenistic.

### **Environmental Justice**

There was a general agreement that sustainable policies needed to be implemented and, in relation to environmental justice, that local resources needed to be used as much as possible in order to support local businesses and the local economy. Employing local people would not only reduce travel routes but also support local emerging artists. Encouragement of car-sharing and hyper-local residencies were also suggested, particularly in rural communities where travel between venues and communities may be necessary.

### **Social Justice**

Arts and cultural organisations have a duty of care towards their members and audiences to ensure that basic access needs are met. If organisations anticipate and meet the needs through organisational guidelines, team training, house rules and event specification it means that D/deaf and disabled audiences can participate without having to use their energy to advocate for their access needs.

There were questions about where the money goes, which organisations it is spent on, and whether there is transparency and accountability. It was also felt in some conversations that there is a geographical injustice in the distribution of resources. There are inequalities between areas and how much is spent per person in different local authorities – a difference of over £50 in some cases. Priorities for social change may differ in different areas but it should not stop organisations and venues using their power to challenge social injustice and widen perspectives.



## **Key Findings: Survey**

There were 73 responses to the survey sent to Arts Council of Wales funded organisations, and 79 responses to the survey sent to Welsh Government funded organisations.

93% of participants from the ACW survey had received funding that had asked them to commit to a Cultural Contract. 3% said they had not received such funding, and 3% were unsure. 55% of participants felt confident in their understanding of a cultural contract, with 23.1 reporting not feeling confident, and 26.2% feeling unsure.

58.1% of participants from the Welsh Government survey had received funding that had asked them to commit to a Cultural Contract. 25.7% said they had not received such funding, and 18.9% were unsure.

40.3% of participants felt confident in their understanding of a cultural contract, with 40.3% reporting not feeling confident, and 21% feeling unsure.

The report largely focuses on the open responses to the survey instrument.

## **Resources and Support**

What respondents felt they needed from Welsh Government and the Arts Council of Wales fell into seven categories:

1. Nothing / unsure
2. Clarity and information
3. Guidance / toolkit
4. Templates and case studies
5. Training
6. Networking, mentoring and discussion
7. Funding

## **Approaches and considerations**

There were also a number of other comments and suggestions relating to the approach that should be taken in the development and implementation of a cultural contract. These fell into four categories:

## **Fears and frustrations**

There were some fears expressed over the cultural contract, many relating to it turning into a 'tick-box' exercise and simply a tool for accessing funding, or having a blanket approach not considering the particular needs and capacities of the organisation or project. Some

expressed concern at their lack of capacity and resources to develop and implement a cultural contract and felt that the current funding system is unequal.

### **Co-creation and Collaboration**

There were suggestions that a co-creation approach would be best suited to the development and implementation of the cultural contract, and that this should happen not just at the organisation level but also at the Welsh Government and ACW level. Related to this, it was felt that cultural contracts relating to inclusivity and wellbeing should be developed in collaboration with people who have lived experience. There was a suggestion to move away from consultations and towards establishing networks so that permanent conversations can be held. This could develop a sustainable form of co-creation which does not rely on external consultants. It was suggested that this process be piloted.

### **Equality, diversity and inclusion**

Equality, diversity and inclusion were cited as important considerations in the approach to the cultural contract. Building capacity with regard to the Welsh language was raised as was ensuring that the diversity of the sector should be better represented throughout. More support for artists with additional needs was requested, along with the provision of technical resources to ensure access for those with physical and learning disabilities. Finally, determinants such as poverty, equality of opportunity, and geographical barriers were discussed and raised as fundamental considerations for access and equality.

### **Accountability and Transparency**

Several respondents asked for more transparency in terms of who has had funding, which art forms have been funded, and geographic spread. Although this information may be publicly available it is not easily accessible.

Consistency of approach was also cited as important, although it was widely anticipated that a flexible approach would be necessary due to the different social contexts within which the sector is working across Wales. These include rural contexts where there can be significantly less diversity than more urban settings. However, it was also felt that the core values of what the cultural contract is hoping to achieve should be consistently applied to all organisations.

## **Ways Forward**

### **Key Points**

- There needs to be change

There was near universal recognition that there needs to be changes to the sector that resonate with the ambitions and aspirations of the Cultural Contract.

- Change needs to be meaningful

There was a fear that the cultural contract will be a tick-box exercise and fail to take the different kinds of art forms, size of organisation, and types of projects into account. One size does not fit all. The pace of change needs to be one that supports the facilitation of trusted and meaningful relationships within the arts sector, with communities and with Welsh Government and the Arts Council of Wales.

- There needs to be clarity

There is a lack of understanding of what a Cultural Contract is, who it is between, how its impact is assessed and what happens if the terms of the contract are broken.

It was also felt that there needs to be clarity over any areas or principles covered in the contract. There needs to be a shared agreement over definitions and these need to be clearly communicated.

- Accountability and transparency are paramount

It was felt that if power is to shift then those organisations that have traditionally received significant and/or long-term funding need to be transparent as to how they make decisions and accountable for the actions they take. Whilst it was felt that smaller organisations and freelancers also need to be accountable and transparent, they operate within a system which places them at a relative disadvantage.

- The process of change needs to be co-designed and relational

It was felt that the spirit of the conversations needs to be reflected in the ways in which a framework is developed and implemented. In other words, it needs to be underpinned by dialogue and in building relationships and not hand over the process to consultants.

- Networking should support progressive change.

Inclusive networks could be ways of enhancing the sharing of ideas and resources.

- Training and Resources are needed to upskill and develop the sector

Change needs to be supported by training and the provision and sharing of resources through case studies, research, and toolkits as appropriate.

- There should be safe spaces to talk about difficult issues

A history of inequality and exclusion make it difficult to challenge the status quo. Some thought needs to be given to the specific conditions and requirements that constitute safe spaces to voice matters of concern.

- Cultural venues need to be spaces of welcome and belonging

For too long particular groups of people in our communities have felt uncomfortable in the venues and places where funded cultural activities and events take place. Venues need to

change the way they engage with communities by understanding their needs and aspirations.

## **Recommended Actions**

### **1. Dissemination of the findings and report**

It is recommended that this report is shared in full with Welsh Government, the Arts Council of Wales, as well as all the conversation facilitators and communities that took part in the conversations.

### **2. Mapping gaps and assets**

There needs to be some mapping of who is missing in this report in terms of the diversity of our communities. A map of grassroots community organisations and groups across Wales should also be considered. Gaps and assets should be reviewed regularly.

### **3. Reach out to un(der)-represented organisations in the sector**

Based on the above mapping, we recommend that the next stage of the framework includes a wider range of voices, from organisations not currently represented in the WCA or the conversations.

### **4. Making language a bridge not a barrier**

Whilst there are many different views, there is a sense in which the Welsh language needs to be a bridge and not a barrier to participation. More development is needed to explore ways in which, where possible, people who do not speak Welsh can nonetheless enjoy cultural experiences in the medium of Welsh. There is a need for opportunities for artists, should they wish, to learn Welsh as well as other languages (including BSL and Makaton).

### **5. Further discussion and co-creation**

Further investment into workshopping the detailed findings of the conversations and allowing the next stage of the framework to be co-created with the arts sector and public.

### **6. Conduct an analysis of the materials provided by survey respondents willing to share their versions of a cultural contract**

Examples of cultural contracts offered by many people and organisations who responded to the survey will provide an initial insight into working documents being used in the sector. It will be a starting point for the guidance materials, case studies, templates and training that will be required.

## **7. Identify resources for support**

In the development of guidance and training materials that are fully inclusive, it is recommended that a range of materials are proactively sought, including guidelines, working practices and training programmes that can help the sector in the development of its own cultural contracts.

## **Announcement of a cultural contract**

The cultural sector was devastated by the necessary lockdown requirements because of the COVID-19 pandemic. No music or theatre performances and no entry into cinema, heritage and exhibition spaces meant that artists and the staff supporting the running of venues and events were unable to work. The sector was in danger of collapse with priority at the outset being given to health, social care, food production and essential goods and infrastructure maintenance. However, on the 30<sup>th</sup> July 2020 it was announced, by the then Deputy Minister for Culture, Sport and Tourism, that the Welsh Government would be investing £53 million to help the cultural sector in Wales deal with the impact of the coronavirus pandemic.<sup>1</sup> This Cultural Recovery fund, to be jointly administered by Welsh Government and the Arts Council of Wales (ACW) through their separate responsibilities, aimed to support the sector through the pressures of the coronavirus. However, it was also seen as an opportunity to ensure that the investment had a ‘targeted social purpose’ through what was referred to as a ‘cultural contract.’ This built on Welsh Government’s existing Economic Contract, administered by Business Wales which, on its cultural recovery fund page, states that it includes areas such as:

- Fair Work
- Sector Board diversity and inclusion – gender, Welsh language, BAME representation etc.
- Retained staff to support wider initiatives e.g., contact tracing to support Test, Trace, Protect
- Social prescribing
- Supporting health & arts initiatives
- Climate Resilience <sup>2</sup>

These headings were broadly accepted by ACW, who stated that the cultural contract is “designed to encourage organisations to transform the future reach and impact of their activities.” <sup>3</sup>

## **The emergence of the Wales Culture Alliance**

The Wales Culture Alliance (WCA) emerged as a loose alliance of arts and cultural organisations and freelancers that came together to support each other as the devastation of the pandemic on the sector became clear. All give their time voluntarily, without payment, in addition to their day-to-day responsibilities. The alliance is open to anyone in

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<sup>1</sup> <https://gov.wales/securing-the-future-of-wales-culture-sector>

<sup>2</sup> <https://businesswales.gov.wales/welsh-government-cultural-contract-additional-information>

<sup>3</sup> <https://arts.wales/news-jobs-opportunities/arts-council-wales-cultural-recovery-fund-opens-for-applications>

the cultural sector who is interested in being involved. They became motivated by the ideas and ambition of a cultural contract and publicly stated (in an invitation to a discussion on a possible future for an arts council in Wales) that they “believe that the future of arts and cultures in Wales shouldn't be about how communities can deliver on Arts Council and organisations' priorities, it should be about how the Arts Council and organisations can deliver on people's and community's priorities.”<sup>4</sup> In April 2021 the WCA was granted £40K from ACW to help shape the cultural contract so that the mission and values of the cultural contract could be developed in a meaningful way. The WCA chose to do this by opening up the conversations to communities, arts organisations and freelance artists across Wales to ensure that the development of a framework itself was based on the lived experiences, concerns and aspirations of those who stand to benefit from the cultural contract.

### **The call out for conversations and a survey**

On the 29<sup>th</sup> April 2021 a call went out from the WCA publicly inviting proposals to hold funded events and conversations with communities to discuss what the cultural contract should look like in order to fulfil its ambitious social purpose.<sup>5</sup> The call out document itself stressed the flexibility, and light touch nature for proposals whilst also stressing that outputs from funded conversations could take a variety of forms.<sup>6</sup> Applicants could apply for up to £3k per project with additional funding for access and translation costs. Two zoom webinars were held on the 4<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> of May with translation available in both Welsh and British Sign Language (BSL). The call-out document described the areas of the contract that would drive the changes as being: fair work, diversity, health & wellbeing, co-creation, inclusive leadership, environmental justice, and social justice

The deadline for bids was the 10<sup>th</sup> May and successful applicants were informed on the 18<sup>th</sup> May. Thirteen conversations were funded. The deadline for the completion of the conversations and feedback was the 31<sup>st</sup> May. However, this deadline was extended by two weeks to the 15<sup>th</sup> June.

