



SOCIAL RESEARCH NUMBER: 49/2017

PUBLICATION DATE: 22/08/2017

Fusion: Creating Opportunities through Culture programme

Second Year Review

Executive Summary

1 Research aims and methodology

- 1.1 Amgueddfa Cymru - National Museum Wales and the Welsh Government's Museums, Archives and Libraries Division commissioned a Government Social Research report outlining the findings of a review of the second year of the Fusion programme's pilot phase. The Welsh Government's Fusion programme aims to encourage and empower people living with some of Wales' most deprived communities to take an active part in the arts, culture and heritage at a local community level. A critical part of the programme has been establishing Fusion Partnerships to design and implement activity at a local area level.
- 1.2 The main aim of this review was to obtain the views of a wide range of cultural stakeholders participating in Fusion Partnerships to assess the impact of the programme on their own organisations. The findings from this review will contribute to the evidence base on culture and tackling poverty in Wales which in turn will inform the Welsh Government's development of the Fusion programme.
- 1.3 This report is based on findings from an online survey, sent to a sample of stakeholders from participating Fusion Partnership organisations, and qualitative interviews with cultural stakeholders.
- 1.4 The following paragraphs summarise the key findings from the online stakeholder survey and the semi-structured interviews with stakeholders.

2. Key findings

Understanding of the Fusion approach

- 2.1 Findings from the research indicate a strong understanding of the Fusion programme's overarching aims. Interviewees were overwhelmingly positive about Fusion's goal of helping to tackle poverty in some of Wales' most deprived communities through cultural interventions. Most thought cultural organisations had a social responsibility to contribute towards these goals.

Motivations for participating in a Fusion Partnership

- 2.2 Main motivations for participating in a Fusion Partnership were to widen access and participation in cultural activities and a desire to improve people's abilities by, for example, developing their skills, confidence and supporting them to gain qualifications. Some survey respondents were motivated by the opportunities Fusion presented for working within new communities and with new groups of people. Research participants felt that the Fusion Partnerships provided opportunities for interviewees to network with a range of stakeholders, and reflect on best practice. They provided a forum for strengthening existing relationships and fostering new links with other cultural organisations, local authorities, and local community agencies working within disadvantaged communities.

Perceived benefits of the Fusion Partnership approach

- 2.3 The benefits experienced by interviewees included the development and strengthening of links between stakeholders, increased profile professionally, and the targeting and engagement of new audiences within deprived communities. In addition, partnerships had enabled a better understanding of other organisations and opportunities to work in partnership on shared objectives and new projects. Some interviewees had also leveraged in additional funding and resources.
- 2.4 The majority of those who took part in the research felt that, as a result of the Fusion Partnership approach, cultural organisations are targeting activities more effectively at people experiencing poverty. Most survey respondents also felt their organisation collaborated to a greater extent on the co-design of cultural interventions with individuals and groups from deprived communities, and more effectively with other cultural organisations and local community agencies working within disadvantaged communities. The stakeholders who took part in the research also felt that individuals experiencing poverty in their communities were accessing cultural activities more as a result of the Fusion Partnerships. In addition, a majority of respondents thought participating in a Fusion Partnership had resulted in their organisation gaining a better understanding of the role culture can play in tackling poverty.

- 2.5 Research participants perceived the main benefits to individuals had been to provide them with new experiences and opportunities. Partnerships were viewed to be helping many individuals to access cultural resources for the first time. Another point that emerged strongly was the perception that local authorities were thinking about different ways of achieving objectives as a result of the input from cultural organisations in partnerships. They had learnt about alternative ways of engaging people, and Fusion provided more adventurous, and therefore appealing, cultural offers which, in the process, helped break down some barriers and misconceptions within local authorities around culture.
- 2.6 Fusion Partnerships were also thought to be breaking down some barriers and misconceptions within local authorities. Interviewees were generally positive about the opportunities to network, and the partnerships providing forums for supporting collaborative working, avoiding duplication and the pooling or sharing resources was noted by some.

The challenges of participating in Fusion

- 2.7 This review also highlights a number of challenges to the Fusion Partnership approach. Collecting monitoring and evaluation data and engaging people experiencing poverty in cultural activities were the most commonly cited challenges to participating in a partnership. Communication issues around the effective sharing of information, so as to effectively share learning and avoid the duplication of activities were also raised by interviewees. In cases where there was no clearly designated Lead Delivery Body (LDB)¹ member of staff responsible for coordinating the partnership, some interviewees reported difficulties joining the network.
- 2.8 Another challenge was that of limited capacity and resources to deliver activities. The issues focussed upon the demand on staff to design and deliver activities in addition to their day-to-day responsibilities and within the reporting timeframe of partnerships.
- 2.9 In addition, a challenge identified by many interviewees' centred on the insufficient time available to establish links and build relations between stakeholders before collaboration on projects could begin. This was linked to the short reporting time frame of the Fusion programme.
- 2.10 The uncertainties created by the current economic climate, subsequent budget cuts across the culture and heritage sector, and the barriers this had imposed in terms of longer-term strategic planning was also emphasised as a challenging factor by interviewees.

¹ The Lead Delivery Body for each Fusion Partnership is the lead body with overall responsibility for overseeing the work of that partnership.

Critical success factors

2.11 The review highlighted a number of factors identified by survey respondents and interviewees as critical to the future success of Fusion. The need for Fusion Partnerships to include a wide variety of organisations was the factor identified as most critical to future success. Other factors cited by respondents included:

- collaboration between stakeholders and the co-productive development of initiatives;
- measuring outcomes and learning from evidence and best-practice;
- increased funding for partnerships;
- strong leadership of partnerships;
- effective communication between stakeholders; and
- embedding cultural activities within deprived communities to create ownership and lasting change.

2.12 Another key theme raised by several research participants was the quality of the cultural activities offered; with many emphasising strongly that to ensure high-quality and innovative interventions, an individual with an arts background and strong understanding of the culture sector needed to be embedded within partnerships.

3. Conclusions

3.1 Overall, research participants were positive about Fusion Partnerships. The benefits of the Fusion Partnerships were largely perceived to outweigh any challenges. Key benefits included the opportunities partnerships provided for relationship-building between stakeholders, helping to raise the profile of cultural organisations and highlight the contribution they can make to tackling poverty. In addition, as a result of the partnership approach, cultural organisations were targeting and engaging new groups in deprived communities more. However, areas for improvement were also identified. One suggested area for improvement was about allowing more time to develop the links between stakeholders and help facilitate co-productive approaches between stakeholders and participants. This was also linked to the need to consider the sustainability of activities by embedding and incentivising partnerships. Improved communication also arose as an issue that could be improved. Many of those who participated in the research emphasised how, to ensure a quality experience for participants, individuals with the appropriate level of understanding, in terms of cultural expertise and knowledge of the cultural sector, needed to play a key role in shaping the direction of partnerships.

Mulready, K., (2017). *Fusion: Creating Opportunities through Culture programme. Second Year Review.* Welsh Government, GSR report number 49/2017.

Available at: <http://gov.wales/statistics-and-research/research-fusion-creating-opportunities-through-culture-programme/?lang=en>

Views expressed in this report are those of the researchers and not necessarily those of the Welsh Government

For further information please contact:

Kathleen Mulready
Social Research and Information Division
Knowledge and Analytical Services
Welsh Government, Cathays Park
Cardiff, CF10 3NQ

Email: kathleen.mulready001@gov.wales

Mae'r ddogfen yma hefyd ar gael yn Gymraeg.
This document is also available in Welsh.

OGL © Crown Copyright Digital ISBN 978-1-78859-098-3