

Arts Council of Wales

Creative Producer

Summary of the consultation
and our response

15 August 2011



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Creative Producer

Summary of the consultation and our response

Introduction

Our Investment Review committed us to:

“A more joined-up, collaborative approach [that] would provide better support to dance artists, presenters and audiences.” Our analysis was that there was *“scope for looking at some aspects of existing dance investment to see if greater ‘value’ could be extracted.”* We identified the need for:

- *continuing high quality community dance activity*
- *strategies to identify, nurture and retain dance talent in Wales*
- *more professional opportunities for dancers*
- *the development of dance ‘hubs’ across Wales – venues and organisations with the expertise, knowledge and resources to work in partnership with dance artists and companies*
- *quality spaces where dance can be made and rehearsed*
- *a ‘creative producer’ for dance in Wales who could create more work from Welsh dance artists and companies*

We stated that we believed that a clearer strategic focus on the actual creation of work was what was needed at this point and announced our desire to introduce a creative producer into the mix, alongside the other resourcing of dance we could achieve through the Investment Review. This included upping investment in the National Dance Company, resourcing other companies such as Earthfall and welcoming the new portfolio client Ballet Cymru (formerly Independent Ballet Wales), enhancing resourcing of the regionally based Community Dance companies, putting additional resources into venues with highly developed and effective commitments to dance - the dance hubs operating dance buddy schemes, programming, co-producing and collaborating. Alongside this we could set the continued work of WMC in programming a variety of Dance on all its stages but most significantly large scale in the Donald Gordon Theatre. Furthermore audiences in Wales will continue to benefit from the UK Dance Touring Partnership and Sherman Cymru’s active involvement in such a scheme. At the same time the support organisations in the former portfolio (CDW and WID) saw their annual revenue funding removed.

We declared that we were looking to the further formulation of a model built around a ‘creative producer’. Whilst seeking to retain an open mind as to the

creative producer's parameters and situation, we trailed characteristics of the role as:

- *firmly focussed on the development of Welsh dance artists and companies*
- *committed to direct activity, rather than advocacy and campaigning*
- *a commissioner of quality dance activity*
- *a producer of work in partnership with other relevant partner organisations.*
- *encouraging initiatives that support training and mentoring of dance artists*
- *developing nationally significant projects that focus on professional development for dance artists*

Our consultation document further elaborated our thinking on what the Creative Producer needed to do and to operate and we concluded:

"In our view it should address the following:

- Engage with dance artists and dance makers to define new creative possibilities.
- Identify a roster of projects (an appropriate number and type).
- Create the appropriate commissions.
- Nurture and build new partnerships
- Identify the right environment for the development of new work.
- Get creative work to market and make it sustainable.
- Help make the money go further by working collaboratively and by maximising on investment in the dance sector.
- Help to refocus the making of work which strongly connects with audiences.

Overall we envisage the work of the Creative Producer as offering further commissioning and delivery of dance productions of a variety of scales and sizes, dovetailed into new, different and developing audiences."

In our formal consultation, we asked for feedback on:

- the scope and prioritisation of activities,
- the requirements and characteristics, essentially the job specifications for the role and finally
- for views on where the role could/should be located.

We launched the consultation with a break out session in our conference attended by 48 participants at the Riverfront Newport. By the closure of the consultation period 4th February 2011 we'd received written feedback from 27 people in response to the consultation.

Revenue Funded Organisations (2010/11)	14
Other organisations	6
Individuals	7

Subsequently we invited attendance to a series of Dance Discussions in Cardiff, Carmarthen and Colwyn Bay, to give informal feedback on the consultation and explore issues further and to consider matters in the light of the funding settlement and the firming up of the budget now approved by Council (£325k p.a. over 2011-14).

Conference and Dance Discussions attendees:

	Conference	Carmarthen	Cardiff	Colwyn Bay	Total
Revenue Funded Organisations (2010/11)	23	2	12	2	39
Other Organisations	7		7	1	15
Local Authorities	4		3		7
Individuals	5	1	7	1	14
Staff	9	5	9	3	26
Total	48	8	38	7	101

We'd like to thank everyone who responded to the consultation and took part in the Dance Discussions.