In parallel the Arts Council of Wales and Welsh Government sent out a survey to funded organisations and projects. The survey asked largely open questions about their understanding of the cultural contract and how they contribute to the areas of the cultural contract. These were described in a more specific way than in the conversations call out, building on how these have been described on the Business Wales and ACW websites. ACW and Welsh Government sent out the survey separately to organisations and projects they currently fund and there were English and Welsh versions made available.

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<sup>4</sup> [WCA Discussion: What could ACW look like in 2031? Tickets, Mon 21 Jun 2021 at 12:00 | Eventbrite](#)

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.literaturewales.org/lw-news/cultural-contract-call-out-wales-culture-alliance/>

<sup>6</sup> <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1m7WN9e7wn3GVXoIPPchgRPAO2GtET7KI/view>

## **Evaluation of the process and findings**

In late April 2021, Straeon Research Ltd <sup>7</sup> was approached by the Wales Culture Alliance to conduct an evaluation of the process and findings contained in the call-out for conversations. Initially this work did not cover reporting the survey findings but since no alliance members felt able to undertake this task within the timeframe available, the researchers, Ellie Byrne and Eva Elliott, agreed to take this on.

Eva and Ellie are experienced social science researchers and have undertaken research with community organisations and with artists and arts and cultural organisations for many years. They strive to work in a way that respects the different knowledge, experience and expertise of the people with which they engage. Whilst based at Cardiff University's School of Social Sciences they set up the Cultural Participation Research Network (CPRN). This emerged from, but was separate, a Fusion project (a programme funded by Welsh Government as a response to the Kay Andrews report on culture and poverty), which brought together academic researchers, artists, arts and heritage organisations and grassroots community groups together to develop research and collaborative projects which fulfilled shared interests and ambitions. The researchers were therefore well known to a number of people in the WCA as well as among some of the facilitators and communities taking part in the conversations. The researchers held a drop in Zoom where the conversation facilitators could come and get to know them, and ask any questions about how the research would be conducted. This was an important step in building trust between the researchers and the conversation facilitators.

## **Approach and Analysis**

A qualitative approach informed the analysis of the process and outputs provided in the conversations. In other words, the researchers were concerned about how and what ideas were expressed rather than how many people held particular views. Developing a consistent analytic approach was, however, challenging as those leading the conversations had very different ideas about the purpose of the conversations and used very different methods to facilitate these. There had been an expectation that the researchers would observe how the conversations were constructed and undertaken but, in most cases, this was not possible. This was for a variety of reasons: time (the limited timeframe sometimes required immediate set up and delivery), ethics (the requirements of a safe-space to speak without fear meant that sometimes participants would feel uncomfortable in being 'observed') and methods (in some cases the methods themselves did not lend themselves to observation – as in the case of a school and community survey). However, arrangements were made to talk to the conversation 'leads' with the object of clarifying how they could share aspects of the process with us, what the outputs in terms of feedback to the WCA would look like, and some reflections on the process itself.

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<sup>7</sup> <https://straeon.co.uk/>



In terms of analysis, the researchers looked at all materials used in the process that participants were willing and able to share (subject to research ethics requirements). These included zoom conversations, survey instruments, film rushes and unedited audio conversations. In some cases, the zoom conversations were also the outputs sent to WCA and it had been made clear that a variety of outputs were possible.

To have a consistent approach the researchers described each part of the process (and in the case of film and zoom recordings this also involved transcribing or providing close detail of what was said) as well as the outputs. They then coded both the process materials and outputs using a basic thematic analysis to assess what themes appeared to be emerging. In the case of some zoom conversations, they also assessed the process by which certain disagreements were articulated and resolved (or not). Ellie and Eva met on several occasions to share and check consistency regarding themes that emerged.

With regards to the survey, responses were pasted into Word documents and thematic content analysis applied to the text. This involved cutting and pasting responses under different theme headings, and merging/splitting these themes until a thematic framework was established.

## **Ethics**

Research integrity is important, and the researchers are committed to ethical research processes which safeguard its participants. The project leads were asked to ensure that any material sent to the researchers which contained the identity of the participants had their consent for their contributions to be seen and used. Consent forms were provided but consent was sometimes verbal in the case of zoom conversations.

However, ethical issues did arise in the process of holding the conversations themselves. It was unclear at the outset how the feedback to the WCA would be used. Were they publicly facing outputs or not? In two cases it was felt that the films they produced could result in some harm to the communities involved and/or to the facilitators. In another zoom conversation, where people were identifiable, controversial issues arose which created some conversation about acceptable language. In this case the zoom facilitator had set the conversation up as a safe space to discuss a difficult topic. However, safe spaces are rarely public facing and words were used which some felt should be withdrawn from this report because of the potential this could cause. Issues such as these prompted the WCA to ask all facilitators not to share their feedback. However, other outputs were clearly meant to be shared and were intended as the start of a collaborative approach to working in their areas and with their communities or networks. In another case the facilitator felt that it was important to be able to share their findings with the participants and to the network of artists in the area.

Learning from this experience is necessary, particularly as the process of a conversational and relational approach to developing and implementing a framework was seen as desirable. Processes inevitably shape content. In particular, the opportunities, but tensions, arise from two important principles that were dominant in what should underpin a new way

of working: the value of sharing, and the need for safe spaces to talk about the issues that matter.

In terms of the survey, responses were anonymous, however some respondents self-identified by naming their organization or projects they were involved in, so where necessary these identifying details were removed during analysis. There was also the option for respondents to leave their email addresses if they were happy to be contacted by the WCA. Email addresses were sent to the WCA and not reviewed or included in any analysis.

## **Structure of the report**

The following section describes the process: first the conversations and then the survey. In particular, the conversations raised particular issues about the difficulties and opportunities inherent in holding conversations particularly, in this context, when there was very little time to reach out and organize. The survey asked specific questions relating to what help, support and training the arts sector felt was required from Welsh Government and the Arts Council of Wales to enable understanding, development and implementation of the cultural contract. It also asked respondents to share how they would include each of the designated considerations into a cultural contract.

We then go on to discuss the findings. Part three focuses on the conversations, followed by the survey in part four. As described in the next section, the conversations were different, using different methods and focusing either on communities or other artists and creatives. Those that involved other arts organisations, creatives and freelancers tended to use the cultural call-out opportunity to discuss the contract within their existing networks. Those that wanted to involve potential audiences and/or creatives used a variety of methods to reach out (see below).

The focus of the discussions also varied. In fact, only two deliberately addressed the areas highlighted on the cultural contract call-out, with others more concerned about what a cultural contract might mean, how it could be operationalised, who the contract should be between, how to hold a contract to account and what they thought it might include. These questions were also raised by survey respondents. One conversation looked at the cultural contract areas and its 'menu of commitments', definitions and examples highlighted in the economic contract on the Business Wales website. Whilst the call-out for conversations focused on a distilled and shortened version of the principles (so not including, for instance, potential duties to support other initiatives such as track, trace and protect) the survey does include all the specific areas mentioned. Hence, whilst there is overlap, the report separates the findings from the call-out and those from the survey.

The fact that there was little direct and intentional focus on the areas or principles contained in the cultural contract was due to the belief that not many would even know what a cultural contract is. This included artists and arts organisations and this feeling of uncertainty was replicated in the responses to the survey. There were two distinct approaches to this. Some used the conversation to explore what a cultural contract might be as groundwork for a discussion as to how it could, and should, operate in ways that could

realize its stated underpinning social value aspirations. Others, particularly in communities, looked more generally at the arts and cultural context, what people wanted and how it could be more inclusive and accessible. In this way some of the principles specified in the call-out were covered, but by stealth. This is particularly the case with the sections on diversity and social justice where there were lively and engaged discussions. We therefore started the conversations section with a discussion around the idea of a cultural contract itself. This is followed by a section on 'language' as issues bilingualism and multilingualism in Wales were significant in many conversations and the primary focus of one. We then look at the principles themselves though some, such as health and wellbeing, had little coverage.

The conversation findings are followed by the survey findings, which are split into two sections:

1. Resources and support required
2. Approach and other considerations

Due to the nature of the survey, responses were shorter and more succinct than the conversation data. They were, however, still qualitative, and contained a huge diversity and range of suggestions, perspectives and ideas. The data contained practical suggestions of what would help organisations to fulfil the requirements of the cultural contract, however there was also much uncertainty surrounding what the cultural contract was, which reflects some of the conversation data.

The data relating to how respondents would incorporate each of the areas of the cultural contract are presented in tabular form as an appendix to this report.

We end with a summary of key themes that have arisen from reflections on the process, the conversations and the survey followed by a number of key actions that need to be considered at the next stage of development.

## Part Two: The Process

### **Conversations: what was funded**

Of the 23 applications submitted to the WCA, 13 were funded. Five additional conversations were held and their feedback was included in the analysis. The total value of all the support requested was £45,954 and the total funds available to support conversations was £20,000. These included:

- three funded conversations in different locations across the South Wales valleys,
- one in a hyperlocal area of North Powys,
- one with young Somali creatives in South Wales,
- a community owned conversation with young people in Butetown,
- a conversation amongst an established group of neuro-divergent people in west Wales,
- a Wales wide series of conversations exploring the relationship between language and culture and what it means for Welsh culture to be inclusive
- Conversations within a creative artists' network in North Wales.
- A series of conversations building on an existing work of community owned conversations in Newport
- A conversation amongst an established group of diverse young people from a youth panel across Wales.
- A conversation with people in organisations across Wales from the independent film sector
- One national arts venue network
- One disability artist led network
- One Health and Wellbeing Forum
- One charitable arts network
- A panel of young musicians

### **Reflections on the Call-out process**

Almost all facilitators commented on the lack of time available to engage properly with their intended communities and welcomed the additional two weeks granted to complete the work. There were some comments relating to the communication and expectations set by the WCA. It was felt that, sometimes, too little time was given to provide requested

information, and that additional requests to include certain topics were unreasonable, as conversation tools had already been prepared and in some cases, data had already been collected and conversations taken place. It was suggested by one group that stronger project management could have ensured smoother delivery of the project, but also that WCA could have pushed back at the pressure they were facing from ACW rather than forwarding it onto the facilitators. It was mentioned by more than one facilitator that ACW needs to acknowledge that anything involving communities takes time and should not be rushed. However, the WCA stressed that the timescales for them, and the ACW, were beyond their control.

It was fed back that the opportunity for funding in the first place could have been better advertised and some groups would not have heard about it had it not been for their existing connections to national organisations. However, the application process was simple and brief which was valued.

In general organisations and individuals were grateful for the opportunity as the data could be used to grow and develop their own practice as well as reporting back to the WCA. In this way, the project has helped to increase capacity in the arts sector, especially for smaller grassroots organisations. Even long-standing organisations commented on what they had learned from taking part in this project and valued the conversations that the call-out had made possible.

The call out has, to some extent, been an experiment in conversation. Whilst a conversation may be seen as an everyday practice, and individual artists and organisations may feel that they know their professional and audience communities, all conversations discovered something they did not expect. Most also found it an enriching process with many saying that they would like to continue to hold conversations to reach out, learn and develop. The need to share ideas and practice was also seen as one that could make the development of a cultural contract something that was realisable and of value.

