



# International Showcasing Action Research Programme

## Year One Evaluation – Key Points

Ruth Garnault M.Sc.  
October 2020

[www.britishcouncil.org](http://www.britishcouncil.org)

National Dance Company  
Wales perform **Rygbï:  
Annwyl i Mi / Dear to me**  
by Fearghus Ó Conchúir,  
National Eisteddfod 2019

Photographer- Iolo Penri



# Executive summary

This report is part of an ongoing process of supporting Wales' international influence through the use of culture.

The Welsh Government published its *International Strategy* in January 2020. There are three core ambitions: to raise Wales' profile internationally, grow its economy and establish Wales as a globally responsible nation. The Strategy says "*Cultural diplomacy – or soft power – will be key to raising our international profile. We will use all our cultural assets to maximum effect.*"<sup>1</sup>

Arts Council of Wales' (ACW) international strategy, written by Wales Arts International (WAI), commits to "*building the capacity of Wales' arts sector to engage and participate internationally. We will encourage our artists and organisations to travel, broaden their experience and develop new connections.*"<sup>2</sup>

In 2018, British Council Wales commissioned the *International Showcasing Strategy for the Arts of Wales: Research Report*. It produced recommendations for the arts sector and Welsh Government to consider and develop. Two of the recommendations were to:

- a) explore existing international platforms and events in which the Welsh sector is interested.
- b) build an international delegate programme around a major showcasing event in Wales.

During 2019 and 2020, British Council Wales undertook Action Research to support these two recommendations and the results are the subject of this report.

To build an international delegate programme Wales could apply to host roving international industry events, targeting platforms which play to Welsh strengths and give Wales an opportunity to showcase, whilst building recognition and reputation as a good host for presentation and debates. This research presents current showcases which could be hosted.

A parallel approach is to wrap a delegate programme around an existing Welsh event providing an industry showcasing aspect to a public event. This research discusses examples of successful international delegate programmes including the British Council's role in Edinburgh and presents current festivals to which a delegate programme could be attached, such as Festival of Voice or the Eisteddfod Genedlaethol.

The International Showcasing Action Research successfully explored the effectiveness of a Welsh presence at different international platforms by supporting Welsh practitioners to attend and then reflect on the value of the experience. The research has produced seven recommendations for increasing the effectiveness of attending showcases in order to raise Wales' international profile.

Whilst the British Council does not commission or produce creative work, the research has produced three recommendations for funding and commissioning bodies to consider in order to use cultural assets to maximum effect.

The report summarises the activity undertaken during Year One and the learning outcomes. It concludes with issues for further discussion. The report proposes research areas for British Council Wales for Year Two of the research programme, given the changing international showcasing landscape, following the global pandemic and the UK's exit from the European Union.

<sup>1</sup> International Strategy, published by Welsh Government 2020 pg 6 and pg 10

<sup>2</sup> Wales Arts: a bridge to the world: International Strategy for the Arts Council of Wales by WAI. Undated but textual references indicate 2018.

# Full recommendations for effective international showcasing

## Ensure preparation is undertaken

- Funding applications should be interrogated in advance to ensure there has been adequate research and the platform and attendees are well matched.
- Funders ask and attendees should think about their objectives. Is there particular work they want to see? Particular people or delegates to contact?
- Links should be made in advance where possible, with both Welsh / UK organisations operating overseas who may be able to help make and suggest connections and identify and approach fellow delegates of interest.

## Establish protocols for what is expected of delegates in return for financial support

Given the variety of events, these are suggestions, but protocols could include:

- Make at least x hot connections, x warm connections, not just from the UK
- A clear expectation that public funding is for wider benefit:
  - Be briefed by at least x arts organisations in Wales prior to leaving, so you act as a representative of the sector
  - Provide evidence of marketing or other materials distributed, for your and other companies
  - Provide evidence of how you have been an ambassador for Wales, as well as your organisation. (Did you sit on a panel? Ask pertinent questions having identified yourself from Wales? Give examples of good practice in Wales? Broker meetings and connections?)
  - Cascade your learning and contacts to the sector. (e.g. run an online seminar, write an article for Wales Arts Review, speak to What Next?.)