The responses in part thoroughly interrogated the initiative: where its rationale had emerged from and, alongside this, the ability and will of the Council to engage in further work with the sector in realistic timeframes to ensure the strategic implementation of the initiative, whilst others clearly welcomed the prospect. As we were consulting in advance of budgetary decisions it was only in the dance discussions that the budget decided by Council could be publicised (£325,000 per annum 2011-14) All therefore, at the time of the consultation, were seeking more detail and reserving judgement as to how it would work. This was seen as dependent on what resulted from the tender process and the operation of the role in reality.

It was generally recognised that the role could not be all things to all people and that partnership and collaboration would be key to success. Arts Council of Wales was urged to be circumspect so as not to overload the role and thus hamper the chances of success. There was a general anxiety (expressed by and large by venue based perspectives) as to what the basis of collaboration would be, how it would be secured, and how it would complement what was already on the ground and working. The underlying theme from the venues was the promotion of what is already being achieved and Arts Council's apparent lack of acknowledgement of this interface and de facto, although unstated, whether better resourcing of current networks wouldn't drive a better overall outcome.

The Dance Discussions were positive in this respect in allowing us to further acknowledge programming and co- production and allied activity through the venues whilst stating the case that in our view Creative Producer activity would add other dimensions. Others indeed saw the real need for a non-venue perspective, an independence of view and a creative commissioning process and perspective more likely to inject new approaches and ranges of work.

Inevitably, the consultation touched on what was exiting from current provision, but was clear and we acknowledge as much in our response, that these areas needed different approaches and that the creative producer was not to be seen as a measure of remedy. Arts Council of Wales in establishing the Creative Producer and working with the sector on issues of Continuous Professional Development (CPD), will need to see how communications about opportunities and development through practice and outlets for more work, can work.

This summary draws together the main themes and ideas that arose from these consultation responses and our responses to them.

SUMMARY OF RESPONSES

Question 1

Do you feel that the scope of activities identified above provide a helpful basis for defining the remit of a creative producer initiative for dance in Wales?

A number of respondents questioned the basis for the conclusions in the Investment Review and the background thinking to the initiative.

"Our concern here begins with the failure of the paper to describe the "models (which) have begun to work elsewhere in Europe & the UK." This information is key to understanding the proposal. The proposal does not rest on any discernible evidence or consultation/discussion with relevant partners."

"We recognise that training and professional development are not properly within the scope of the creative producer. However, we wish to point out that choreographic development will be necessary to ensure the model's success, and are concerned that this is not highlighted sufficiently in the brief on page 3."

"Although training and professional development are not within the remit of the creative producer, it is important to realise that the artists with whom the creative producer will be working are only ready to be produced by virtue of training and development opportunities provided by WID and others. These activities need to be continued in some form, or the creative producer model, however initially successful, will be inherently unsustainable."

"We welcome the idea of web-based resources for communication and networking, but are concerned about the information resources for dance being within the remit. Although our consultation with sector members shows that artists are concerned about the loss of information resources with the closure of WID, the provision of any such service may be administratively burdensome if done properly. This must be considered in the context of Council wanting a 'fleet of foot' model."

There was a welcome from many of proposed traits of CP work and what will characterise it e.g. an emphasis on quality over a single and personal aesthetic and work which is audience-focused, as both of these will be key in ensuring long-term success.

The practical scope of the role was questioned in written responses and in the Dance Discussions

Many interpreted the scope we were proposing as too broad, others questioned its leadership role, suggesting that there is exclusivity for leadership for Dance in Wales.

"the remit of the creative producer as proposed in the ACW consultation document is trying to cover too much."

"I feel that this is a great initiative and I welcome it sincerely. This certainly is something that has been missing from Wales. However, the landscape of dance in Wales is changing drastically and I feel that the remit of the creative producer as proposed in the ACW consultation document is trying to cover too much. As the creative producer won't be a big new organization, I feel that the aims of the proposal should be narrowed down in order to make it successful. In the beginning, it is important to focus solely on the aspects of production of high quality work and later expand on training and mentoring once the role of the producer is more established."