### **Methods used and the appropriateness/effectiveness of these**

The most successful conversations were those where facilitators were already working with a community of place, identity or practice and were able to use their existing networks to facilitate conversations or activities around the Cultural Contract. In one case people who were 'community connectors', working in both a community anchor organisation and a small community group, reached out to young activists in their community. Those without an existing network, for example those relying solely on passers-by to participate, or recruiting participants from scratch, had significantly poorer turnout/interest despite their good intentions. Several facilitators, however, said they had been surprised by the people who did take part. In particular, it was felt that young people were more engaged than expected. This was particularly the case where the facilitators engaged with people in public spaces with which they were familiar.

Many used zoom as the place in which they held their conversations. This was particularly useful in the context of the restricted movements at the time, was cost effective, and could

bring people together over a wide geographical area. Many used breakout groups and jamboards as ways of encouraging input from as many people as possible. One broke up the conversational dynamic by inviting recorded provocations to encourage responses in a way that encouraged and prompted unexpected but relevant dialogue about language and culture. However, due to the short time allowed the turn-out was lower than expected in many cases and in one case the facilitators were the only people speaking.

Some changed their approach when it was obvious that the original plan would not work, for example lack of access to the venues they wanted to work in, and slower than anticipated loosening of pandemic rules. This sometimes resulted in broadening the perspectives in the data by bringing in other voices, but in one case the conversations simply did not happen.

Activity-based forms of conversations seemed to work well – small tasks ranging from word association to zine creation were good at engaging people, however the relevance to the topic was not always clear so some of what was produced had little relevance to a cultural contract.

Some facilitators were keen to articulate their own views. Sometimes respondents seem to agree because of the way something was phrased to sound more compelling. Conversations worked best where the process allowed them to step back and listen, allowing the participants to take ownership of the process. Underpinning this is trust. Trust in the participants to be able to own the conversation. However, it was also clear that trust needed to be present in the first place. This is particularly the case with members of the public or communities where there may be a direct relationship or through a connector who is themselves trusted. In one case a relationship with a key staff member of a school meant that access to students was made possible. Trusted ‘connectors’ enabled facilitators to reach out beyond the usual suspects. In one conversation a survey was used. This had the advantage of reaching a greater number of people than in a conversation though the disadvantage is that more nuanced discussions about art, creativity and culture could not be expressed. However, they can be a good basis for ‘taking the temperature’ at a particular moment in time and with the possibility of measuring future change.

## **Reflections on the data collection process**

It was reported that terms like ‘Cultural Contract’, ‘Arts Portfolio Wales’ and even ‘Arts Council Wales’ were not always familiar to the public, who seemed largely unaware of their existence in some conversations. Some facilitators deliberately did not use these terms, but instead talked about the issues relating to the Cultural Contract. There was also some negativity towards posters with the words ‘Welsh Government’ on them; in one locality people driving by even shouted abuse directed to Welsh Government. However, it was also mentioned by several facilitators that this project represented ‘the beginning’ of opening up conversations about equality, access to the arts and the cultural contract, and that they were surprised by the appetite for such discussions in their communities. This diversity of public responses to the conversations could be down to the way in which conversations

were facilitated and the level of trust community members (in many of them) had in the facilitators, but also could have been shaped by the historical and political context in each locality. Many places in Wales feel let down and abandoned by the state, which can explain some of the more negative responses to the conversations.

Although in some communities it was felt there was a strong appetite for these conversations, in other places a very different picture was painted. There was a feeling in one locality that the community did not wish to acknowledge its hardships or challenges, and do not feel they are missing out on anything currently where the arts are concerned. This links to the notion of unhealed trauma and of being constantly let down by the government, but at the same time having a strong sense of pride and associated refusal to acknowledge how the community is suffering through no fault of its own. A common theme across some of the conversations with facilitators was the presence of unhealed trauma in some communities, relating to post-industrialisation but also to the history of arts in the area. It was mentioned that some long-standing historic pieces of art had been removed from community locations which had held deep significance for local people, and that other public art was not well cared for. Those contextual factors of being ignored and belittled also need to be taken into consideration when engaging in conversations where existing power dynamics shape attitudes to perceived outsiders.

In more than one instance, facilitators talked about how people felt afraid to speak out about funding issues or decision-making, for fear of being cast out of the arts sector in their area. It was felt that freelancers working in the arts sector would not speak out as they would not be able to find work, or to access venues if they were seen as challenging. There were also concerns about the public response to some conversation outputs, which were felt to portray some communities in a negative light. This has raised quite sensitive issues over confidentiality and ethics, and some findings are anonymised to the regional level rather than individual local authorities.

## **The idea of a cultural contract**

### **What is a cultural contract?**

There is a widespread lack of understanding about what a cultural contract is, and some uncertainty as to whether the term should be used at all. This is not just from communities, but from the sector itself (also reflected in the responses to the survey). It needs to be carefully explained, and how it may benefit in different ways, arts organisations of different kinds, freelancers, staff and communities. However, there was also a deep sense of commitment to the values and principles underpinning the cultural contract and a number of organisations (particularly small independent organisations) said that they had already created something similar and that it drives what they do and in their planning for the future. In those conversations where meaning and implications of the cultural contract were discussed, there was some consideration given to how it could be developed and implemented.

In general, there was a strong feeling that one size will not fit all. Large organisations may find implementing a cultural contract relatively easy with its resources and administrative infrastructures, whereas a small organisation or independent freelance artists may not - even though some felt it was the smaller community-oriented organisations that were doing it already. It was suggested that there may be different options or versions of a cultural contract. The Business Wales guidance on the cultural contract was discussed in one conversation. It was felt not to be very arts oriented and very operational. However, they felt it was a good starting point for developing their own. It should be noted that several respondents to the survey have offered to share their own versions of a cultural contract. Given the perceived lack of clarity and the strong desire to share ideas and resources, this is likely to be welcomed by others in the sector.

However, it was also felt that perhaps the term 'contract' worked against the stated ambitions of the cultural contract, which is values based, and should be dropped. The term 'contract' does not necessarily imply commitment or aspiration, rather an obligation to comply. However, the importance of accountability was also stressed so there needs to be further discussion as to how a culturally grounded, flexible and inclusive sector could operate.

### **How should a cultural contract operate?**

The 'surprise' in many cases that the conversations were experienced as positive and illuminating was seen as relevant to how stakeholders in the cultural contract should relate to each other in the future. It was felt that some form of relationality should be at the heart of a revitalised, inclusive and socially responsible and just sector. This was discussed in terms of three broad levels:



- Relationships between cultural organisations and freelance artists and communities of place and identity
- Relationships within the cultural sector itself, particularly between artists and arts organisations, and
- Between communities and artists on the one hand, with Arts Council Wales and Welsh Government on the other.

It was widely felt that a framework for a cultural contract needs to be relevant, appropriate, adaptable, and inclusive and to consider the different Welsh contexts in which art and culture is produced and enjoyed. For instance, it was felt by some artists that there is an imposition of a South Wales mindset that is not appropriate for the cultural sector in North Wales. There needs to be some consideration of the different ways in which communities are included and involved in programming, as audiences, as participants in projects and as the artists of the future. It was also felt that the 'contract' should be one that is negotiated but also flexible and open to challenge in a spirit of cooperation and support where possible. However, it was also felt that the sense of privilege held by many existing organisations needs to be challenged. Organisations that have on-going funding need to demonstrate how they are applying the principles of the contract in their arrangements and practices.

It is not enough to say that people's voices need to be heard, the structures need to be there to support that process. It is not in the scope of this report to outline what this structure would look like but there was a sense in which those structures need to be developed through a participative process. In one conversation the fear was expressed that resource intensive consultants would be used, which could go against the spirit of the cultural framework itself. In addition, there is little confidence that either the Welsh Government or the Arts Council of Wales know or understand the needs and aspirations of communities across Wales. One suggestion was that WCA could occupy some incubator or trustee role and that productive relationships should be developed with grassroots and anchor community organisations. However, these mechanisms need to be discussed further against other participative approaches. It was strongly felt that any structure supporting the cultural contract needs to be participative in the way it operates in the future and not just in the way it is set up.

Arts organisations themselves spoke of the need to understand better the communities they serve. They found out things that they had not expected and had therefore learned from the process. Even in cases where the engagement process was difficult and perhaps less productive than hoped, the process indicated the work that needed to happen in order to have more constructive, valued and fruitful conversations. Where members of communities were the 'owners' of the conversations they talked about the need for cultural experiences that resonated with them. A consistent comment in these conversations was that organisations needed to reach out to them proactively, rather than expecting communities to come to them. One group of young people came up with the concept of the 'cognitive wall', in their discussions about space and power. It is a wall that they felt was created by

‘the dominant culture’ and not by so-called ‘hard-to-reach’ groups. This can lead to micro-aggressions and stems from a deep failure to understand the lived experiences of the communities that organisations say they want to involve. There is a need for the Arts Council of Wales itself to be better ‘known’ to communities (through their website and other communications) and to develop a more shared and owned understanding of what the cultural contract is, what it can do and what they support might generate opportunities for flourishing carers and cultural experiences for all.

The concerns are that this work will become a fixed-in-time tick-box exercise, an unrealisable burden and will simply reinforce inequalities (particularly between organisations and freelancers, large and small organisations, and between communities). These concerns were reflected in the survey data as well as the conversations. This would go against the ambitions of the cultural contract. It was also felt that there is a wealth of shared resources held collectively that could help to develop, and meaningfully implement, a cultural contract. There should be an attempt to create structures that encourage sharing in a spirit of cooperation rather than competition. However, this needs to ensure transparency and accountability so that existing forms of inequality and exclusion do not creep in. Finally, there were a few conversations that expressed surprise that the cultural contract is not more explicitly linked to the well-being goals in the Wellbeing of Future Generations Act. It was felt that this could add clarity and be more cohesive in terms of a distinctly Welsh approach.

