

Forever Emerging?

A report into directing for the stage in Wales

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This report was completed in February 2020 and we planned to launch it the following month. Then came COVID-19. The full implication of this pandemic on our lives and livelihoods is incalculable but what is apparent is that the world in which we find ourselves is markedly changed. The question for us all now is what might we do collectively, and on an individual basis, to ensure that what emerges from this crisis is a more unified and equal sector.

Many of the themes in this report spring from longstanding systemic issues that have been ignored for far too long. Rather than returning to "normal," this pandemic gives us the opportunity to reset the way our theatres work and to transform the sector through more progressive, equitable and inclusive practices. Who gets to speak, what stories get told and who gets to tell them are pressing issues for the sector and society as a whole. Thanks to the campaigning voices of the Black Lives Matter movement and initiatives such as the Welsh Arts Anti-Racist Union, there is a momentum of change which can enable a fundamental shift of power. We hope this report can play some part in contributing towards greater transparency and inclusivity.

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Forever Emerging? A Report into Directing for the Stage in Wales

1. Introduction

In 1989, Kenneth Rea published *A Better Direction*¹ - his landmark inquiry into the training of directors in the UK for The Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation. But, until Thomas Hescott and Corinne Furness published *The Director's Voice*² thirty years later, there had been very little further written examination of the UK employment context for stage directors. To our knowledge, this report is the first to look at the specific circumstances in Wales yet recent experience has shown a significant increase in the number of directors living in and working from Wales. Welsh and Wales-based directors have been affected by similar conditions and challenges as those in the rest of the UK. However, their path to employment is generally unlike the conventional route of directors in England. Arguably, the environmental context in Wales has more in common with some other nations than it has with England.

For example, in 2008, the Australia Council for The Arts published *Love Your Work: Training, retaining and connecting artists in theatre*.³ The report identified an arts economy where there was a well-networked, but physically isolated artistic community; where directors felt stuck within a certain scale of work and were unable to progress; where opportunities to direct were limited and declining; where pathways for career progression were frustrated and unclear; where it was perceived artistic directors were staying in role for too long and where creative succession was not happening. Many would recognise the parallels with Wales.

The arts economy in Wales has generally been hampered by a comparable lack of investment with elsewhere in the UK, particularly with England. The room for manoeuvre in theatre has always felt circumscribed and fraught with risk. Ongoing austerity and the need to see the benefits of public investment radiate more widely are critical to Arts Council Wales' (ACW) new thinking. As Nick Capaldi (Chief Executive - ACW) says

*We want a Wales where the benefits of the arts are felt across all communities, regardless of wealth, gender, ethnicity, language or locality. We want a Wales that nurtures the well-being and quality of life of all; a Wales that's dynamically connected to the rest of the world through the richness of its arts and the networks that they create.*⁴

We recognise the systemic challenges facing the arts economy in Wales. Directors, like other artists and creative professionals, are dynamically linked to these issues – implicated by and

¹ <https://gulbenkian.pt/uk-branch/publication/a-better-direction/>

² <https://stagedirectorsuk.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/DirectorsVoiceDec2018.pdf>

³ <https://ifacca.org/en/news/2008/12/19/love-your-work-training-retaining-and-connecting-a/>

⁴ <https://www.walesartsreview.org/nick-capaldi-arts-council-of-wales-to-expand-its-reach/>

subject to them. It is a time of both opportunity and challenge for the arts in Wales. We trust this report can contribute to the changes needed.

In July 2017, the results from a survey of stage directors in Wales were published reflecting on opportunity and the experience of working with ACW's portfolio of professional producing companies, including National Theatre Wales, The Sherman, Theatr Clwyd, Theatr Genedlaethol and others.

Some of the findings were stark. For example, 20% of the respondents – professional stage directors earning a living in Wales – had never worked with an ACW portfolio company at any stage in their careers. 88% had never had any opportunity to direct on a mainstage in Wales at any point in their career, despite having done so with success elsewhere.