"Should levels of funding be not substantial enough to cover all the ideal tasks, then priorities should be identified according to ACW strategic and artistic priorities for the Dance Sector."

A number of technical queries surfaced as we were consulting in advance of budget setting

"Our primary question is how the producer's commissioning pot will interact with other sources of Arts Council funding for artists. Will the producer be able to 'top-up' production grants?"

Our Response:

The Creative Producer idea was a component in the strategic consultancy supported by the Arts Council four years ago where a sustainable new dance delivery model was actively discussed between: WID, CDW and the then Mesa. So it is not a new element in discussions about advancing the possibilities for Dance. Active research and tracking developments across the UK and Europe has been a feature of various Dance Forums we have held. The council decision regarding withdrawing revenue funding from support organisations in Wales, and a Council desire to channel money towards more "front line" production possibilities, dovetailed with the long standing plan and the desire

to further a new model offered in part by the Creative Producer for Dance in Wales. Creative Producer is however seen as complementing and not supplanting other valued infrastructure and approaches which have been actively promoted by the Investment Review decisions.

In constructing the eventual tender brief we will take further advice from Advisers and expertise and ensure the scope is practicable and focussed on sourcing projects and investing in production , achieving collaboration and audience development, all in relation to budget. We will also work to ensure the initiative has the best opportunities to relate to existing networks and build on them.

The resourcing of the Creative Producer does not choke off other routes to funding for project work, touring and collaboration.

“The exclusive focus on “Welsh Dance Artists & Companies” is understandable. However it neither recognises that there is still very little capacity in the sector to produce work of a standard and scale to tour to the established network of venues currently programming and developing audiences for dance in Wales, nor recognises the audience demand for the best of UK and International work to be seen in Wales.”

And:

“Venues are seen to be generating work, but not the Holy Grail.....”

Our Response:

Council’s priority coming out of the Investment Review was to enhance production possibilities. We are conscious of the formation gap which could open up in the medium term, but that this will now need to be addressed by a variety of means and approaches ranging from the work being developed and further programmed by the key Regional Dance Hubs who may be able to identify additional resources to undertake and develop some of this work. It is our belief that the Creative Producer will encourage different approaches to programming, and realise a balance of venue based and other located or site specific projects

“The Creative Producer should enable facilitation of dance products to allow connection and reconnection so that the artform can develop within Wales and in turn empower dance artists and organisations.”

Our Response:

We see this as a necessity and will work actively to encourage the spirit of collaboration and the interaction of key players. These things should result from the emphasis on quality and communications which we would anticipate a Creative Producer bringing and developing in collaboration with others.

Question 2

Are there any other important activities that you feel the scope of the initiative should address?

A number of respondents emphasised the importance of an objective voice in working with the artists who don't necessarily make work that is particularly popular with audiences. It was generally felt from the artist's perspectives that the development of the artform itself must be a priority – not just a saleable product.

Some respondents also felt that there should be a stronger emphasis on international activity within the Creative Producer document.

“Consistency with the Investment Review. Be Bold and Brave. Create an organisation to thrive rather than just survive, and use the knowledge and skills that are already in place within the sector.”

“The Creative Producer should be an inventor, entrepreneur a curator of strong vision, dynamism and ambition, able to take risk and challenge the dance sector.”

“In response to this I can only put forward what I view as some of the key gaps in the provision for the development of high quality dance in Wales:

1. Support for the many emerging professional artists

- *Administrative & business planning*
- *Fundraising & income generation*
- *Tour booking / getting the work seen / local, national and international*
- *Critical appraisal and direction*
- *Partnership development / local, national and international*
- *Marketing / branding / identity development*
- *Audience development and education work including artist residencies and education programmes*

- *Developing training programmes for the artists in all aspects of creating and touring work*
 - *Linking with the education sector*
2. *Working with the promoters / venues / producers / theatres & arts centres
Liaison with Creu Cymru & the Wales Dance Consortium*
3. *Developing partnerships with individual promoters both in Wales and the rest of the UK
Creating commissioning opportunities that will help the work to be seen, particularly in awkward and out of the way places."*

"The arc of activities you have broadly outlined on page 3 - i.e. nurture and develop talent and good ideas, find ways to produce and present work inventively, and reach a broad and diverse audience – is clear and are part and parcel of the process, weighted at different times, which any creative producer should expect to undertake."