# Language

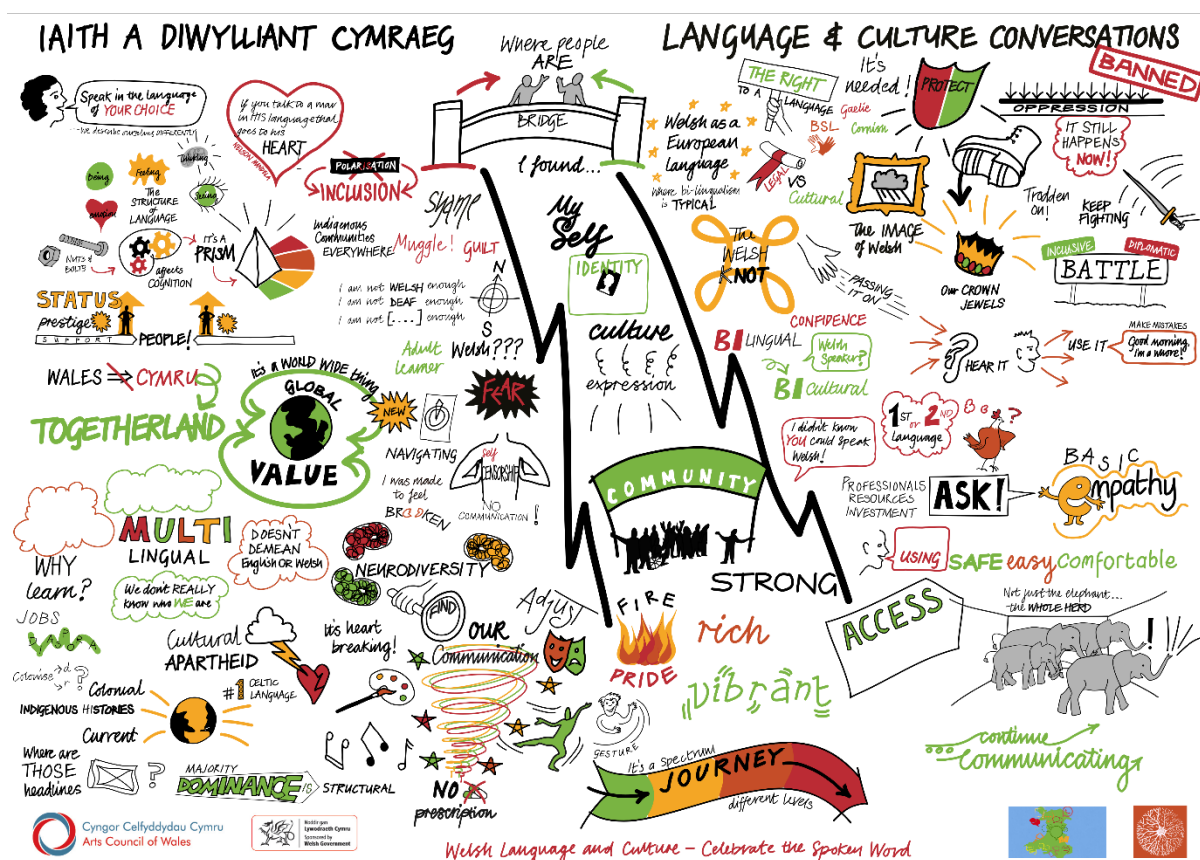


Image by Helen Frost [www.frost-creative.co.uk](http://www.frost-creative.co.uk)

NB The views represented in this image are not endorsed by the organisations who funded the conversation

*Even if we don't understand a language fully, we can experience the richness of culture through its songs, poems, dances. So finally let's agree not to accept polar opposites but bridges. Not binary but holistic thinking. Not polarized languages but as a means and tool for bridging within and without. Of welcoming and sharing windows and lights in this – our togetherland. (Excerpt from a provocation in a conversation about language and culture)*

Language was inevitably a central theme in the conversations. Language is more than a means of communication: it is bound up with identity, emotion and belonging. There were some very different views on language in the conversations, and in this section there may be some views that readers find distressing or difficult to comprehend. Differences in beliefs and opinions relating to language nevertheless exist in Wales and were reflected in several of the conversations that took place. It is important to remember that the issues relate to perceived structural and political barriers and not individuals, and that there was a general

consensus across the conversations that language plays an important role in Welsh culture and can be a bridge between different communities.

The Welsh language was not seen as separate from Welsh culture and many people in Wales feel the weight and hurt of history. Wales' native language has been derided and silenced through, amongst other things, the Welsh Knot. Some speakers expressed a sense of intergenerational trauma as previous generations have silenced themselves in their communication with their children and grandchildren. Anger from the fall-out from history was also expressed relating to the frustration, from some communities, that they feel penalized for *not* speaking Welsh when they identify whole heartedly with *being* Welsh. They felt that there are important ways in which the English language expresses their Welsh identity in their own communities.

However, as the graphic illustration suggests, the conversation that discussed language and culture directly focused on the possibilities of language to open windows, and to open up different ways of understanding the world. The central motif is of a bridge and of meeting (and greeting) in the middle whilst surrounded by the real emotions connected the implementation of language policy and the multiple assertions of Welsh identity. The first zoom meeting was a conversation about bilingualism and the second a focus on Wales as a multilingual country. Multilingual not just in terms of verbal languages but non-verbal languages too, the most recognized being deaf sign language, which carries just as much culture and community with it as verbal languages.

The intensity of passion about the Welsh language is embedded in the cultural sector in Wales. For those venues that support the Welsh language, or may see themselves as more bilingual, they are managing the different feelings and ambitions of artists and communities. One participant felt that s/he was both a freedom fighter and a peacekeeper. Cultural leaders associated with Welsh organisations defend the language with a passion, but much was said about also being welcoming and inclusive. It was generally recognised that there needs to be ways of making the Welsh language accessible and alive, even for those who are learning or lack confidence. Indeed, much of the conversation looked at the learning and use of the Welsh language as a journey and that we should not divide people into Welsh language and non-Welsh language speakers. It was said that the arts can be a vehicle for learning or at least have some understanding and insight into the richness and vibrancy of the language. Those who felt themselves to be bilingual talked about the different ways different languages encapsulate the world as well as Wales itself.

Some people talked about their experiences in other countries with parallel indigenous languages and that we should learn from these and not feel that Wales should 'beat itself up' for not being perfect. In some of these examples it was felt that the Sami (northern Scandinavia) and Mauri languages expressed a connection to nature that was resonant with Wales and the Welsh language. It was felt that the cultural sector could do so much more to use language in a welcoming and non-judgemental way. However, respect should also be given to those who feel that their Welshness, and the community they belong to, can also be expressed in English (or a non-Welsh or non-verbal) language. What is important is that

everyone should have the right to access the native Welsh language. In another conversation it was felt that English language artists across North Wales were penalised because of the lack of opportunities for them to learn Welsh.

In some places in Wales (mainly cities) many different languages are spoken. These reflect histories of migration, much of them still linked to Wales' history as a global centre for industrialisation. It was asked whether the cultural sector can support the fact that multiple identities are carried through language? It was argued that languages are kept alive through their usage and the cultural sector could do much to look imaginatively at 'translation'. In this way the use of language can be seen as an invitation to gain new ways of seeing rather than a closed door.

It was raised by some speakers that, for some, there are no languages that exist through which they can easily communicate. Some neuro-diverse people, for example, may find it difficult to communicate through language. In these instances, could we look to other forms of communication more broadly? For this to become commonplace, more training and resources are required to increase capacity in the sector. It is important for everyone to find it easy to speak, communicate and enjoy the arts. It was suggested that developing best practice around this should be as commonplace as having bus stops and post offices. This goes beyond the arts sector. For example, if BSL was taught as a language in schools it would help with communication in the longer term.

## **Fair work**

There was some concern about nepotism and bullying in the industry and this extends to jobs going to people that are already known. In some parts of Wales emerging artists have experienced a closed-door policy in relation to jobs and opportunities. There needs to be ways of reaching out further than the known networks and to be fair and transparent about hiring processes. There are also 'gatekeepers' to the arts and cliques that hinder artist integration and the opportunities for work and progression. In one conversation a speaker felt that elite organisations prefer to stick with the artists they know and trust. For instance, they may not take on a new Asian writer because it constitutes a perceived risk. However, it was felt that the transformation of the sector depends on risk. It is no longer acceptable to think of people as risks if they are receiving public funding. It was also felt that new and emerging artists, who are not part of an established arts community or social network, are not accustomed to the 'language' expected in, for instance, an Arts Council of Wales bid. More support is needed to break the mould, and this was reflected in the survey data with respondents asking for extensive support and resources to enable *all* organisations to participate fully in the cultural contracts process.

In other smaller organisations the difficulty of *knowing* how to find new and emergent artists that are not known was expressed. As well as accountability and transparency there needs to be support in developing inclusive recruitment processes. For instance, it was suggested that more use could be made of Open-Hire to support recruitment.<sup>8</sup> These were

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<sup>8</sup> <https://www.openhire.uk/>

also raised as training needs in the survey, with some organisations asking for guidance and support in ensuring their engagement and recruitment practices were in line with the expectations of the cultural contract.

Artists need opportunities to develop their practice. However, in more rural locations, particularly in North Wales, this is difficult to find and freelancers in particular can feel cut-off. This was also reflected in the survey data, with one respondent suggesting more collaboration was needed between organisations in North Wales. The opportunities for development need to be more equally distributed and not just in the usual 'hubs' of cultural activity. It was suggested that large arts organisations could realise their privilege and offer support for free. The survey data contained several suggestions for peer-to-peer mentoring and support within the sector, where larger or more experienced organisations could help smaller organisations, and with funding to facilitate this. Again, in North Wales artists felt that they had to develop a wide variety of skills and fulfil a variety of roles in order to compensate for a deficiency in structural support e.g., theatre-makers being performers, directors, dramaturg, producer, marketing, overseeing funding applications, and administration on single projects. This is to fulfil the deficit of collaborative practice across the region, a lack of accessible structural support as well as development opportunities. Arts practitioners felt there was a lack of collaboration opportunities or development opportunities due to the lack of cohesive networks across the region. The survey pointed to a need for more opportunities for young people and emerging artists, including in North Wales.

A major theme was the pressure on freelancers who often work for no pay, or they stretch their pay, to meet the expectations of a project. This was raised in the survey data as well. Freelancers are at a disadvantage when it comes to applying for bids, which they do in their own time, whilst larger organisations are paid to put bids together as a part of their job. There was a suggestion for more work to be done on what might constitute a living wage for freelancers which takes into consideration the right to annual leave, sick pay, and pension contributions as well as the fact that many freelancers do not have consistent work. The survey revealed the need for support to freelancers and unfunded organisations with bid writing, both in terms of mentoring and financial support.

In terms of fair pay generally the Living Wage, as stipulated by the Living Wage Foundation<sup>9</sup> was mentioned in some conversations and that all organisations should seek to be accredited so that everyone working in an organisation is paid no less than the living wage. It was also suggested in one conversation that pay distribution should be considered, with the highest paid worker not paid more than three times those that are paid the least. Rates of pay could be regulated by a higher authority and reviewed regularly so that employers are held to account. However, some consideration needs to be given to small

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<sup>9</sup> <https://www.livingwage.org.uk/>

<sup>10</sup> It is also be noted that Cynnal Cymru is the Living Wage accreditation partner in Wales: <https://cynnalcymru.com/living-wage-for-wales/#:~:text=Living%20Wage%20Funders%20This%20is%20a%20scheme%20by,grant-makers%20to%20combat%20low-pay%20in%20the%20charity%20sector.>

organisations so that they are able to support staff and freelancers fairly. Also, some consideration should be given to young people whose labour is often exploited. One conversation concluded that there needed to be equality of wages regardless of age.

Fair work also needs to consider the balance between home and work. The pandemic has been difficult for many people working in the cultural sector in a number of ways with some people finding home working stressful and intrusive. Employers need to consider how they can ensure a healthy working environment (see health and wellbeing below) and both address and prevent burnout and stress.

In the conversation where it was discussed, Business Wales' support of trade unions and collective bargaining was welcomed. They felt that joining unions should actively be encouraged by cultural organisations.

Fair work and understanding rates of pay was a training need identified in the survey, so that organisations could fully understand this issue and ensure they are operating fairly and in accordance with the most up to date guidance and policies.

## **Diversity**

This was a major theme in most conversations and the range of concerns suggest a need for an intersectional approach to be considered at all levels: audience, artist development, staff, board representation and senior management. The arts also have an important role in challenging exclusion, prejudice and oppression through the power that culture has to represent the world. Diversity was also considered in terms of artistic form. Some felt that the culture was defined too narrowly in terms of what is seen as legitimate. For instance, creative forms (particularly in dance and music) are often seen as marginal to the arts (e.g., hip-hop, grime) and new creative gaming art forms which may be relevant to future generations and already involve people who feel marginalised from the established mainstream arts. A lack of artistic diversity in relation to projects, funding, opportunities and structural support to deliver rural activities was also highlighted as a barrier to community involvement as well as restricting opportunities for artists located in those rural communities.

