

IFRCS10 Philip Hughes, Gallery Director, Ruthin Craft Centre

Senedd Cymru | Welsh Parliament

Pwyllgor Diwylliant, Cyfathrebu, y Gymraeg, Chwaraeon, a Chysylltiadau Rhyngwladol | Culture, Communications, Welsh Language, Sport, and International Relations Committee

Effaith Gostyngiadau Cyllid ar Ddiwylliant a Chwaraeon | Impact of Funding Reductions for Culture and Sport

Ymateb gan: Philip Hughes, Cyfarwyddwr yr Oriol, Canolfan Grefft Rhuthun | Evidence from: Philip Hughes, Gallery Director, Ruthin Craft Centre

1. What impacts has reduced funding had on your organisation and sector so far?

Our work at Ruthin Craft Centre centres on the four 3-month long exhibition programmes and related residency and workshop activity.

As far as the exhibition programme is concerned we are already finding that the reduced funding has meant that there are less touring exhibitions available particularly from galleries in Wales.

We often provide exhibition space for artists who have received research or production grants from ACW. Reduction in ACW funding has reduced the number of such grants and therefore also reduced the opportunities we have to show the new and dynamic work produced by these artist craftspeople.

Artists / craftspeople have been negatively affected by not only this reduction in grants but also by the reduction of numbers of artists being shown in group shows to save costs and there being fewer residency opportunities.

There is also less funding available for visiting other venues and networking.

2. What measures have you taken in light of it, such as changing what you do and how you do it.

We have not changed the key principles on which we work but, in order to balance our books on reduced funding, we have undertaken the following measures:

- We have adapted our staffing structure to reduce costs – this was enabled by the retirement of our Deputy Director.
- There are now significantly fewer free drop in type activities available at the Centre. This has a significant impact on the depth of participation available for our visitors and it has also reduced the support that we give in terms of paid activity for artists. (The situation would be a lot worse had we not been successful in raising additional income from other sources to fund some of this activity.)
- This has also reduced the amount of off-site activity such as attendance at Collect. This means that the profile of the Centre which is achieved at such events is reduced.
- Opening hours at the Centre were reduced from seven to six days per week. This reduction in opening hours has been maintained because funding levels do not allow the necessary increase in staffing costs.
- The size and quantity of exhibition catalogues has been reduced as part of the cost cutting exercise. This reduces the profile and prestige of the organisation and artists lose or getting reduced impact from the catalogues produced describing their work.
- We are now able to afford fewer paid advertisements for the Centre and its exhibitions. This again lowers the profile and prestige of the Centre. In a move to address this we are now putting more effort into publicising our work through Instagram.

3. To what extent will these impacts be irreversible (e.g. venues closing, or specialist skills being lost rather than a temporary restriction in activities)?

It would be simplistic to say that all these restrictions are reversible. Yes, we would be able to increase free drop in and off-site activities, restore seven day a week opening, produce more detailed exhibition catalogues and return to more paid advertisements. All these could be implemented as soon as funding is available to do so.

But the impacts of some of those reductions would be more difficult to reverse:

- The loss of a senior member of staff (not replacing the Deputy Director) will have an impact. It will reduce the potential for the Centre to raise additional funding, make and maintain relationships with other venues
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and market and advertise the programme. When more funding becomes available Senior members of staff would then be able to consider the nature of the new post. It is unlikely that the decision would be to replace to the same job description. To this extent, this would offer an exciting possibility to formulate and recruit to a new job description.

- The reduction in free drop in activities could well result in a reduction in the number of visitors and certain repeat visits within the year. Once people change their pattern of activity, it is a big job to contact them and attract them to return. This would involve significant costs in increasing marketing and officer input.
- Again it would take considerable effort, time and expense to re-establish and create the network of external contacts.
- Opening hours can be returned to seven days a week. There would be costs involved in advertising this and this would include changes to the signage outside and around the building. But again it would also involve considerable marketing of the changes to ensure that visitors were aware of and taking advantage of the extended opening hours.
- The size and quality of the exhibition catalogues and the amount of paid advertising could be re-established and would probably have fewer impacts than the other changes.

4. What interventions would you like to see from the Welsh Government, beyond increased funding?

We would welcome a better understanding by ministers of the sector that they are in charge of. This is probably not achievable as ministers are not elected for the particular skills needed to undertake such a portfolio. But what we would ask for – which is achievable – is for ministers to adopt a modest acceptance of their lack of in-depth knowledge and understanding and a willingness to listen to and take advice from specialists who have a deep understanding of the sector and from the arts bodies themselves.

There are other elements overseen by Welsh government where specific provision for the arts could be of immense value:

- The reduction of VAT on cultural activity
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- Support for arts provision for all young people in schools
- Funding for delivering arts based activity in social care settings
- Special tax provision for artists as in Ireland

5. To what extent do the impacts you describe fall differently on people with protected characteristics and people of a lower socioeconomic status?

Reductions in funding have meant that balancing the budget at RCC means that a significant amount of income needs to be raised from sales in the retail gallery and from charges for events and workshops. To ensure that funding is raised the availability of these opportunities needs to be highlighted. While this raises the awareness of these opportunities for those who can afford to take part, it also raises the awareness of these opportunities for those who cannot afford them and means that they might feel excluded from events and activities that they would like to take part in.

At the same time fewer free events means that people of a lower socioeconomic status who have in the past been able to take advantage of free events, find that the programme available to them has reduced.

Organising events for people with protected characteristics or for people of a lower socioeconomic status also involves significant additional costs. These include:

- Significant staff time is needed to identify, contact and liaise with groups and individuals
- Often work with these groups needs to be in their own environment and needs additional staffing support both from us and from the organisations hosting our events
- In other instances, transport to the Centre needs to be provided

6. Do you have any other points you wish to raise within the scope of this inquiry?

ACW needs to take a radical look at the way it allocates its funding. There are a number of large scale organisations – in particular Wales National Opera and the

National Orchestra of Wales – that have more potential to raise significantly more to cover their own core costs. If this could be done, this would release more funding for ACW to look at a more balanced level of support across its portfolio. In particular, ACW needs to address the historic underfunding of the Visual Arts and Crafts. At the moment WNO receives more than three times the financial support than that given to the entire Visual Arts and Crafts portfolio across Wales.

It will also be interesting to see how much revenue funding the Welsh Government finds for NCAGW and from where this funding is found. While it is good to see this increase in the Visual Art and Craft portfolio, it is hoped that the underfunding of the already established galleries can be addressed at the same time as funding is found for the new organisation.

To release the full potential of the galleries across Wales, it is vital that ACW finds a way to increase their funding. The on-going low level of funding to the galleries and the less than standstill nature of that funding over 14 years has left the galleries with little potential to raise additional funding themselves. Fundraising activity requires staff time and resources and this cannot be found when funding levels allow little more than the costs of staffing and running the building.

It would be worth considering ACW itself taking on the role of raising additional funding and making an application for a development of three years of activity for the gallery network across Wales. Carefully collected statistics and results from this could then be used to make the case to Welsh Government for increased funding for ACW to allow them to continue the increased funding to galleries as part of their annual revenue awards.