While the survey recognised pockets of support for emerging directors, the response to the survey indicated a perception of minimal opportunity in Wales to progress a career beyond an early stage. Evidence pointed to a fundamental lack of support for directors to develop and gain experience:

“The opportunity for mid-career and established directors to further develop their practice through experience in working at different scales or within more specialist areas was rare to non-existent.”⁵

The theatre ecology of Wales and the realities of being a small nation mean that fewer jobs are available to directors than there are people who want and possibly deserve them. However, it is important to ascertain whether opportunity is under-developed or even systemically limited in Wales and whether there is an inequality that mitigates against Welsh talent being able to achieve its full potential. Irrespective of this, it is also important to assess what structures are useful to directors in Wales and what can be done if there is a will to support them.

There is an expectation that public investment in the arts in Wales helps prevent a drain of creative talent out of the country and retains people within the industry. Welsh taxpayers have a right to expect that a proportion of their money is being directed towards artists who live, work and reciprocally invest their time, energy and money here. It is our view that it is neither insular nor narrowly nationalistic to expect this.

Of course, challenges are being experienced right across the performing arts. Economic factors make sustainable careers difficult at the best of times. Moreover, the overwhelming amount of public subsidy that is focussed on London skews the economy for everyone. With £1 billion a year in grant-in-aid and over fifty times the amount of subsidy compared to the UK's nations and regions, it is little wonder that there is such difficulty for directors wanting

⁵ <https://www.stagedirectorsuk.com/unavoidable-systemic-issues-that-demand-to-be-addressed/>

to make their living at a distance.⁶ As Graeme Thompson (Creative Producer at Live Theatre, Newcastle) put it in a recent interview in *The Stage*:

*Our entire national infrastructure and theatre industry centres around the capital. However, what if you can't afford to move to London? What if you're in a situation that won't allow that? What if you don't want to? What if you are truly based in a region or community in which your creativity is rooted, which sings of an identity that doesn't often get a voice? Do you become one of the left behind?*⁷

Unlike directors making their start in London, directors in Wales can be doubly afflicted – both by the exclusivity of metropolitan attitudes and by the negatively reinforcing idea within Wales itself that if you're not in London you can't be any good. At a meeting in Cardiff in June 2016, a young director spoke out about his frustration at feeling like he was “forever emerging.” Other voices in the room replied immediately that he could “join the club” – as well-established, mid-career directors, they all shared his frustration; it was the same for them.⁸

Further research conducted by SDUK in 2018, led to *The Director's Voice*. This report highlighted the difficulties experienced by many directors at mid-career level, particularly for those coming from disadvantaged backgrounds where the combination of low pay, job insecurity and the need to live or be available to work in London can inhibit advancement.

SDUK's report gave a useful overview of current opportunities and challenges for stage directors trying to forge a sustainable career. Although many of the issues covered in the report are relevant to directors throughout the UK, we felt there was an additional need to provide insight into the specific challenges faced by stage directors in Wales.

For example, elsewhere in the UK, there are many pathways for progressing a career as a stage director that are not currently available in Wales. Thus a key part of this research will be to consider what opportunities might enable emerging and mid-career directors in Wales to acquire the skills and experience to develop careers and, ultimately, maximise their chance of taking up a leadership role with one of our key cultural organisations.

As part of this, it is important to reflect on whether lack of internal development has led to the vast majority of Artistic Directors in Wales being individuals whose main experience comes from elsewhere. Is the skillset available to enable talented individuals to progress to leadership of key organisations in Wales? Of course, there is great enrichment gained

⁶ <https://www.theguardian.com/culture/2016/dec/15/public-funding-for-arts-still-skewed-towards-london-report-says>

⁷ <https://www.thestage.co.uk/opinion/2020/producer-graeme-thompson-theatres-need-to-help-artists-outside-london-level-up/>

⁸ <https://stagedirectorsuk.com/simon-harris-while-the-present-is-challenging-the-future-will-probably-be-even-more-so-2/>

through artistic leaders from elsewhere running key cultural organisations, but do such examples indicate a deeper problem whereby the directors in Wales are disadvantaged through lack of opportunity or other barriers?

