

**Written Response to the Communities and Culture Committee's Report
On the Promotion of Welsh Arts and Culture on the World
Stage by Alun Ffred Jones, Minister for Heritage**

16 September 2009

Introductory comments.

I welcome this opportunity to respond to the National Assembly for Wales Communities and Culture Committee report, "The Promotion of Welsh Arts and Culture on the World Stage". I would like to note my thanks to the Committee members for the effort they have put into collecting and examining the evidence provided for this particular report and for the obvious commitment to the arts and culture which their investigations and this report demonstrate.

Over recent years the Assembly Government has taken an increasingly strategic approach to the development of international links and partnerships. These links have encompassed social and cultural as well as economic aspects of government policy. They have extended to countries all over the world and we have done much to promote ourselves as a small, smart country. Wales has benefitted from the wide variety of the partnerships we have established but we have also ensured that our partners – whether in Chongqing or in Africa – have benefitted as well from the experience and expertise that Wales has to offer.

Establishing international links has involved the development of partnerships here in Wales as well as overseas. Partnerships with cultural organisations have been part of these efforts throughout. This is a reflection both of the strengths Wales has in this area and of the power of culture to establish and cement links with countries all over the world.

My written evidence to the Committee argued that promoting the importance of a rich and diverse culture lies at the heart of the One Wales programme for government, and in turn, promoting our culture will remain at the core of our efforts to place Wales much more prominent on the world stage. My evidence recognised that we need to continue to develop effective partnerships at home and abroad if we are to consolidate and grow the reputation Wales enjoys outside our borders.

A key element of the government's policy for the arts is to promote greater access to the world stage for our artists, and to bring more international artists to Wales. We want overseas audiences to see for themselves, and thereby fully appreciate, Welsh culture in all its forms. The development of international networks is vital. We are fortunate in Wales to have an organisation like Wales Arts International (WAI), funded jointly by the British Council and the Arts Council of Wales (ACW), which is actively engaged in establishing and nurturing these networks and ensuring an international dimension to the government's arts agenda.

There must be firm foundations on which to build our international engagement. If we do not have a strong, vibrant arts sector in Wales, we will have little basis on which to promote ourselves abroad. Thus it remains at the heart of the Arts Council's mission to develop an arts sector in Wales that can command respect, first at home, then overseas. Investing in a creative, lively, and financially viable family of arts organisations is fundamental to the Arts Council's mission. ACW will continue to develop its international strategy on the back of our domestic strengths, building on initiatives such as the Welsh presence at the Venice Biennale of contemporary art.

The British Council presence in Wales has been strengthened over recent years and now includes a senior arts adviser officer, who manages the British Council's relationship with WAI. I have been greatly encouraged by the steps taken by the Council over recent months to ensure that its agenda can reflect the diversity of cultural agendas being pursued not only in Wales but across the rest of the UK. This includes the establishment of a Cultural Diplomacy Group featuring representatives from each of the nations of the UK. We will continue to work in partnership with the British Council in promoting Wales and Welsh artists overseas and in support of the Council's wider agenda.

The Committee's Report highlights the potential of the internet and digital media to raise the profile of Wales, its art and its culture across the world. We will continue to develop Wales.com. But we are also harnessing interactive technologies more widely in support of our cultural agenda. The People's Collection of Welsh History will be an important new tool. It is being developed by a powerful partnership involving the National Library of Wales (NLW), Amgueddfa Cymru – National Museum Wales (ACNMW), the Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Wales (RCAHM), BBC Cymru/Wales and the National Grid for Learning (NgFL Cymru). Our intention is that the People's Collection will provide new ways for a variety of groups and communities to pursue their interest in aspects of our history. It will, of course, provide a new means of bringing the culture and heritage of Wales to people all over the world.

I strongly endorse the Committee's view that all aspects of our cultural heritage have a part to play in the development of international links. We need to value the contribution of our sports men and women as international ambassadors as much as our opera singers. And all elements of our creative economy need to have international ambitions, not just our premier national companies. The creative industries in Wales have an important contribution to make to the wider efforts to make the UK an international creative hub. This wider importance we attach to the creative industries was one of the factors that has led the Deputy First Minister to invite Professor Ian Hargreaves to undertake a review of the sector. We will of course consider very carefully whether the review's findings in due course have implications for the issues considered by this Committee.

Seizing – and creating - opportunities to promote Wales on a world stage via its arts and culture calls for an ability for Wales to convince others that what our arts and culture organisations have to offer is distinctive and original. This

will allow Wales to gain a competitive advantage. As I noted in my evidence, the government's Visit Wales arm consistently builds in culture and arts messages into a wide range of marketing initiatives. I have been taking a close interest in the development of the cultural tourism agenda for Wales, for example, and we are currently renewing our efforts in this sphere. A crucial challenge will be to maximise the cultural tourism offer from the whole of Wales. I view this as essential in increasing the numbers of people who will come to Wales to enjoy our culture as well as our breathtaking scenery and welcoming accommodation, and who will, in turn, be well-positioned to think of Wales when planning cultural events in their home regions and countries.