## **Feeling safe**

Challenging what seem to be inherently unequal structural power structures can feel unsafe for communities and artists who might feel excluded or outside the established arts networks. Feeling safe to speak and challenge, was seen as a minimal condition in which to facilitate change inclusively. If change is to embrace the diversity of the communities and artists living in Wales then the ideas pertaining to 'feeling safe' are relevant to processes of developing and implementing cultural framework.

Feelings of exclusion can result in self silencing and feeling that there are no places to have the difficult conversations about how you feel and how these may inform change. However there needs to be some thought about what constitutes a safe space. People often use the

term lightly as if it is obvious what it means. However, it is often done without actively thinking about the ways in which taken-for-granted structures, and forms of practice, exclude people from particular place-based, ethnic, neuro-divergent, disabled communities. In particular where opinions are divided, the emphasis should be on non-judgemental resolution and reconciliation, whilst avoiding language that is offensive or weaponizing. In one conversation there was a discussion about the psychological violence stemming from the unconscious use of language and assumptions about what constitutes a space of belonging.

## **Communities**

In relation to communities, diversity was considered in terms of how communities of identity, experience, oppression, and place could be more prominent in the production and consumption of art. Consideration in many conversations was given to class, disability, neurodiversity, ethnicity and race, as well as gender. A cross-cutting theme was the need for organisations to reach out to communities that might not be included rather than waiting to hear from them. A need to be much more proactive and to challenge the unconscious assumptions they may hold. These relationships need to be ongoing, meaningful, and developmental. Not one-off engagements or projects 'helicoptering' in.

Many communities of place and identity feel excluded from cultural opportunities in terms of consumption, participation, development and production. The overall sense was that it is still largely a white, middle class domain. Many people still feel alienated, excluded, and even humiliated by the ways in which cultural spaces are conceived and constructed and the ways in which the cultural industries reinterpret the world. It was also felt that the processes of change need to be supported by funding. As one participant said, "*why not build an escalator to help people rather than pull up a ladder to stop people trying*".

## **Cultural venues and spaces**

Going beyond safety, cultural venues need to feel inviting, welcoming and, in relation to the communities they are rooted in, as 'spaces of belonging'. However, the transformation of these spaces cannot be done without reaching out to diverse communities themselves and engaging with the lived experiences that constitute historic feelings of exclusion and alienation.

Larger cultural venues were referred to frequently in conversations in South Wales. Whilst acknowledged as important and valued, it was felt that these venues tended to fall short both in terms of their connection to their local communities, and as venues that seek to reach beyond the local. People from different valleys communities talked about the expense of attending performances and events (tickets and transport) and the time it takes to get to venues in the Capital city (again poor transport infrastructure). There was a sense of a geographical injustice and divide, where the city reaps the benefits of both investment and the consumption of cultural goods within the region. Although it was also acknowledged that efforts were being made to address local connectedness and reach, it was felt that more could be done in terms of engagement and communication.



Our urban centres are diverse but there is little that reflects the rich traditions from black, Asian and other minority ethnic communities that are part of Welsh culture. These diverse and popular forms of music, performance and art are rarely part of mainstream programming or seen as a route to becoming an artist. For instance, it was pointed out that there are some exciting developments in the Somali music scene but people do not easily know where, or how, to go and listen to it. Do our 'mainstream' venues even try to find out what might be present and emerging from the diversity of communities living in Wales? In more rural areas it was suggested that there was a lack of knowledge as to what opportunities there are to access events or exhibitions.

In one case speakers reflected on how large cultural venues tend to operate as spaces, in comparison to smaller community venues, such as the one in which they held their conversation. They felt that community spaces operate with an explicit acknowledgement and understanding of the local population and the use of the buildings is built around what local people need, want and value. Whilst a different kind of venue to a theatre, cinema or gallery it was felt that similar processes of thinking about power and space could be embedded in thinking about large cultural venues. For instance, placing communities at the centre in thinking about the use of rooms and internal spaces and the provision of food that is offered to people who walk through the door. Communication about facilities also needs to be clear. If there are prayer rooms or there is good Wi-Fi access, then this needs to be communicated meaningfully and effectively. It was felt that large venues needed to be generous with their space and resources to communities and artists. They need to be nurturing the creativity of future artists in ways that are meaningful to the people living within their sphere of responsibility.

In some communities the gendered nature of events or exhibitions determines whether people feel they have a right or permission to enter or participate. For instance, some Muslim women do not feel comfortable in spaces where there are men, or their parents will feel that they are not appropriate for their daughters. It was argued in one conversation that there should be 'women only' spaces in some cases. In this conversation it was also felt that activities tended to be male dominated so women *feel* excluded. However, a survey of bilingual secondary school students suggested that it was girls who tended to feel more comfortable with arts-based activities, so it is difficult to be explicit in this report as to how different arts spaces and practices are gendered.

Discussions about cultural spaces did not just concern large venues. There was also, particularly in some parts of the South Wales valleys, a deep sense of sadness, loss, and betrayal with regard to buildings. Discussions about empty, abandoned and disused venues raised the issue of what community cultural spaces could be if they could be properly renovated, funded, and supported for events and projects for people to enjoy and develop skills which might provide entry points for future artists. However, in other areas cultural spaces look different and culture may be embedded and expressed in the everyday spaces where people can (and could) engage with art. In more rural areas better understandings of the use of smaller community venues could be used to reach out more imaginatively to communities, where there is an appetite for creative development and cultural experiences.

Transport is an issue for rural areas too and it was suggested that links between arts venues and Transport for Wales be forged across the country. In one conversation it was also stated that there should be a rural policy which seeks to improve access for those who struggle to travel with regard to communities and artists.

### **The arts conceived of as 'other'**

The reputation of arts and culture in some communities is that it does not reflect a practice or potential vocational path for them. It was reported in some cultural groups that parents do feel that arts offer a 'proper' career. There is sometimes a stigma associated with the arts and they are only seen as a hobby. This was not just a concern amongst some minority ethnic communities but also in other places in Wales where there is little reach from the sector and where artists are seen as part of a different walk of life. The term 'culture' is often felt to be loaded with privilege. Art is sometimes seen as something that other people do, that is not for them. Even to consider that 'they need it' can be seen as insulting. This is perhaps not surprising given the lack of representation from working-class people and more economically neglected communities. The response is sometimes to see certain communities as culturally deficit, but it was none the less clear that culture was evident in many 'ordinary' ways. The role of the sector may be to build on is already there rather than imposing an idea of what is culturally 'good' for communities. It was also suggested that plans need to be long-term, not just short-term projects that re-enforce a feeling of being devalued.

### **Opportunities for young people**

The infrastructure for young people to develop their skills in activities such as dance, music and other forms of performance is absent. Venues in some communities are often unsuitable for practicing or performing safely. But there is also a lack of thinking more imaginatively about existing spaces. One musician talked about his experience in Liverpool where young bands were able to perform in popular venues on 'dry' nights. With regard to music in many communities the post-pandemic recovery has raised the concern that local venues, such as pubs and clubs, will find it even more difficult to host bands. These are often part of a trajectory for careers but also hold significant value in communities in terms of access to particular cultural forms.

Engagement with young people in rural and post-industrial areas suggested an interest in arts-based activities but having little opportunity to develop their interests. Whilst small rural villages are unlikely to have large arts venues it was felt that much could be done to build on the cultural infrastructures than may be there such as libraries, community centres, pubs (which sometimes have rooms) and Young Farmers' clubs. Findings from a survey in a bilingual school in a rural area of North Wales suggested that interests change and develop according to age and opportunities to harness interests in, for instance, video/film making, photography, song writing, or playing musical instruments should be harnessed in ways make best use of local resources and the artists that operate in the area.

In terms of careers there was a feeling that people want opportunities to develop their skills and passions in their hometowns or, at least, in Wales, without having to move away (although some people also want to go and explore the world). Even for something like music training it was felt that there are not enough opportunities in Wales to receive an education in music. Again, gender was an issue in some cases with girls feeling that there were fewer opportunities aimed at them – especially in music which was felt to be a male, white dominated art form. However, as above, the gendered picture is complex with many forms of arts practice seen as feminine, potentially creating an invisible wall to entry.

The focus on young people is perhaps a consequence of the conversations that were funded. However, some place-based conversations felt that older people tended to be forgotten and that they can also contribute to, and enjoy, cultural experiences. Whilst not widely discussed it was also said that arts organisations and their boards need to be held to account for their lack of diversity. This is also an important condition for the wider changes needed to promote and support diversity.

## **Health and wellbeing**

There was surprisingly little on health and wellbeing in the conversations. This may be because the focused nature of the conversations meant that health and wellbeing tended to be less of a priority in the conversations at this stage. Nonetheless the relative silence was also reflected in the survey.

However, there was an awareness for the need for the wellbeing of staff to be central to fair work, particularly as Wales recovers from the pandemic. In one discussion there was concern from staff in venues about the processes of opening up and the need for organisations to be mindful of their responsibilities in supporting staff health and wellbeing. Some organisations have ensured that they are doing regular check-ins with staff, and it was felt that this needed to be routine in all organisations with offers of support through, for instance, counselling and access to therapy. It was stated that all arts organisations need to be concerned with the impact of new forms of working have had on staff wellbeing and on the stress and burnout this has created.

One conversation talked about taking care over the accessibility of venues post-COVID for people whose mental health may be suffering, or who may feel anxious about going to venues.

There was nothing on the therapeutic role of the arts or culture as a determinant of health. It is noted that there is a memorandum of understanding between Arts Council Wales and the NHS confederation and the development of a social prescribing route to recovery.

## **Co-creation**

Some of the conversations on diversity overlapped here. The focus tended to be on barriers rather than meaningful co-creation with communities. It was agreed that there needs to be

investment in building meaningful relationships and understanding the barriers for many people in accessing opportunities to participate.

Community engagement tends to be devalued, is under-resourced and often unpaid. It is hidden work that is essential for co-creation or any inclusive process or practice. It was stated that by connecting and working with communities today we will open up the possibilities for the artists of tomorrow. In one conversation it was suggested that arts organisations could offer the opportunity for emerging artists in underrepresented communities to work with known excellent and experienced artists.

It was felt that all aspects of the co-creation process need to be funded including translation, transport, access to venues. The practicalities, in more rural areas, need to be recognised as resources are more dispersed.

### **Inclusive Leadership**

Again, little directly on this theme although there was a general call for transparency and the need to be pro-active for change. There was a call for leadership to be more equitable and relatable and for organisations to be transparent and honest about policies, so they are seen not to be tokenistic. It should be possible to challenge decisions, particularly in large well-funded organisations, they are felt not to be working and fall short of the commitments expressed in the cultural contract. One conversation called for unconscious bias training to understand and learn how biases can affect decisions. Equalities and unconscious bias training was also requested by many in the survey. There was a call for meaningful recruitment (see fair work) which commits organisations to actively seek new artists/staff rather than rest with existing structures that can systematically exclude.