Directors are initiators, visionaries, producers, leaders, communicators, innovators, makers, facilitators and thinkers that are the life-blood of theatre in Wales. Unfortunately, they are too often discouraged by the reality of their profession – a profession which can leave them “*forever emerging.*”

Thus a primary aim of the research conducted for this report – *Forever Emerging: A Report into Directing for the Stage in Wales* – is to provide an accurate picture of opportunities for stage directors in Wales and to identify if resources can be better utilised to enable a broader raft of opportunity and help towards building stronger, longer-lasting careers.

We gratefully acknowledge the support of the Arts Council of Wales in the writing of this document. We thank Stage Directors UK (SDUK) for their assistance and all the directors who contributed through participation in the survey and interview.

Methodology

The authors of this report are both directors based in Wales and our experience of working here and elsewhere has informed our desire to carry out this research. Our objective has been to provide a picture of current opportunities for stage directors in Wales and to find out if there are ways resources can be better utilised to help build sustainable careers. We also want to make clear any barriers to advancement that currently exist, as well as highlight new initiatives and examples of best practice.

To provide insight into the current situation and possible barriers to opportunity, we sought to find out some detail about stage directors in Wales – their backgrounds, age, ethnic and gender identity, class, education and training. We sought to identify and communicate with as many new, emerging, mid-career and established stage directors in Wales as possible in order to gather the widest range of views and experiences.

We adopted a mixed-methods approach for gathering the data that has informed our findings. We began the process by disseminating a series of questions via an online survey. We approached over one hundred and twenty professional stage directors based in Wales and promoted it online via social media and through the communication channels of this survey's funders and supporters – the Arts Council of Wales (ACW) and Stage Directors UK (SDUK). The survey (see Section Five: Appendix 1) was accessible in Welsh and in English. In total we had 76 responses to the online survey with many respondents giving detailed answers.

From the responses, we identified several areas of importance. Broadly, these related to training and engagement, career pathways, transparency, sustainable careers and leadership. This informed the next stage of our research which involved meetings with artistic leaders from Arts Portfolio Wales organisations. We invited them to respond to a series of questions related to these areas. In total, we held over twenty face-to-face sessions with key individuals and invited others to respond by e-mail. (A list of participants is included in Section Seven: Appendix 3). We also ran two focus groups with participants who were chosen on the basis that they had indicated their willingness to take part in further discussion after responding to the survey. The participants represented a broad range of perspectives in terms of age, experience and stage of career.

Permission was given by all participants to record conversations for the purpose of accuracy in the report, enabling us to reflect the views and opinions of those we spoke with. Participants were given an option as to how they would like their comments attributed.

Throughout this report we heard the use of terms such as 'emerging', 'mid-career' and 'established' when discussing different stages of a director's career. There is some debate around what exactly is meant by 'emerging', given that it can refer equally to someone who is at the beginning of their career as well as someone with a track record. We prefer the use

of 'early career' in this context but see that this is used interchangeably with 'emerging' by many. For the sake of clarity, we use the term 'emerging' to refer to directors at the start of their career who are predominantly assisting, directing fringe projects and have less than five years' experience. We identify 'mid-career' directors as those who have regularly directed professional work across different scales and have between five and twenty years' experience. We refer to 'established' directors as those with a substantial track record of work and twenty or more years' experience in the industry.

However, we accept that these labels are not particularly satisfactory or universally applicable. We use them as a guide, rather than a definition.

2. Report

Recent experience has shown an increased availability of assisting, training and general opportunity for early career directors. This was broadly welcomed in our research with appreciation from those who have been able to access and take advantage of it. Whilst this is a marked step forward from when Welsh directors were first surveyed in 2017, there were some mixed feelings about how these opportunities operate in practice and how companies continue to work and engage with participants.