We will continue with our efforts to promote modern aspects of Welsh culture. But there is also scope to package our historic culture more effectively. Cadw is taking the lead in the development of an all-Wales Heritage Interpretation Plan. This is an ambitious move unprecedented in Europe, which will seek to promote and present Welsh heritage consistently, with authority and through means which spark imagination and passion. The initiative ties into the Heritage Tourism Project, a £19m investment in promoting Welsh heritage to visitors around the world. Wales now has three UNESCO-inscribed World Heritage Sites (Blaenafon, Pontcysyllte and the Edward I castles and walls of north Wales). I am encouraging partnerships to ensure that Wales maximises the potential afforded by or remarkable World Heritage status to showcase Welsh heritage and culture internationally.

The Committee's Report highlights the importance of partnership working in promoting Wales more effectively overseas. I very much agree but the government also believes that partnership working needs to be at the heart of our efforts to improve the public benefits we derive from our cultural programmes more generally. Strengthening this partnership working still further will be at the heart of our work over the coming months to develop a revised strategic framework for the Heritage portfolio.

I have set out below my response to the Report's individual recommendations.

Detailed Responses to the report's recommendations are set out below:

The Committee recommends that:

Recommendation 1

We recommend that the Welsh Assembly Government (hereafter referred to as the Welsh Government) refreshes its strategic framework to promote Wales on the international stage

Response : accept

Rationale:

The International Framework document produced by the Welsh Assembly Government in 2004 and while the underlying principles are still valid, there have been developments and changes in a number of areas that impact upon the application of the Framework. The Arts Council of Wales, Wales Arts

International and British Council have suggested that a refresh of the strategy could bring new impetus to the synergies between arts and culture policies, the creative industries and educational links. ACW, WAI and BC have made the point that the mere fact of artistic work being taken overseas is insufficient; the question should be asked “why do we want this particular piece of work to be experienced by other cultures?”. ACW sees itself having a clear role in supporting both the effective promotion of Wales and the freedom of artists to create independently. The point about effective promotion is important, because Wales needs to ensure that all promotion is useful. Thus we accept that the time is right for us to review the framework and consider a more appropriate document for the times we are now in.

Financial Implications – this will require administrative effort and will therefore need to be scheduled to be carried out when capacity can be met. The Office of the First Minister will lead on reviewing the framework document and costs will be met from Welsh Assembly Government running cost budgets.

Recommendation 2

We recommend that the Welsh Government provide a firm commitment to expediting the new culture strategy

Response : Accept

Rationale:

I have been very reluctant to rush the development of a new culture strategy for Wales. The existing strategic statement, “Creative Future”, has 3 years to run, while the implementation of the Wales Arts Review continues, as overseen by the Arts Strategy Board, which meets two or three times annually and which I chair. “One Wales” effectively brought “Creative Future” up to date by setting out nearly 40 new cultural commitments, including those relating to arts and culture, and to placing Wales in the World. While there is no need nor capacity to seek to re-iterate “Creative Future”, I do intend to publish a revised strategic statement that will make clear my ambitions for the Heritage Portfolio. This will be a high-level document focusing on a limited number of key workstreams.

Financial Implications – The main costs of drawing up this statement will be those of devoting officials’ time to this work.

Recommendation 3

We recommend that the Welsh Government develop wales.com to become the definitive internet site that people consult on Wales providing comprehensive information and taking the opportunity to promote a multitude of topics including business, investment, arts, culture and tourism, all with consistent and recognisable branding

Response : accept in principle

Rationale:

The European and External Affairs Division (EEAD) secured the wales.com domain for the purpose of promoting Wales internationally in March 2008 and launched the www.wales.com website in November 2008. Since then, EEAD has overseen the site's ascent from the 10th page, or lower, of results for "Wales" on the Google search engine, to 4th from the top. (Other search engines such as Yahoo and Bing return www.wales.com at the top).

The sites which regularly compete with www.Wales.com at the top of the results lists for the search "Wales" are www.visitwales.com ; www.wikipedia.org/wiki/wales ; www.wales.gov . I have taken particular note of the comments made by the National Library of Wales and others, relating to better coordination and improved partnership working in the production of our virtual promotional material, particularly in the area of providing information about our international presence. I have already commissioned some work on the feasibility of the compilation of a central database detailing all major overseas arts and culture activities. I welcome the suggestion that there should be more commitment from across the Welsh Assembly Government and other key institutions to engage with and contribute to wales.com. In doing so it is vital to understand the target market and their needs. Wales.com is primarily targeted at people outside Wales and the content and language needs to reflect that. Visitors to the site may have little or no knowledge of Wales and their particular interest may be in any one of a wide range of sectors. Wales.com seeks to address these factors by providing appropriate content, introducing visitors to different aspects of Wales' cultural, business, tourism and study opportunities, linking directly to relevant web sources where they can learn or explore further in a level of detail which suits their needs. From 2010, wales.com will also provide access to visitors, potential visitors and others across the world to The People's Collection, which will present and provide engagement with Wales' cultural heritage online.