### **Environmental Justice**

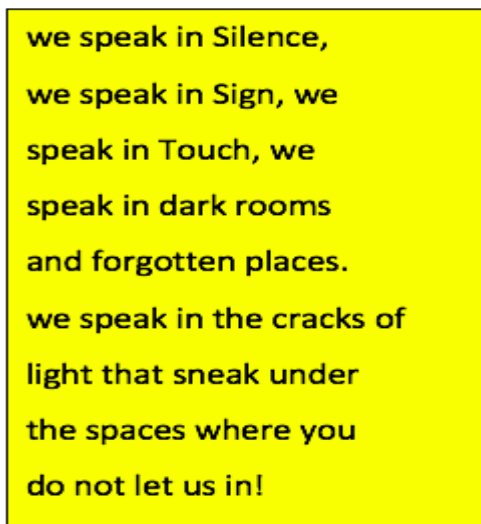
Where discussed there was a general agreement that sustainable policies needed to be implemented and, in relation to environmental justice, that local resources needed to be used as much as possible in order to support local businesses and the local economy. There is also a responsibility to employ local people wherever possible and to support emerging local artists. This would have additional environment benefits in terms of shorter travel routes. Encouragement of car-sharing and hyper-local residencies were also suggested, particularly in rural communities where travel between venues and communities may be necessary. However, it was also stressed that there may be different capacities with regard to large and small organisations. In addition, resources in some areas are required where cultural organisations are working from historic buildings, which themselves hold cultural value.

There was some discussion about whose responsibility environmental justice is, and the possibility of a shared or collaborative responsibility in some cases. The idea of the use and impact of a kite mark was discussed in one group and a particular scheme, The Green

Dragon Environmental Standard<sup>11</sup>, was shared. A number of practical examples of environmental practices, policies and projects (e.g., rewilding, repurposing, working with eco-friendly suppliers) were mentioned and, again, it is an opportunity to share ideas and resources. It was also suggested that organisations could consider sourcing material only from businesses which have fair work and sustainable practices

## Social Justice

From: Stories of access



**we speak in Silence,  
we speak in Sign, we  
speak in Touch, we  
speak in dark rooms  
and forgotten places.  
we speak in the cracks of  
light that sneak under  
the spaces where you  
do not let us in!**

## Accessibility

We have placed accessibility under the heading of social justice. As one group of D/deaf and disabled people pointed out, Article 27 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.<sup>12</sup> states that “*Everyone has the right freely to participate in the cultural life of the community, to enjoy the arts [and to share in scientific advancement] and its benefits*”. In this conversation they pointed out that arts and cultural organisations have a duty of care towards their members and audiences to ensure that basic access needs are met. They felt that lack of accessibility meant that for many disabled people, they are not able to freely participate.

Access for disabled people was widely felt to be not good enough. In one county, there are no suitable spaces at all for wheelchair users. Where there are facilities, they rarely function properly, increasing risk. If organisations anticipate and meet the needs through organisational guidelines, team training, house rules and event specification it means that D/deaf and disabled audiences can participate without having to use their energy to advocate for their access needs. This can be exhausting. Lack of access makes people think that existing cultural opportunities and events are not for them, and they are made to feel unwelcome or an inconvenience. Moreover, disabled people feel shut out. It was felt that

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<sup>11</sup> <https://www.greenbusinesscentre.org.uk/green-dragon-environmental-standard>

<sup>12</sup> <https://www.un.org/en/about-us/universal-declaration-of-human-rights>

people should not have to request access and that it should be expected and routine. One conversation went into some detail as to how venues/events/meetings could be made accessible and welcoming (see appendices). However, it needs proactive engagement because the needs of D/deaf and disabled people are not the same.

This is one important area where there should be training and resources available to enable a shift to a more inclusive cultural sector. There are good examples of organisations or exhibitors holding, for instance, dementia friendly screenings. Training could also include basic skills in British Sign Language (BSL) and Makaton as well as how to ensure that venues are experienced as welcoming and safe for people with a range of disabilities. Some venues used lockdown to invest in staff training of these kinds. It was stated that there is a willingness in the sector, but it takes time and resources and to make a change.

### **Power & inequalities**

Unpinning many conversations (explicitly and implicitly) were questions about where power lies. There were questions about where the money goes, which organisations it is spent on, and whether there is transparency and accountability. For example, are venues inflating hire charges on purpose? Are the same people on the funding boards also in receipt of funding? There are possibly quite difficult and deep issues for ACW and Welsh Government to look at here in terms of abuses of power. This was mirrored in the survey, where several respondents called for greater transparency and accountability regarding who is funded, geographical spread and who makes decisions. It was suggested that the failure of organisations to meet the standards set in the cultural contract should result in consequences, including defunding organisations where necessary. It was also suggested that ACW should be held to the same accountability in terms of how it operates.

It was also felt in some conversations that there is a geographical injustice in the distribution of resources. There are inequalities between areas and how much is spent per person in different local authorities – a difference of over £50 in some cases. Although some venues are expected to have a regional reach it was felt that the benefit is more likely to be for those who are also more privileged, thus reinforcing the social injustice.

It was also recognised that the cultural sector has a responsibility for how the social world is represented and there was a call for venues to de-platform artists that reinforce discrimination or prejudice. It was also felt that cultural venues should also be spaces where diverse communities can feel safe in discussing the issues that matter to them and to challenge existing practices (see section on feeling safe). Priorities for social change may differ in different areas but it should not stop organisations and venues using their power to challenge social injustice and widen perspectives. It was felt that this needs to happen alongside promoting artist and audience diversity in their local areas. Long-term thinking and development need to happen to enable meaningful change. Again, examples of good-practice and resources could be shared.

There was a strong message that culture is ordinary and made in people's everyday lives. There is a need to build on that rather than see some communities as deficit of 'culture'.

However there needs to be ways in which opportunities to discover and explore creative horizons are offered, and made available, to everyone. Nonetheless there is evidence to suggest that access to the arts is unfairly distributed to benefit a more affluent demographic so there is an inverse correlation to need.

## Part Four: Findings from the survey

An online survey was created to capture the experiences and perspectives of organisations funded through ACW programmes and Welsh Government's 'Creative Wales'. This was available in English and Welsh. There were 73 responses to the survey sent to ACW funded organisations, and 79 responses to the survey sent to Welsh Government funded organisations.

The survey began with an explanation of the research and space for respondents to give their consent. They were then asked whether they had received funding asking them to commit to a cultural contract, and to state how confident they felt in their understanding of a cultural contract.

### **Arts Council for Wales respondents**

There were 66 responses in English and 7 responses in Welsh (there were 8 submitted but one is a duplicate). The survey was sent to 253 potential respondents, giving a response rate of 28.85%.

100% of participants agreed to the consent questions at the beginning of the survey.

93% of participants had received funding that had asked them to commit to a Cultural Contract. 3% said they had not received such funding, and 3% were unsure.

However, only 55% of participants felt confident in their understanding of a cultural contract, with 23.1 reporting not feeling confident, and 26.2% feeling unsure.

### **Welsh Government respondents**

There were 74 responses in English and 5 responses in Welsh. We do not know how many people the survey was sent to so cannot provide a response rate.

100% of participants agreed to the consent questions at the beginning of the survey.

58.1% of participants had received funding that had asked them to commit to a Cultural Contract. 25.7% said they had not received such funding, and 18.9% were unsure.

40.3% of participants felt confident in their understanding of a cultural contract, with 40.3% reporting not feeling confident, and 21% feeling unsure.

Respondents were then asked a series of qualitative questions, with space to write as much or as little as they wished. The responses were varied and rich in scope and reflected many of the same issues as the conversation data, as you have read.

This section is split into two sub-sections:

Firstly, the resources and support required from the sector, including training needs, resources that would be helpful, and a range of tools and methods in order to support the sector with the cultural contract.



Secondly, reflections on the approach to developing the cultural contract and considerations that the sector feels are important for Welsh Government and ACW to consider in the process.

## **Resources and support required**

In relation to what respondents felt they needed from Welsh Government and the Arts Council of Wales, and what respondents would like to see happening in the sector to support the cultural contracts framework, these fell into several broad categories. Responses were varied both in their content, but also in their tone and understanding. The breadth and diversity of experience, opinion and appetite for a cultural contract was significant.

The majority of responses from both surveys fell into very similar themes, so will be presented together here with key differences highlighted. Quotes are identified as coming either from the Welsh Government survey (WG) or the Arts Council of Wales Survey (ACW).

A cross-cutting theme was that organisations vary significantly in their size, expertise, art form, business model and staffing. It was felt that smaller organisations in particular need additional support and resources to enable them to fulfil the requirements being placed upon them with the cultural contract. As one respondent highlighted, “...*smaller cultural units... provide a valuable contribution to historic and cultural aspects*” (WG) and help specifically for smaller organisations was requested frequently across both surveys.

## **No support required, or unsure what is required**

In total, 10 respondents from both surveys felt there was no need for any guidance, support or help in the creation of a cultural contract, and that ACW and Welsh Government had been helpful in what had already been provided. As there were a total of 79 WG responses and 72 ACW responses, this means that 6.62% of respondents felt either that there was no need for training, or that they were not sure.

## **Clarity and information**

It was evident from the responses that some confusion and lack of understanding exists surrounding the cultural contract, with one person stating, “*I don’t know what your [sic] talking about*” (WG). The term ‘cultural contract’ was reported as “*very unclear*” (WG) for one respondent, and others asked for clarity on the basic principles of the contract, the definition of ‘culture’ and its aims. There was also a request for information relating to the specific areas of the contract and how organisations can grow their understanding of each area.

The key areas identified for clarity and further information were:

- What is a cultural contract?
- Who is the contract between?

- How will the information be used?
- Is the contract at the organisation level or project level?
- How will it be reported on?

In relation to ongoing information, it was suggested by respondents in both surveys that updates on new policies, guidance and developments would be welcomed as they emerge.

### **Guidance / toolkit**

The need for some form of guidance, whether in the form of a document, toolkit or meetings and seminars, was very clear from the survey responses. As one respondent highlighted: *“One person’s interpretation will be different to another”* (ACW).

Respondents asked for guidance on what would be expected from Welsh Government and ACW in terms of a cultural contract - its format, length, implementation, monitoring and reporting. It was suggested that this could be bespoke for specific artistic disciplines where possible. It was raised that guidance on the specific areas of the cultural contract would also be welcomed, particularly for smaller organisations. If there is existing guidance that is relevant to the cultural contract, then this should also be highlighted.

Guidance should be tailored to organisations of all sizes so that requirements are fully understood and should be written to enable non-professional and volunteers to understand the instructions as well as more experienced industry professionals. Jargon should be avoided. A human point of contact was often requested in addition to documentation, to enable full understanding and to whom questions could be directed. There was a sense that guidance documents can be overwhelming so care needs to be taken in the creation of these.

The issue was raised of duplication between the aims of the cultural contract and wider ACW targets. It was suggested that there is a streamlined process to avoid excessive form-filling, and that perhaps completing ACW objectives could also count towards a cultural contract.

### **Templates and case studies**

As part of the guidance process, respondents asked for a range of templates, case studies, examples of cultural contracts, and best practice documents to support them. These were strongly requested in the data, and it is highly recommended that such supporting material is provided for organisations.

One respondent said that they need to *“...see an actual contract, to understand precisely how it would apply to us in practice”* (WG), and others reflected this, asking for examples of cultural contracts relating to different size organisations, with different business models, starting points, and from rural as well as urban areas.

Examples of “*what makes a good cultural contract*” as well as “*what is not good enough*” (ACW) were requested, along with examples of how voluntary organisations are fulfilling their contracts. Templates for job descriptions, policies and Welsh language commitment were also requested.

