



William Powell AM,
Chair - Petitions Committee,
National Assembly for Wales,
Cardiff Bay,
CF99 1NA

14th July 2011

Dear Sir,

Petitions: P-03-308 Save Gwent Theatre
P-03-311 Spectacle Theatre
P-03-314 Save Theatr Powys and Mid Powys Youth Theatre.

Thank you for your letter of 29th June regarding the above and for the opportunity to respond to ACW's correspondence relating to these matters.

Our opposition to the cuts made by ACW to the Theatre in Education sector last June are well known and we continue to be bewildered by such drastic action being taken in advance of any clearly thought out and articulated alternative strategy being in place. To say that ACW have been inconsistent in their attitude and approach to arts provision for young people is to understate the case. As late as April this year they were still awaiting responses from young people's groups they had consulted with some ten months after they had axed three TIE co's.

We believe that the interests of young people would have been better served if ACW had undertaken a thorough review of their priorities and objectives and delivered a clear strategy for consultation before engaging in an ill thought out and damaging change in priorities that has operated unfairly at the expense of a large number of professional arts workers but perhaps more importantly has deprived many thousands of young people access to the arts provided by their TIE company.

ACW state that: 'It's absolutely clear that young people want to engage actively with the arts, but often feel that much of what they see around them from professional arts providers is not of interest or relevant to them. Young people want to be active creators, not just 'consumers' of arts product.'

This statement would seem to betray a lack of understanding of both theatre in education and young people. Theatre in Education is about active engagement and creativity it is about art that is relevant to the lives of our youngsters, work that

stimulates and challenges them to think and act creatively. It does the very thing ACW seem to think young people want.

ACW say it's worth noting that Gwent Theatre continues to exist, this needs to be contextualised. GT exists as a legal entity with a board of unpaid trustees this provides a legal mechanism for the governance of Gwent Young People's Theatre which is funded by MCC and The Worker's Educational Association and has recently been the subject of project grant aid from ACW. GYPT has also received some additional funding from ACW to help develop the use of the Melville Theatre as a hub for community/young people's theatre activities. This financial assistance is welcome and will help to secure the future of youth theatre activities in the area. However, the fact remains that the professional TIE Company no longer exists. Six full time members of staff were made redundant on 31st March this year; also employment opportunities for in the region of twenty acting jobs, three designer's jobs; further, to the detriment of fostering new writing, two or three commissions for writers have also been lost. This is a tragic waste of the skills and talents of dedicated arts professionals and is the source of much individual heartache. The greatest loss however, is to the schools and community. Gwent Theatre regularly performed and presented work for in excess of 22,000 children year on year. Some of the areas our company served are amongst the most socially disadvantaged in Europe it is the loss to these children that is the hardest to bear.

We look forward to the Minister's proposed review of Theatre in Education provision and will be making a detailed submission to him when we know the form the review is to take.

Yours sincerely,

Gary Meredith
Former Artistic Director of Gwent Theatre on behalf of the Board