The focus on www.wales.com should continue to be cross-cutting and external to Wales. The lead should remain with EEAD who welcome the Committee's recommendation that key organisations should renew their commitment to engage.

Financial Implications – These relate to the cost of dedicating staff time to the wales.com website, and to the costs for other key organisations of engaging with the First Minister's European and External Affairs officials, who manage the website.

Recommendation 4

We recommend that the Welsh Government, Arts Council of Wales and Wales Arts International collaborate to take maximum advantage of available funding (including European funding) to support Welsh arts and culture abroad

Response : Accept

Rationale:

The remit I have given the ACW for 2009-10 requires them to “work collaboratively with other AGSBs and WAG Departments to actively investigate alternative sources of support, especially European funding.” I believe that it is more important to optimise than to maximise our take from available funds, not least because EU funds, among others, must be match-funded. For this reason, we must ensure that we deploy all funding at our disposal towards achieving the Welsh Assembly Government’s policy objectives. It is more than a question of taking advantage of opportunities for funding; there is also a need for information-sharing so that different bodies can respond quickly to opportunities that may arise. I also believe it is important to look at the return on our investment: the *Raising the Red Dragon – a Welsh Visual Arts Exhibition* successfully toured in four cities in China between March and May this year and the feedback from that tour has been remarkable. In Chongqing alone, the local news and fashion channels publicised the exhibition, thereby reaching an audience of more than 400,000 people. A recent example of effective collaboration between the 3 bodies named above and the British Council in Wales has resulted in the National Dance Company Wales being invited to participate in the opening of the Grand Theatre in Chongqing Province China this October. This is a marvellous opportunity for the company and will further cement the relationship between Wales and the province.

ACW and the British Council are committed to providing effective feedback to me on how they achieve this recommendation, for example through the use of the EU structural funds. WAI has a well-established relationship with the Welsh Assembly’s Brussels team, and the identification and sharing of relevant opportunities is a key rationale for this relationship. A briefing event for around 30 arts stakeholders from Wales was organised by the Assembly’s European and External Affairs Division and took place in Brussels on 6 March this year. This event – the first of its kind - was designed to facilitate networking, and raise awareness of opportunities for both EU funding and collaboration.

WAI and ACW are proactively seeking to support and encourage Welsh organisations’ participation in the EU transnational programmes, such as the IMPACT: Indigenous Music Promotion Advancing Cultural Tourism Outline, which is being promoted under the Atlantic Arc INTERREG IV programme.

Financial Implications – Alongside the running costs implications for organisations devoting staff time to EU funding applications, the match funding requirements of any new funding coming to Wales will be studied.

Recommendation 5

We recommend that the Welsh Government, Arts Council of Wales and Wales Arts International explore how public patronage of the arts could be better encouraged and supported

Response : Accept

Rationale:

I strongly agree that we need to maximise funding for the arts from private sources, whether individuals, businesses, or charities. In the remit letter for the current financial year, I have asked the ACW to explore sources of support that would complement the Welsh Assembly Government's grant in aid to the Council. In the current economic climate, I have made a point of asking arts organisations, during meetings, whether levels of sponsorship have been affected. The British Council offers a network, and of course its internationally established and respected brand, that can be used where the goal is to seek leverage for partnership support.

Financial Implications – staff costs.

Recommendation 6

We recommend that the Welsh Government produce a detailed action plan linked to its strategic framework to identify specific opportunities such as those created by touring Welsh arts companies and individuals, to create international links and promote Wales abroad, articulating how working together, each Welsh Government department and relevant public organisations in Wales will contribute in strategy, delivery and review. In doing so it should liaise with universities to examine and learn from their experiences of engaging internationally

Response : accept in principle

Rationale: There is a strong connection between this recommendation and Recommendation 1. Wales has greatest impact in creating productive international links and promoting Wales abroad when we act together – by recognising that co-operation and collaboration, where appropriate and consistent with the participating sectors' and organisations' business and policy objectives, we can achieve results for Wales greater than the sum of its parts.

In reviewing the strategic document and the appropriate way forward, we will consider what detailed action plans are appropriate and achievable.

Financial Implications – staff costs.

Recommendation 7

We recommend that the Welsh Government considers how the provision of art regionally and locally, as well as across the whole of Wales, can contribute to Wales's international cultural presence nationally, explicitly in its preparatory and consultation work in developing its new culture strategy and proposed Legislative Competence Order on Culture and other fields.