Until approximately fifteen years ago, aspiring directors were at a premium, but with chances to develop few and far between. The Sherman Lunchtime plays, under Phil Clark's auspices, offered several directors a valuable opportunity and, for some, a first step into directing. Paid assisting roles were a regular feature of Sgript Cymru's new writing work, offering early support to Sara Lloyd, Adele Thomas, Steve Fisher and Alex Ferris amongst others. Under Terry Hands, assistants often gained experience on Theatr Clwyd's productions; however, these opportunities were typically offered to directors from outside of Wales. However, in partnership with The Sherman and Theatr Genedlaethol Cymru, Living Pictures delivered two directing courses in 2009 and 2013; the former developing three new productions alongside a year of intensive mentoring. Participants included Mared Swain, Bridget Keehan, Elise Davidson, Sara Lloyd, Sita Calvert-Ennals, Sarah Bickerton and Julia Thomas.

The establishment of National Theatre Wales (NTW) in 2008 led to several paid emerging director opportunities and has become to this day a regular feature of the company's work, lending a standardisation to the practice that coincided with its adoption more widely across Wales. Open call outs for individuals interested in working with the company led to successful applicants being assigned to its main productions. Recently, NTW began using an agreement based on a template devised by SDUK in 2016 and subsequently updated, which outlines terms and conditions, duties and rates for assistants. The scope of these emerging director positions has been varied, but generally they operate as assistant director placements with each emerging director given the chance to observe the methods of a lead artist.

NTW has also offered engagement with the company through its other developmental opportunities – initiatives such as the Wales Lab programme, Summer Camp and more recently themed and located residencies. These schemes are focused on artist development and available to a broad range of theatre makers. They provide a means through which directors can begin a relationship with the company and through which they can be supported to test out an idea. However, the company emphasises that this is a holistic approach to making work that encompasses other considerations. As Simon Coates (until recently, Head of Creative Development at NTW) explains:

For me, it's about where the idea is coming from - where the work is coming from – that's what's really integral. And ensuring whatever your discipline or whatever your practice is – whether you are a writer or a director or another type of theatre maker - then you feel that there is a clear mechanism for putting an idea forward. And if NTW and partners feel like that's an idea that we can get behind and meets some of what we're trying to do as well, then we honour that idea in the best way possible to bring the creative team around it. It has to come from that place, I think.⁹

Other organisations have turned their focus to a more bespoke development of the next generation of Welsh and Wales-based theatre directors. Upon her arrival at the Sherman Theatre, former Artistic Director Rachel O'Riordan developed a partnership with the James Menzies-Kitchen Trust (JMK Trust) which enabled early career directors to form a network and find mutual support. Sessions ranged beyond information exchange and community-building, to sessions on skills and sharing of practice. From this initiative, the Sherman identified the assistant directors that it would recruit to a variety of its in-house projects.

However, as Julia Barry (Executive Director of The Sherman) elaborates:

One of the things that we found when we first started running a JMK directors' group here was that we had – it was a very open group, anybody could join, anybody could participate in the workshops that we were running. What we felt was that we were having a light touch across lots of people but not really having that depth of engagement and impact with any one individual which is why we then reduced it to six to give them as much of an opportunity as possible.¹⁰

This thinking led to the creation of the JMK/Sherman Director's¹¹ group, involving Jesse Briton, Siobhan Lyn Brennan, Matthew Holmquist, Hannah Noone, Paul Jenkins and Luke Hereford. Through what was referred to as “structured development,” the directors received workshops and mentoring from more experienced directors. In turn, this led to opportunities to direct productions of plays developed through the Sherman's playwrighting programme in Cardiff and at Theatre 503 in London. However, the initiative has now ended and is under review.

Tamara Harvey stated in our research that she felt “there is a lack of comprehensive training”¹² available in Wales. This comment also speaks to a desire for a more bespoke and targeted development of directors. This has led directly to Theatr Clwyd's own trainee director scheme, which is a part of a multi-stranded artist development programme called TYFU|GROW. The scheme has regularly supported assistant directors in the past to work on productions, but currently supports two early career directors – Francesca Goodridge and

⁹ Interview with Simon Coates – June 26th, 2019 at NTW

¹⁰ Interview with Julia Barry – June 12th, 2019 at Sherman Theatre

¹¹ <https://www.shermantheatre.co.uk/news/sherman/new-welsh-voices-showcase/>

¹² Interview with Tamara Harvey by e-mail – August 7th, 2019

Eleri Jones - to work within the building over an 18-month period towards a full production. Each trainee spends a week with each department at Theatr Clwyd over the course of the scheme to build an understanding of every aspect of creating and producing shows as well as running a building. The traineeships were advertised as “*providing an unparalleled opportunity to develop talent, experience and skills*” and have been realised with partnership support from the Carne Trust and the Arts Council of Wales with funds raised thanks to Sir Ian McKellen.