‘Best practice’ was also quoted as an area respondents would require support in, so they could learn how best to develop, implement and report on their cultural contracts. Best practice examples and case studies showing what different organisations should be doing for different aspects of the cultural contract could help to provide support.

## **Training**

Training was mentioned frequently across both surveys, both in terms of what help and support ACW and Welsh Government could provide to organisations, and what organisations would like to see happening in the sector to support the cultural contracts framework.

It should be noted that 10 respondents from the ACW survey and 17 respondents from the Welsh Government survey felt they either did not know what training would be required, or that none was required. There were also two responses from the ACW survey suggesting that people should have the “*freedom to question*” and be able to “*challenge the status quo*”.

Of those who *did* feel that training would be beneficial, the majority simply asked for ‘training’ and did not specify any topic. Where mentioned, specific areas for training requested included:

- Equalities, Diversity and Inclusion (1 WG, 16 ACW)
- How to write a cultural contract (6 WG; 8 ACW)
- Implementing the cultural contract (11 WG, 2 ACW)
- Evaluation, monitoring and data management (2 WG, 7 ACW)
- Understanding the cultural contract (7 ACW)
- Marketing, PR and online (7 WG, 2 ACW)
- Management, business and systems training (3 WG, 3 ACW)
- Climate resilience and lowering carbon footprint (3 WG, 2 ACW)
- Writing funding applications (4 WG)
- Access to skills for young people (including mentoring and apprenticeships) (3 WG, 1 ACW)
- Engagement & communication training (4 ACW)

- Policy and compliance (3)
- Awareness raising (no further explanation given) (3 WG)
- Social prescribing (1 WG, 1 ACW)
- Fair work/trade (1 WG, 1 ACW)
- Mental health (1 WG, 1 ACW)
- How to include non-Welsh speakers in boards that are run in Welsh (1)
- Customer service (1 WG)
- First Aid (1 WG)
- Running a museum (1 WG)
- Technical camera work (1 WG)
- Volunteer training (1 ACW)
- How to become a B corporation (1 WG)

The number of responses per survey have been included by each topic to demonstrate any similarities or differences in the data between the two surveys.

In terms of the recommended format for training, there was a mixture of responses from people; some preferring written documents, and others preferring live sessions with interaction. Online and virtual training was suggested by several respondents, feeling that face-to-face “*may not be necessary*” (ACW) and that online is better for the environment. However, in-person training was also requested. There were several requests for organisation-specific training to ensure relevance and tailored support, particularly for smaller organisations. It was also requested that a database of expertise was made available, should organisations seek specific training on areas in which they have little experience.

One respondent felt that training works best when shared among several organisations:

*Our organisation supports a number of young volunteers, helping them to develop skills and build their CVs for future employment. They are involved in every aspect of delivery. We have found over the last 18 months that training is more beneficial when shared with a number of organisations and that the best training allows time for participation and sharing of knowledge by those attending*

(WG)

It was also suggested that ACW invests in training for its own staff on process-based arts and co-design needs, to increase understanding of new approaches among the organisation and to inform future funding streams. Another respondent felt that the training given to the

sector should also be taken by ACW and Welsh Government civil servants “...so that we all have a common understanding” (ACW).

Overall, there was a clear sense that ‘one size’ will not fit all when it comes to training delivery methods.

### **Networking, mentoring and discussion**

This was one of the biggest themes across the survey, related to the themes above, but with more of an emphasis on shared learning, mentoring, meaningful discussion and networking between people and organisations working in the industry, as well as with communities.

Networking and mentoring can help organisations identify their strengths and weaknesses. As one respondent remarked:

*“It would help if the sector was more joined up. Wales by its nature is made up of so many smaller organisations, who could benefit by working more together”* (WG)

The importance of dialogue at the initial stages of the process was highlighted, to develop thinking around the theoretical underpinnings of the contract and to ensure commitment to genuine change from less engaged organisations. The time required to develop this was noted; growing a shared understanding and commitment takes time and cannot be rushed. For example, it was suggested that dialogue is also needed between organisations and their communities to ensure the framework is “...appropriate and inclusive and doesn’t create barriers” (ACW).

The idea of peer mentoring and support between different organisations was suggested, either on an individual basis or via group support. Networks for practical support, facilitated discussions, and “conversations that lead to a better understanding of the needs of the sector...” (ACW) were felt to be valuable opportunities to help the sector make the cultural contract feel meaningful and not “...like another tick box” (ACW).

Ongoing discussion and sharing can be a way of overcoming any “...misunderstanding[s] between the people that actually produce the work and those that fund it...” (WG) and there was a strong sense that opportunities to share experiences and best practice within the sector would be highly valued. As one respondent pointed out: “people are the best kind of resources” (ACW).

A need for advisors and human contact was also highlighted in the data, with respondents asking for “a point of contact”, “specialist help on site” and “access to real people” (WG).

Training was frequently requested alongside “meaningful discussion” (ACW) in the form of facilitated events, networks and mentoring. Suggestions for opportunities for dialogue included:

- Hub/database of expertise and collaborators
- Day-long sessions for staff, freelancers and participants

- Visits from ACW
- Regional points of contact
- Discussion groups
- Online fora
- Networking events
- Peer-to-peer mentoring
- Sharing events
- Webinars with Q&A

Webinar support was also mentioned by respondents in both surveys, as well as check-ins / review meetings with support staff and help to ensure agreements are of acceptable quality. It was highlighted in both surveys that events should bear in mind that some people in the sector are only able to attend evenings, and that time is scarce for everyone.

It was also felt that within organisations all staff should be involved in the cultural contract, not just one or two, to enable a company-wide understanding. The implications of the cultural contract may affect some of the traditional business functions, for example Marketing, which may need to become more community focused. It was also raised that there are still many voices missing from the arts sector, including *“carers, care experienced young people, people experiencing economic disadvantage, rural isolation and poverty”* (ACW). Others agreed that the cultural contract is an opportunity to make changes that will, ultimately, increase quality of life.

Overall, it was felt that open dialogue and ongoing discussion were absolutely key to the development and implementation of a cultural contract. A wide range of mechanisms were suggested, highlighting the need for careful consideration of the needs of the entire sector and how best to engage all organisations meaningfully.

## **Funding**

Funding was mentioned by respondents as a facilitator for the development, understanding and implementation of the cultural contract. It was felt that there should be a funded role within the Welsh Government specifically for the facilitation of the cultural contract, as well as ACW workers dedicated to supporting organisations in their development of cultural contracts. Indeed, one respondent asked for recognition that a flourishing arts sector *“needs investment in its organisations in order to build capacity”* (ACW) which was re-iterated by other respondents.

Financial support to reflect the additional work being undertaken by organisations in developing a cultural contract was requested, and it was also felt that funding would be required to enable organisations to engage with their communities during the development

process, to support greater inclusion and accessibility. The success of the Cultural Recovery Fund was highlighted, with a suggestion that more of this type of funding could help to achieve greater equality faster. There was also the suggestion that financial support could be given to ACW portfolio companies to support non-portfolio organisations to develop their cultural contracts. It was raised by several respondents that not all organisations will be able to deliver on all aspects of the cultural contract; as one respondent pointed out, *“there needs to be some recognition that not all targets can be achieved if there is no funding in place to achieve them”* (ACW).

General increased funding to the sector, increased capital funding, and grants for community engagement were also cited as important in achieving change. Financial support to be able to offer a living wage, business rate relief and support for commercial businesses were also requested.

Overall, it was felt that to enable all of the training, networking, discussion, development and understanding to take place, these activities would need financial support to recognise the additional time and work required of the sector. Much networking and capacity building in the sector is currently taking place without regular funding, and ongoing funding to sustain this was felt to be important.

## **Approaches and considerations**

In addition to the data on what practical resources, support and training is required, respondents also spoke about how they felt the cultural contract process should be approached, and the considerations they feel are important to bear in mind.

## **Fears and Frustrations**

There were some fears expressed over the cultural contract, many relating to it turning into a ‘tick-box’ exercise and simply a tool for accessing funding, or having a blanket approach not taking into account the *“wide range of organisations in terms of scale, geography, demographics of reach, resources and capacity”* (ACW). Some respondents were also worried about the fact that some art forms involve less public engagement than others, for example film, and were concerned about unrealistic expectations being placed on certain art forms.

Some expressed frustration and stated that they are already working in a way akin to having a cultural contract, and that this process would add a layer of work which, they felt, was unnecessary. There were also concerns from several respondents relating to staff capacity which has been reduced due to the pandemic, and real worries about how they would resource the development and implementation of the cultural contract. This was particularly felt by volunteer organisations where *“there isn’t the capacity of expertise to draw up policies/a contract of this nature - we wouldn’t know where to start”* (WG). It was felt by one respondent that the current funding system was deeply unequal and that COVID had made these disparities visible. Another felt that the cultural contract requirements

should be included in existing requirements, such as those in the Wellbeing of Future Generations (Wales) Act, funder expectations and each organisation's strategic objectives.

It was also mentioned that commercial businesses rarely receive financial help and therefore it can be a struggle for artists to earn a living wage. The suggestion of a "new tailor-made body that promotes and funds commercial [*art form*] in Wales" (WG) was made.

### **Co-creation and Collaboration**

There were suggestions that a co-creation approach would be best suited to the development and implementation of the cultural contract, and that this should happen not just at the organisation level but also at the Welsh Government and ACW level. Related to this, it was felt that cultural contracts relating to inclusivity and wellbeing should be developed in collaboration with people who have lived experience. Respondents also felt that a more collaborative approach towards each other in the sector would be a facilitator, but pointed out that the current competitive funding system was a barrier to this. There was a suggestion to move away from consultations and toward establishing networks so that permanent conversations can be held. This could develop a sustainable form of co-creation which does not rely on external consultants.

It was felt that bringing organisations together would have the most impact in terms of sector-wide learning and informing development of the cultural contract. The opportunity for ongoing sharing and discussion in relation to cultural contract work was also highlighted. This was brought up specifically about venues in North Wales, to ensure that training and development opportunities were made available.

There was also a suggestion that iterative trialling of the cultural contract, whereby a sample of organisations pilot it before rolling out, could be a way forward. This could help to facilitate a co-creation process.

### **Equality, diversity and inclusion**

Equality, diversity and inclusion were cited as important considerations in the approach to the cultural contract. These encompassed a range of considerations that respondents felt were important. Building capacity in the sector to deepen understandings relating to Welsh language use and non-use (including Welsh speakers who may not use their language and the reasons underpinning this) was raised by one respondent. A counter point was that we should embrace different forms of 'Welshness' that are not language based. The provision of Welsh-language versions of existing resources was also suggested.

It was suggested that the diversity of the sector could be better represented in the sharing of expertise, for example sharing from disability-led and participatory organisations. The point was raised that transparency and more inclusion of diverse perspectives would be beneficial in funding decisions.

More support for artists with additional needs was requested, along with the provision of technical resources to ensure access for those with physical and learning disabilities.



Finally in this section, determinants such as poverty, equality of opportunity, and geographical barriers were discussed and raised as fundamental considerations for access and equality. As one respondent put it: *“Life on benefits and low income can be hard and soul destroying - access to the arts can provide a lift, confidence, a sense of possibility, time out of normal life...”* (ACW).

### **Accountability and Transparency**

Another concern was about accountability and transparency across the sector. Several respondents asked for *“transparent, open and accessible purpose and process”* (ACW) in terms of who has had funding, which art forms have been funded, and geographic spread. Although this information may be publicly available, it may not be fully accessible to those wishing to look at the data.