"We would welcome a stronger emphasis on international activity within the document, as we believe that the creative producer is an excellent opportunity to promote Wales on the international stage."

"The Creative Producer should play a role in enabling partnerships among the dance sector by valuing what is already in place and see how to maximise resources by joining the dots."

"However the Creative Producer should be far more than just a facilitator for what is already in place. There is no point perpetuating only what is existing or limiting ourselves in thinking within the box of what is already in place."

"We believe that the principal role of the Creative Producer must be to enable the maximum amount of resources to be distributed to the artists to enable the creation and touring of their work. It must be administratively very light, entrepreneurial and focused. The remit must be clear and what success will look like must be defined. It must not promise to solve all the problems for dance in Wales as then it is guaranteed to fail."

Our Response:

The research and idea behind the Creative Producer initiative is to support the independent professional dance sector in Wales and the outcomes of its work.

The intent is to be inclusive and developing, and whilst Wales focussed, the Creative Producer output should draw attention to dance from Wales, as well as address openings and possibilities for touring beyond Wales.

We acknowledge the issues raised, but this new departure should be able to relate to the successes and the shortcomings of previous initiatives, whilst having the confidence to forge something new and dynamic. We will work hard with all parties to encourage the spirit of collaboration and the interaction of key players around an inspiring initiative. A realistic scope, based on enabling new work to be created and find its audience is recognised as paramount.

Question 3

Do you have a view on what activities should be prioritised by the Creative Producer?

There was some concern expressed by respondents around provision for young, new and emerging choreographers. Questions were raised around how an artist becomes someone who is at a stage where commissioning them becomes viable, when there is perceived lack of decent infrastructure to support them to do this at present.

"We believe that the Creative Producer should initially focus on creating the right environment for success by fostering partnerships, ensuring that key partners are committed to its success and ensuring that artists feel a sense of ownership of the brief."

"Partnerships will be key, but this should not be mistaken with the Creative Producer being at the service of the existing structures/venues."

"It will have to be an equal partner with a clear role and mission. Also the partnerships should not just be limited to dance venues and organisations."

"Focus and investment in a few companies and artists who are not revenue funded but definitely have a strong impact on the dance sector should be made"

Our Response:

Such responses will help to form the basis of the final brief for the Creative Producer, and also to play an integral part in the business planning. We know and value the elements that are already in place and have emphasised the collaborative framework the Creative Producer will want to develop.

Question 4

Do you have views on what we should stipulate as requirements from applicants?

The majority of concern from most of the respondents was around the practicalities of “how this would work”? There was a strong feeling that the Creative Producer role could not be fulfilled by a single person alone.

Many respondents also kept referring to the most recent successful model seen working in Wales, in the form of National Theatre Wales. Everyone was in agreement however, that this was a very different scale of operation, and that one would have to take care in making that comparison. The agreement was around the scale of ambition, and that that should be defined by the resources made available. The overall agreement was in the wish to make the Creative Producer do one thing, and to do it well.

Another major area of concern was around accountability, and the question around: “Who should the Creative Producer be answerable to?”

“The hope is for the creative producer to come from a neutral place that has an all encompassing approach to dance that recognises the value of independent and community dance practice. The Creative Producer certainly needs the ability to be responsive to genuinely interesting artistic ideas that reflect and challenge the current dance ecology.”

“We have serious concerns about accountability & monitoring/assessment. This is particularly the case if such a substantial amount of money (& ambition) is vested in an individual or individuals.”

“This new entity should be answerable to the Arts Council to guarantee its objectivity and freedom of initiatives. Very clear remits or SLA of some sort should be given to the Creative Producer so the work can be carefully monitored.”

And:

“It is extremely likely that the new organisation will dictate what should be done according to their own interest and agenda, and not fulfilling the mission of this new post.”