Theatr Genedlaethol Cymru has recently launched *Awenau*¹³ – an initiative aimed at developing more Welsh-speaking theatre directors. According to its Artistic Director – Arwel Gruffydd – the company were surprised and encouraged by the number and quality of the applications it received. As Wales has a much stronger tradition of actor-turned-directors than is the case in England, it is interesting to note the company’s openness to those who wish to change direction or extend their experience. In the company’s own words:

*The aim of Awenau is to nurture the talent of new Welsh-speaking theatre directors, to ensure that individuals feel ready and confident enough to take hold firmly of the wheel and lead on exciting theatre projects in the future. The scheme is part of our enterprise to support the development of theatre artists, to facilitate the development of new, ambitious theatre work, and to promote talent.*¹⁴

The successful individuals were Mirain Fflur, Nia Morris, Gethin Roberts and Elen Mair Thomas with additional support to three other directors – Eddie Ladd, Rhian Blythe and Nico Dafydd.

In a similar vein, The Other Room is in the second year of its Professional Pathways Programme – a work-based development scheme for producers and directors. Funded by ACW, it is currently delivered in partnership with the Royal Welsh College of Music and Drama (RWCMD) and the Wales Millennium Centre.

Some formal opportunity to learn to direct has become available in Wales through University of South Wales Trinity Saint David (USWTD)’s one-year Welsh-medium MA in Directing/Cyfarwyddo. This has been joined by USWTD’s recent two-year English-medium MA delivered at its Carmarthen campus. Growing out of the BA in Acting, the degree takes a practical approach with a strong emphasis on engagement with professional practitioners through assisting and exploration of different directing practice. As Dave Ainsworth - Programme Director – explains:

¹³ <http://theatr.cymru/awenau/?lang=en>

¹⁴ <http://theatr.cymru/announcing-the-directors-of-the-awenau-scheme/?lang=en>

*We want a practical course which is going to work... Directing is still a craft that we need to nurture and establish – re-establish – in the professional theatre. If graduates want to become directors, the best way of learning the craft is to see it in action.*¹⁵

It currently has one student in each year but is designed to cater flexibly for two.

SDUK's *The Directors' Voice* report in 2018 presented some interesting arguments about the predominance of MA's, particularly regarding Birkbeck University's MA which is widely considered to be one of the most successful training grounds for emerging directors. However, while acknowledging the value of an MA and other training, the relevant arguments in the SDUK report were about how a sizeable majority of working directors had received no formal academic or in-work training within their discipline at all. Fewer than one in five had a drama degree and around one in ten had an MA in a drama-related subject. As the report states:

*Thirty years on from the Gulbenkian report and directors are still self-taught and learning on the job. Higher education seems to play an important part in the life of a director, but what a director learns at university would appear to be less important.*¹⁶

Perhaps the experience in Wales will be different. But *The Directors' Voice* suggests that we are still looking for the right structures to prepare potential directors for the challenges the industry is facing. Its proposition is that young people are encouraged to narrow their focus too early on and that:

*Directing does not appear to be the graduate job many courses lead young people to believe.*¹⁷

This makes sense in the context of a rapidly changing environment for directors where the twentieth century idea of an apprenticeship followed by forty years of work seems desperately outmoded, if not absurd.

