

ArtWorks Cymru and Welsh National Opera

Overview

Welsh National Opera is the project lead for ArtWorks Cymru and brought together seven other organisations and individuals from across Wales to create a consortium of participatory commissioners to explore and share their practice and to investigate how employers can better support the artists that deliver their work.

How the work sought to address the issue

ArtWorks Cymru wanted to find out what was appropriate for the sector in Wales and set out a three stage research structure covering: consultation, action research and dissemination. By using an action research process, ArtWorks Cymru aimed to conceptualise a potential training network for Wales that came from the sector itself. Each ArtWorks Cymru partner has given a substantial amount of in kind time, as well as providing venues for sessions and leading process throughout the project.

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What it achieved

The project has raised the profile of Welsh National Opera's participatory work and has also allowed all organisations in ArtWorks Cymru to share practice regularly and reflect on their particular methods in a peer-to-peer setting. Welsh National Opera's role in leading ArtWorks Cymru has been recognised by both Arts Council Wales and Arts Council England and is clearly seen by them as the company leading the sector in Wales.

Lessons learned

Employers and commissioners want the work they create to be high quality and they recognise the value of investing time and space for continuing professional development sessions. However, it's often hard to fund CPD opportunities, as organisations have found it hard to justify the need. ArtWorks research has enabled us to be more articulate about why this support is crucial to the quality of our work and has created a much more open dialogue with funding bodies, who also want to see practitioners supported in this way.

Stronger links are needed with the further and higher education sectors, in order to develop exchange between emerging and experienced practitioners. The next step is to find ways to create bridges between academia and the practice.

What is happening with the learning now

Welsh National Opera has begun to look more fully at how it supports artists working across its participatory projects using the learning group structure as a starting point. It is also looking at how Welsh National Opera contributes to the wider support of artists in Wales and seeding the Wrexham Community Artist Network in collaboration with Arts Connection has been a direct response to this issue. There are also plans for a south Wales artist network, bringing together the practitioners that are used by the company on a regular basis to share ideas around best practice.

Opportunities for other stakeholders

ArtWorks Cymru partners are feeding the learning into what they do in different ways. Head 4 Arts has created a hot desk area in their office so artists can come and work alongside them, as well as feeding into a jointly run community artists training week based in south Wales. Community Music Wales have created an online forum for their tutors to encourage practice sharing and mutual support.

ArtWorks Cymru has gone on to secure funding for a further two years of activity and has expanded the partnership from seven organisations to 26 artists and organisations from across Wales. It's clear that there is a collective will to come together to move the sector in Wales forward and the links that the wider partnership provide will help to expand the legacy of the initial research undertaken across the ArtWorks Special Initiative.

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