Consistency of approach was also cited as important, although it was widely anticipated that a flexible approach would be necessary due to the different social contexts within which the sector is working across Wales. These include rural contexts where there is significantly less diversity than more urban settings. However, it was also felt that the core values of what the cultural contract is hoping to achieve should be consistently applied to all organisations – there was even the suggestion that ACW should consider defunding companies that do not demonstrate a commitment to change.

It was further suggested that the Welsh Government should ask that ACW *“...demonstrates its commitment to these values and practises in how they work and engage with the sector, their decision-making processes, [and] who is seated at the table when decisions are made”* (ACW).

Responses to each area of the cultural contract are included as an appendix to this report.

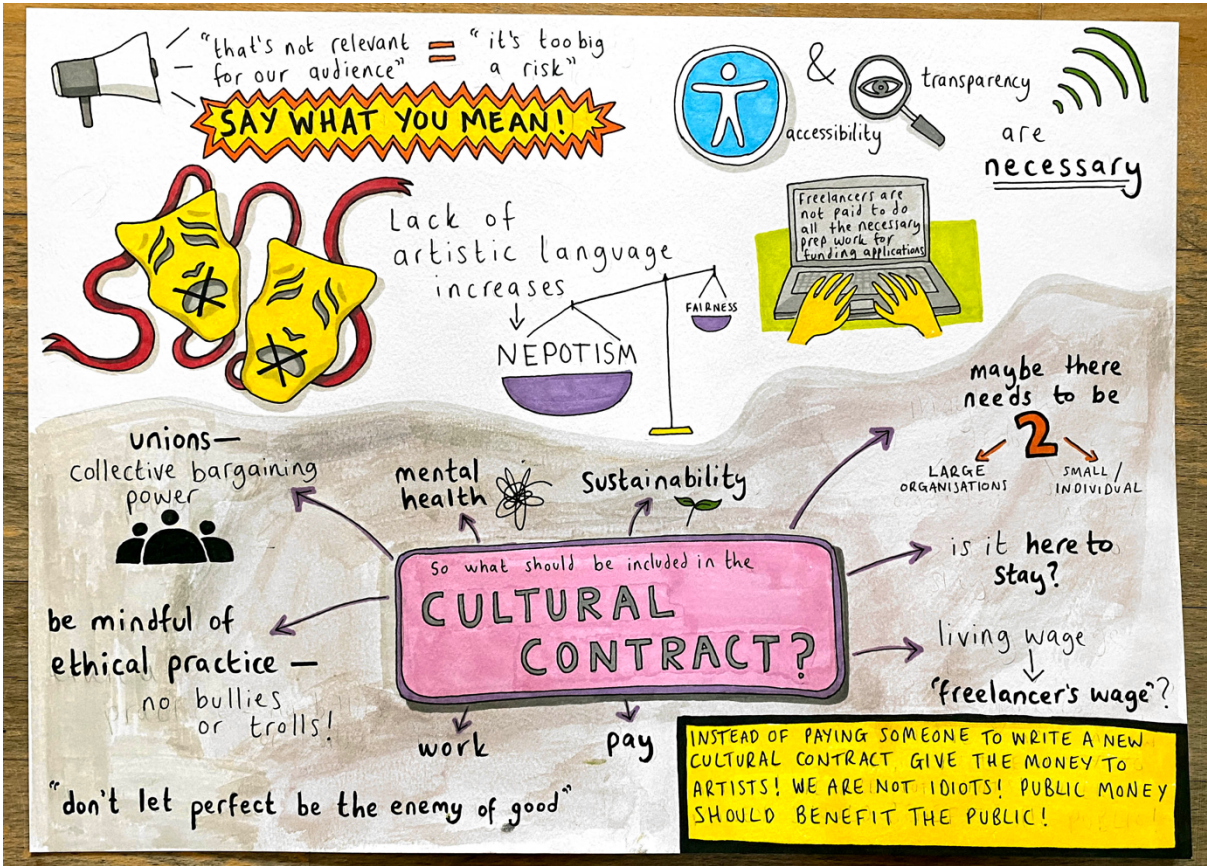


Image by Hazel Elaine Guppy [www.hazelaine.com](http://www.hazelaine.com)

## Part Five: Ways Forward

This final section sums up the data into a number of key issues for consideration, and some recommendations for the next stage of the development of the framework.

### **Key Points**

#### **There needs to be change**

There was near universal recognition that there needs to be changes to the sector that resonate with the ambitions and aspirations of the Cultural Contract.

This was reinforced in the conversations which illuminated a deep sense of hurt and anger. This stems from a combination of

- A lack of *recognition* in terms of the diversity of communities, languages, and cultural forms in Wales,
- Unequal distribution of *resources*, favouring urban centres and a failure to address barriers associated with poverty.

This has resulted in systemic inequality and exclusion which needs to be addressed. However, change cannot happen overnight. It needs the time to develop the relationships of trust and resources that can scaffold the sector in what could be a radical transformation. In addition, it has been a challenging year where organisations and artists have felt battered and bruised with mental health seriously challenged. The development and implementation of the cultural contract could be experienced as onerous if not done sensitively and commensurate with what is achievable.

#### **Change needs to be meaningful**

There was a fear that the cultural contract will be a tick-box exercise which people sign off at the beginning of a contract and then gets forgotten.

It needs to be appropriate to the kinds of art form, size of organisation, and types of projects that are being funded. Welsh Government and the Arts Council of Wales need also to show how they are supporting and facilitating change. The responsibility cannot be downloaded to organisations and artists delivering work. One size does not fit all.

The pace of change needs to be one that supports the facilitation of trusted and meaningful relationships within the arts sector, with communities and with Welsh Government and the Arts Council of Wales.

#### **There needs to be clarity**

It is a lack of understanding of what a Cultural Contract is, who it is between, how its impact is assessed and what happens if the terms of the contract are broken.

It was also felt that there needs to be clarity over any areas or principles covered in the contract. There needs to be a shared agreement over definitions and these need to be clearly communicated.

### **Accountability and transparency are paramount**

It was felt that if power is to shift then those organisations that have traditionally received significant and/or long-term funding need to be transparent as to how they made decisions that affect change, and accountable for the actions they take. They need to demonstrate how they are using the contract to affect change including how they: actively engage local and diverse communities, provide fair pay and a good working environment, and how they hire artists and staff.

Whilst it was felt that smaller organisations and freelancers also need to be accountable and transparent, they operate within a system which places them at a relative disadvantage.

### **The process of change needs to be co-designed and relational**

It was felt that the spirit of the conversations needs to be reflected in the ways in which a framework is developed and implemented. In other words, it needs to be underpinned by dialogue and in building relationships. There was some resistance to the idea of involving consultants at the expense of involving stakeholders at all levels in relation to the contract. It was also felt that the development of individual contracts needs to be in a spirit of co-operation.

### **Networking should support progressive change**

Some of the conversations were held with networks of artists. It was felt that this was productive itself in terms of the sharing of ideas and resources. However, these need to be supported with funding where possible to support access and inclusion.

### **Training and resources are required to upskill and develop the sector**

It was felt that change needs to be supported by training and the provision of resources through case studies, research, and toolkits as appropriate.

It was also felt that larger organisations could share some of their own resources as well as offering spaces for training and development.

### **There should be safe spaces to talk about difficult issues**

A history of inequality and exclusion make it difficult to challenge the status quo, whether this be artists who feel that they are marginalized, or communities of identity, interest, oppression, or place. However little thought has been given to the specific conditions and requirements for a safe space to be created but also be a vehicle for voicing matters of concern.

## **Cultural venues need to be spaces of welcome and belonging**

For too long particular groups of people in our communities have felt uncomfortable in the venues and places where funded cultural activities and events take place. This may be due, for instance, to lack of proper access, the kinds of cultural experiences provided, the cost of participation, or the provision of inappropriate food and drink. Venues need to change the way they engage with communities by understanding their needs and aspirations.

## **Recommended Actions**

Between them, the conversations and the survey have revealed a rich variety of perspectives, feelings and suggestions about issues surrounding the development and implementation of a cultural contract. As so many commented, this is the first step in the development of the contract, and further action is necessary to develop a framework and guidance that will enable *all* organisations and communities to engage with the cultural contract and for it to be meaningful. The following actions are recommended:

### **1. Dissemination of the findings and report**

This is essential in order to continue discussions in a spirit of openness. It is recommended that this report is shared in full with the Welsh Government, the Arts Council of Wales, as well as all the conversation facilitators and communities that took part in the conversations. It may be appropriate to create further outputs in different formats in order that the findings are shared as inclusively as possible. It is suggested that attention is paid to the body of the report and not just the summary of key points. The report itself contains detail which may be important for more nuanced discussion of further action.

### **2. Mapping gaps and assets**

This has been a first step in reaching out to other artists and communities. The process was rapid and there are inevitable gaps. These gaps should be mapped. For instance, few people from older age groups have been involved. Wales is diverse and the process needs to engage with people who are likely to contribute from their own perspective of cultural contribution and experience. In terms of ongoing engagement with communities, a mapping of community organisations and assets should be undertaken as a continuing exercise. The process should not be a one-off but one that is continually subject to review. An asset map can begin with the knowledge that the sector already holds. There are a number of examples of community asset maps. This includes one recently developed by Building Communities Trust (BCT)<sup>13</sup> A map would be a starting point for building meaningful ongoing relationships.

### **3. Reach out to un(der)-represented organisations in the sector**

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<sup>13</sup> <http://www.bct.wales/community-assets-in-wales/?force=1>

Based on the above mapping, we recommend that the next stage of the framework includes a wider range of voices, from organisations not currently represented in the WCA or the conversations. The timescale of the conversations meant that many organisations were not involved so proactive engagement is recommended.

#### **4. Making language a bridge not a barrier**

Whilst there are many different views there is a sense in which the Welsh language needs to be a bridge and not a barrier to participation. More development is needed to explore ways in which, where possible, people who do not speak Welsh can nonetheless enjoy cultural experiences in the medium of Welsh. More needs to be done to develop more imaginative ideas about translation, including with, and for, people with non-verbal languages. There is a need for opportunities for artists, should they wish, to learn Welsh as well as other languages (including BSL and Makaton). This is a divisive area, and it should be recognised that many people for whom English is their own language may strongly identify with being Welsh.

#### **5. Further discussion and co-creation**

It is recommended that further investment is put into workshopping the findings of the conversations and allowing the next stage of the framework to be co-created with the arts sector and public. This includes going back to those who took part in the project, as well as casting the net wider to include un-represented voices. There may be gaps in the data or additional considerations that were not made clear in the conversations that need to be included in the next stage of development.

#### **6. Conduct an analysis of the materials provided by survey respondents willing to share their versions of a cultural contract**

This will provide an initial insight into working documents being used in the sector and a starting point for the guidance materials, case studies, templates and training that will be required.

#### **7. Identify resources for support**

In the development of guidance and training materials that are fully inclusive, it is recommended that a range of materials are proactively sought, including guidelines, working practices and training programmes that can help the sector in the development of its own cultural contracts. This includes examples of cultural contracts offered by many people/organisations who responded to the survey.

In particular guidance, and resources to, ensure that venues and events are accessible to d/Deaf and disabled communities is essential. Working with organisations with expertise in how to develop accessible materials, and piloting the guidance materials, is also recommended.