- 1. A track record and willingness to work in partnership with an unselfish approach*

2. *A strong understanding of the requirements of creating and touring work*
 3. *Creative thinker, problem solver*
 4. *Good knowledge and understanding of the many different ways that artists develop their work*
 5. *Good knowledge and understanding of venues*
 6. *Understanding of audience development and ways to encourage new audiences into dance*
- Experience and understanding of high quality professional dance*

“We believe that the proposed diversity and range of roles of the Creative Producer suggest that this be delivered most effectively by an organisation and not an individual, not least with the potential or requirement to raise additional funds. It is also important that, should it have a fund-distributing remit as well, this organisation exist with an appropriate constitution and structure.”

“Research (our own and ACE) has shown that audiences identify more readily with the producer/presenter than with the artist’s name. This is especially important with regards to less-established artists. When trying to sell such an artist to a venue, it is important for the producer to have a good reputation and brand in order that artists may trade upon it. We urge Council to recognise that the producer will need an identity of its own.

*Ultimately, we would like to stress that Council should not be too restrictive in accepting pitches, and not state from the outset that a whole new organisation is not wanted. From the work expectation outlined in the document, it may be that an organisational structure **is** needed. This does not **necessarily have to be** an administratively-heavy structure. Ultimately, it should be for the bidders to design what they think is the best structure according to the brief.”*

Our Response:

The issue of a single person versus a small team approach is one that needs to be explored. The Arts Council of Wales is convinced however, that a fleet of foot approach to overhead needs to be encouraged. The person or team would be answerable to the Arts Council of Wales, its funder. Without being cumbersome it will be useful for the Creative Producer to have a Reference Group to offer support and advice, and for this reference group to grow out of the Advice and independent specialists we can draw on in the formulation of the tender brief, selection process and appointment. The duties and responsibilities and targets could quite easily be drawn up and agreed in some form of a Service Level Agreement with a an individual, a team, a partnership or consortium. Success will depend on the partnerships and clear remits of responsibility which arise out of the projects the Creative Producer initiates.

Question 5

Do you have any other points you wish to make to contribute to the Council's shaping of the Creative Producer model for Dance?

Concerns were raised around the apparent huge remit. There was also a strong feeling from one of the respondents who had worked in the dance sector in Wales for a long time, who felt that models that had been "imposed" on the dance sector from top down had never really worked. The respondent felt that dancers should be allowed to develop organically, within their own timeframe.

"Ultimately, we would like to stress to Council that they should not be too restrictive in accepting pitches, and not to state from the outset that a whole new organisation is not wanted."

"The hope is for the Creative Producer to come from a neutral place that has an all encompassing approach to dance that recognises the value of independent and community practise."

"An individual may be prone to having a single aesthetic which is incompatible with the wishes expressed elsewhere in the document."

"The Creative Producer will need to be able to leverage in additional funds and this will be made massively more complicated by it not having organisational status. For example, many trusts and foundations will not consider non-charitable companies, and a charity will need trustees etc, pointing more to an organisation."

"I see considerable experience and delivery already of areas of the creative producer's proposed remit. I am concerned that the proposal paper ignores these developments completely, instead claiming to draw its inspiration from assessing ways such models have begun to work elsewhere in Europe and the UK and what their key characteristics are. But the proposal document makes no reference to what these models are, or what their characteristics might be. Similarly, having taken stock during the investment review of the situation in Wales" the proposal document makes no reference to what this analysis is. I am therefore concerned, given that both ACW and the sector wish to work to enhance our activities, that there exists a separation in our understanding of where the sector is and where it needs to go. There is no reason why this separation cannot be fixed, but it requires a fuller engagement than the current timetable allows."

"I hope that ACW is able to draw on the expertise, networks and collaborations that are already functioning successfully and work in partnership with the sector to develop these initiatives and so enhance the production, presentation and development of dance in Wales."