If a person is not able to do this, they should clearly report why. Perhaps the showcase is no longer of value for Wales. This would prevent resources being spent with low returns.

Networking needs to be more than simply 'meeting people'. In order to share the learning with others and to have a dataset for use in the future, the delegate needs to provide:

- Evidence on how the networking happened
- Evidence of what the meetings might tangibly lead to
- Evidence of what is being done to achieve the goals (e.g. increased touring product).<sup>3</sup>

## Mentoring, training and skills development

British Council, ACW, WAI and Creative Wales should work together to provide training to producers and delegates on how to make the most of showcasing opportunities. Mentor and advise first-time delegates.

## Keep the choice of showcasing events under review

"Good showcasing and international events are really useful and important. But I stress 'good'. It's important to **constantly evaluate the quality of events and the outputs made by them**. It's also vital to be driven by the priorities in the sector at that time as well as to be across any new or improving showcasing or international events that might fit better."<sup>4</sup>

## Send the same people more than once

"People remember people, they don't necessarily remember an organisation or company or nation without the person they have attached to that entity."<sup>5</sup>  
Attendees get the most out of attending a sustained presence at a single event and building their connections and knowledge. Longer-term investments are vital to grow our international profile.

<sup>3</sup> Simon Harris Edinburgh 2019 pg 10

<sup>4</sup> Celtic Connections delegate

<sup>5</sup> IETM report for showcasing for British Council Wales Catherine Paskell pg 1

*“Long term investment in relationships builds trust and connections, so that artists can create work internationally in the future and touring products can be booked by international promoters. Wales will benefit from stronger showcasing opportunities because of these networks for trust and friendship.”*

*Delegate*

### **Send more than one person, and rigorously interrogate reasons for sending more than three**

Whilst many delegates travelled solo, the respondents pointed to clear benefits of having more than one person at an event. However, careful use of resources and the climate emergency means funders should consider carefully why they are sending large delegations. Coordination is needed across Welsh Government, British Council, ACW and WAI.

When sending more than one person, aim for a mix of an experienced and a less experienced practitioner, and of an organisation-based and an independent practitioner.

### **Increase membership of worldwide and EU networks by Welsh companies and individuals**

At €100, individual membership of the International network for contemporary performing arts (IETM) is more affordable than most international platforms. WAI are to be congratulated on their work encouraging broader membership of IETM and bringing the Arts in Rural Areas event to Llandudno. Through networking, artists will make connections which will build showcasing opportunities. *“It’s the people who can give the most to the network who get the most out.”* See appendix 14 for information about current Welsh membership. Wales members should propose sessions to IETM, following the model of the Arts in Rural Areas working group. Consider strategic memberships and how organisations can support each other. For example, if a national company is a member, they should sometimes send

a delegate from outside their management or their freelance taskforce member.

### **Interrogate Return on Investment and environmental impact**

Analyse the outputs and outcomes to consider the ROI for each visit. For example, if the person meets mostly UK people when travelling to New York, investigate more cost-effective ways of networking.

### **Build on areas of strength**

“If there are areas where Wales has a strength, such as language or genre, look for strategic international opportunities.”<sup>6</sup> The British Council Arts Strategy aims to enable “the world [to] look at the UK for the development of policy and practice regarding the place of culture in inclusion, representing marginalised voices and access to the arts.”<sup>7</sup> The British Council Wales Project Management plan identified the following areas of expertise in Wales: socially engaged practice, arts and education (Creative learning), participation, arts for regeneration, and arts for social change.<sup>8</sup>

### **When considering which work to represent Wales internationally, prioritise the quality over all other factors.**

“Focus on whatever music or artists we feel are the strongest in quality and incoming demand to provide an inroad into international opportunities, and also a gateway back into Wales.”<sup>9</sup> Dr Mordsley’s research confirms that international delegates to the Edinburgh Fringe are looking to discover “new and ground-breaking work.” This supports the recommendations of the British Council *International Showcasing Strategy*.