Response : accept in principle

Rationale:

The prime intention behind this proposal for legislation is to improve cultural services for the people of Wales in their localities. Evidence to the Committee did, however, note that there will only be high-quality arts and arts organisations to take onto a world stage if these are fostered at home. The proposed Legislative Competence Order on Culture and other fields will provide the competence to the National Assembly to enable Welsh Ministers to bring forward legislation through an Assembly Measure within the competence provided under the Order. In this case, the competence being sought is to enable the Assembly Government to implement its *One Wales* commitment to place a statutory obligation on local authorities to promote culture and encourage partnership to deliver high quality cultural experiences for their communities.

The One Wales commitment reflects our belief that local authorities have a key role to play in ensuring that culture in its widest sense is a thriving aspect of the lives of our communities. Excellence in the arts does not exist in a vacuum. It is sustained by people's everyday experiences. I am in no doubt therefore that the cultural provision supported by local authorities can contribute to Wales' international cultural presence. This will be considered at the appropriate time in taking implementation of the statutory duty forward.

Financial Implications – At this stage it is not possible to assess the financial or other impact of the One Wales commitment. We firstly need to determine the exact nature of the statutory duty so that the impact on local authorities can be assessed.

Recommendation 8

We have recommended greater co-ordination of effort between our cultural departments and agencies, and consider that this should extend to the work of our literary agencies. We also recommend that capacity should be built between our agencies to enable a Wales centre for translation.

Response : Accept in part

Rationale:

Greater co-operation and co-ordination will improve the efforts of our literary agencies just as it will bring benefits to our cultural organisation more generally. The recommendation for a "Translators' House" was included in the ACW's Artform Literature strategy. The first step has been achieved by the Welsh Literature Exchange, working in partnership with T• Newydd and Academi. Further work will be needed by the Arts Council of Wales to take this work forward.

Financial Implications – A fully-fledged version of a Translators' House would have cost implications that would need to be fully explored.

Recommendation 9

We recommend that the Welsh Government takes into consideration the financial constraints and other barriers faced by artists in consulting on the new cultural strategy.

Response : Accept

Rationale:

The present economic climate calls for judicious focusing of public money, in my own, as in all, Welsh Government portfolios. A number of the arts organisations I have met this year have nonetheless reminded me of the contribution to society which the arts can make by helping people to understand and cope with the challenging situations that confront them. The sector's own resilience should, I agree, be met by as much financial certainty as the public sector is able to provide, as well as by adequate levels of support in areas such as access to networks, news of funding opportunities, and so on. This is the sort of service which the Arts Council, WAI and the British Council are well-placed to provide but which I will certainly expect to be considered in the context of my revised strategic statement.

Another report by the Communities and Culture Committee, "Public Service Broadcasting in Wales", published in June, recommended the commissioning of an independent review that would look at the Welsh Assembly Government's activity in the field of creative industries and audiovisual culture. There is a read-across to the work of Professor Ian Hargreaves, who is now taking forward that work.

Financial Implications –

None specifically.

Recommendation 10

We recommend that the Arts Council of Wales and Wales Arts International explore how they might improve the proactive marketing of their services to engage arts practitioners at the coal face.

Response : Accept

Rationale: The ACW and WAI agree that the effectiveness of their communications should be reviewed.

Financial Implications – this work will fall within the roll-out plans for the development of WAI's website and its *Canfas* newsletter.

Recommendation 11

We recommend that Wales Arts International provides, and markets, a support service aimed at providing advice, and diplomatic assistance to help artists address the practical difficulties of taking their work abroad.

Response: Accept in part

Rationale: The Welsh Assembly Government and partner organisations already provide a range of practical support services aimed at helping Welsh artists or arts organisations to make contacts abroad; or in providing signposting to embassies and consulates. Our New York office, for example, offers PR support to organisations wishing to stage arts events in New York. The ACW itself acknowledged, in its evidence to the Committee, that funding and other issues can present obstacles to artists and arts organisations. The International Opportunities Fund administered by WAI gives some financial support to artists, such as those participating in the “Artists and Curators” programme which takes arts professionals to the Venice Biennale of Art. ACW/WAI noted in their evidence to the Committee that opportunities for artists from Wales to work abroad are increasing and I recognise that it would be a lost opportunity if artists were prevented from participation through a lack of practical advice and support. Technology clearly offers an opportunity for effective support to be provided at a lower cost and much generic information is already available. The British Council offers centrally-available advisory services, which can also be sought via its worldwide network of offices.

I do not believe, however, that Wales Arts International is the most appropriate body to provide diplomatic assistance to artists. That responsibility rests with the Foreign Office. Thus I do accept this recommendation in part only.

Financial Implications – WAI will continue offer advice and guidance to artists from within their existing funding allocation.