Our Response:

The Investment Review has involved the Council in re-appraising what and how it funds and develops the arts in Wales. The development of the idea, and the thinking behind the Creative Producer has come out of this informed analysis and reflection and sharing of experience and specific dialogue with organisations. During the writing up of the current dance strategy, major gaps in provision were identified, which prohibited the sector from moving forward. Considerable time and resources has been spent in regular discussion and dialogue with a wide range of partners, both individuals, companies and organisations – and the new Creative Producer development is borne out of a clearly identified and pressing need. Council came to a conclusion that it needed to create more direct routes to the actual creation of new work in dance in Wales. We have now finalised a budget of £325,000 pa over the period 2011-14.

In all documents from the artform strategies onwards and through the development of possibilities through Arts outside Cardiff, and indeed the investment programme in developing venues, Council has promoted and acknowledged initiatives developed by networks and venue based collaborations. Equally we feel justified in the proposal of the Creative Producer as a different element in the mix, functioning in a collaborative way, but bringing something differentiated from venue based programming. The Investment Review is seeking to advance a complementary package of investment in our National Dance Company, other companies, Venues as Hubs for Dance, Community Dance organisations, and alongside this - a Creative Producer model to develop possibilities for new work.

Question 6

Do you have views on where a Creative Producer would be best located?

Many of the respondents felt very strongly that it should not be an assumption that the Creative Producer should be based in Cardiff or even in South Wales.

Some also believed that the long-term success of this model would depend upon it having its own dedicated studio and rehearsal spaces.

"it is also possible to have an accessible dance location and that that location becomes its shop window and allows it to develop activities as a result of having identified space for dance."

"We agree that it must be a distributed resource. This absolutely must not be interpreted as a base in Cardiff with links to other parts of the country, but rather a genuine distributive model i.e. one which see resources controlled by a partnership which is physically located across Wales."

"Clearly, a willingness to engage with practitioners and presenters will be imperative to the success of the initiative, but there should be no stipulation about location as part of the tender process, and that process should seek simply to get the best proposals possible."

Our response:

We believe that with the right approach and the right attitude, the issue of location can be resolved in innovative ways together with the right partnerships. It is quite clear from seeing other initiatives develop in the arts in Wales that it would need to have a countrywide remit and cannot be "Cardiff-centric" in what it delivers. We will remain open to suggestions on this issue from the tenders and responses we receive in tender bids. It is quite clear that the innovative use of IT and new social media, -, will help in communicating with a very mobile workforce.

Question 7

Any other comments?

Many of the respondents felt that it was important for Council to recognise that the Creative Producer initiative would not be a panacea for all ills, that there would still be gaps in the dance sector. The respondents urged Council to take a long-term view, and be careful not to burden the Creative Producer with unrealistic expectations.

"My biggest concern about the creative producer is the artist development as well as how to ensure an entry for newly graduated dance makers. I feel that one of the difficulties of creating larger scale work in Wales is access to a good rehearsal space."

There was a strong feeling that Council would need to start formulating new plans in order to plug the other gaps that had been opened up in the dance

sector in Wales – as a direct result of the decisions relating to the recent Investment Review.

"I worry for the future."

"Excitement about the new possibilities the Creative Producer could offer and its impact on the dance sector."

Our response:

Council recognises that the Creative Producer model must have a very clear brief and cannot nor should seek to resolve everything. We have already begun to address some informational issues such as the recent new in-house development of the monthly dance diary bulletin. The recent RFA documentation also engages with other clients such as the Regional Dance Hubs, and the community dance organisations recognising their roles in developing dance and the role they can play in areas such as Continuous Professional Development (CPD), working in collaboration with each other. It is important to remember that although WID has now closed its operation, CDW is still going through its transition phase of exploring what new proposals will be viable to take forward.

Respondents to consultation

South Wales Regional Committee Members

Taliesin Arts Centre

Janet Fieldsend

WID

Tanja Raman

Karine Decorne

UWIC

The Riverfront

Newport City Council

Jen Angharad (personal response)

Bombastic

Wales Dance Consortium, Creu Cymru

Theatr Mwldan

NDCW

Borough Theatre

Sherman Cymru

Deborah Light

Louise Suller

Jem Treays, RWCMD

RCT

Earthfall

Joanna Young

Dawns Powys Dance

Chapter

Powys Arts Forum

Sian Thomas and Marc Rees

India Dance Wales