### **Enable artists to lead from the front**

“Artists and creative organisations should be setting the agenda through their content.” Enabling artists to lead the ways Wales is presented “will mean we are less likely to rely on the tropes of Welsh culture. But it will only happen if properly resourced and has a lead in time.”<sup>10</sup>

<sup>6</sup> Action Research delegate

<sup>7</sup> British Council Arts Strategy pg 21

<sup>8</sup> Wales Arts Showcasing Project Management Plan pg 6

<sup>9</sup> Action Research delegate

<sup>10</sup> Action Research delegate

# Recommendations to develop specific showcasing events

## The Great Escape (TGE)

TGE in Brighton is a major event with international reach: Welsh funders must not be uncomfortable about supporting work that is going to England as it is both a major market for Welsh work and a cost-effective gateway to meet international delegates.

One respondent noted the preference for Celtic development (as suggested by the programme for Dublin Music Festival, and the number of people from Wales to Celtic Connections in Scotland.) Whilst Celtic music is deserving of support, the delegate thought it part of the music picture, rather than the primary focus.

- Investigate if hosting a TGE party, as many countries do, would give a good ROI.

## IETM membership network

- Investigate hosting a plenary session focusing on a Welsh specialism. This would bring around 500 members to Wales.

## Spring Forward (Aerowaves)

Spring Forward showcases tour-ready work and is driven by Aerowaves members. The UK has one member organisation: The Place, London. Would they see their role as putting forward Wales-based dance artists?

- Welsh dance sector to engage with The Place
- Investigate hosting Spring Forward or a similar Aerowaves event.

## EFA Atelier

- Support raising the profile of EFA in Wales so more Wales festivals attend, leading to opportunity to host in the future.
- *"It would be good to spread the word through ACW, BAFA, bigger festivals (e.g. Festival of Voice, Hay, Eisteddfod) to see if others can attend for networking, seeing work [etc.]."*
- Investigate running an Atelier alongside one of the bigger festivals in Wales.

## Targeted digital alternatives for showcasing for music

"Focus some resource on how music and music organisations in Wales can be reached by any international onlooker." Tŷ Cerdd represents (mostly) traditional music, Focus Wales international work with rock and pop, Trac work with folk/traditional sector.

- Develop just one digital gateway into Wales that can then signpost to genres and styles appropriately.

# Recommendations for a showcasing event in Wales

The Wales Arts Showcasing Project Management Plan for British Council Wales detailed the idea of a signature showcasing event in Wales. Wales Millennium Centre (WMC), with the National Companies Group and Welsh Government's Major Events Unit, would lead.<sup>11</sup> British Council Wales would develop an addendum event to 'wrap around' the showcasing platform. During the Action Research period, WMC changed elements of its flagship *Festival of Voice* including moving from summer to autumn and running from two weeks to an extended weekend. This could provide advantages to an addendum event. COVID19 means there is uncertainty around major events for some time.

Year One produced the following learning points and recommendations for hosting an event.

Showcase Scotland: Speed Networking was the best single event. This supports the British Council report findings for Edinburgh where 62.5% of respondents found structured meetings arranged by the British Council 'very useful.' *"The networking breakfasts were the most useful because they are specifically targeted at connecting individuals."*

Consider the number of events per day. Showcase Scotland starts around midday and runs late into the evening; it can be high pressure for the delegate.

Consider the length of event. Showcase Scotland might be better at three rather than four days. (This would fit well with the proposed length of *Festival of Voice*.)

Consider designing the showcasing event so all delegates can see everything (as with Spring Forward) rather than have to make choices (as with Celtic Connections).

Consider running an informal dinner for first-time delegates. Showcase Scotland does this specifically for women and "people regarded this as a really strong initiative."

Gary Raymond's visit to the Edinburgh Fringe identified learning for a Wales showcase including transport infrastructure, both to the location and within the festival; connectivity for ticketing; pricing structures including free events and discounting; and financial viability including for the producer. The critical element might be financial. ***"Producers and production companies have no space for another money-sapping platform like the Fringe in their annual budgets."***<sup>12</sup> Appendix 15 has ten points that warrant "further research and discussion."

<sup>11</sup> Wales Arts Showcasing Project Management Plan pg 6

<sup>12</sup> Gary Raymond 2019 pg 10