There is a disconnect in our outlook on the role of a director, which encourages people to apply for MA's, to take part in emerging director schemes, and to see themselves as fully fledged directors at the age of 25, and an industry which is frequently not ready to engage with them for another five or ten years. We need to start to talk about the role of director as something more senior. This doesn't mean there won't ever be 21-year olds with an astonishing grasp of their voice and their craft, who will find their place quicker than most – there will always be outliers. We

¹⁵ Interview with Dave Ainsworth – February 5th, 2020 at University of Wales Trinity St David

¹⁶ <https://stagedirectorsuk.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/DirectorsVoiceDec2018.pdf>

¹⁷ <https://stagedirectorsuk.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/DirectorsVoiceDec2018.pdf>

*need to stop seeing the outliers as the norm.*¹⁸

In any case, as Arwel Gruffydd points out, companies are not funded to do this kind of work and must either invest in it themselves or seek funding from elsewhere. Similarly, whilst the Sherman's JMK programme is on hold, it shows how ad hoc and precarious the idea of "structured development" can be for early career directors.

Concern and, in some cases, anger was expressed by directors about the focus on early career directors compared to the lack of opportunity, support and investment committed to directors who have moved beyond that phase. That is not to deny the individual value of these initiatives. In many cases, the impact on participants is transformative. However, even in these cases, there was dissatisfaction about a lack of follow-through and a concerning element of bad faith. Reflecting on their experience with a theatre, one director noted:

*It's been radio silence. It is frustrating – having been on quite a few of these emerging director programmes – that it feels very much like when you're having the experience this is great, but once you're gone, how do you get your foot back in the door? How do you re-engage with the company? What's the next step? I understand there's an onus on you to find your own opportunities, but it does get to the point you think – where is this going in the future? Is it something that's a tick box? Or a "Look, we're doing this amazing thing!" Is that long-term investment really there? In artists and in Welsh artists? Are they going to continue to commission people who are not trained in Wales? Is it going to lead to future work?*¹⁹

The strongest feedback throughout the research was frustration around the lack of engagement with directors who have already established themselves to a degree and who no longer feel they can be categorised as emerging. In the case of this survey respondent, for example, the anger and disillusionment are palpable:

*Stop all emerging director schemes, especially those related to age which is discriminatory. It is impossible for women returning after having children. When I tried to apply for the first ever NTW one (ie. Creative Associate role) I was told by the inaugural AD I was too experienced and yet there were no opportunities for experienced directors. I was then told to be a producer!*²⁰

¹⁸ <https://stagedirectorsuk.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/DirectorsVoiceDec2018.pdf>

¹⁹ Interview – Anonymous – July 22nd, 2019

²⁰ Survey respondent – Anonymous – May 2019

More mildly, another survey respondent argued:

There is a need for our companies to step up – and not just nurture young and up and coming talent - but ensure there are still opportunities for mid-career directors.²¹

This an industry-wide issue with consequences. As Lyn Gardner noted recently in *The Stage*:

Fetishising the young plays to the idea that theatre is a race, a sprint rather than a marathon, and that you have a sell-by date, because there are always younger theatremakers snapping at your heels... Maybe if there were more and different routes into the profession and a greater valuing of that experience, theatre would be a more representative place, less out of touch.²²

Findings such as this bear out the argument that so much investment in training initiatives is relatively misplaced when there is not a sufficiently developed sector for them to enter. Arguably by concentrating resources almost exclusively on training schemes for new and emerging directors, the outcome further down the line is a significant increase in the number of directors struggling for opportunities to make work and indeed any kind of living.

The status of assistant directors and how different companies work with them was a live issue in our research. Information in the focus groups and through the questionnaire painted a mixed picture of the experience for participants in their learning journey. Assistants had good experiences with their lead directors, but many spoke about inconsistency – from lack of clarity about their role before rehearsals began to unproductive use of their time and skills when the project was underway.

These comments were typical:

I've had a real variation... so I had a job where I didn't speak. I just made the tea. That was the process for me. And I felt like I wasn't allowed to speak - I didn't have the knowledge or the authority to offer anything creatively. I literally just made the tea and made sure the actors were okay. And that was it. Whereas the job I've just got, I asked, what do you want from an assistant director? And was told; "I want you to be my creative collaborator in the room." And it was amazing to hear that from a director. And for me it was a really new approach, given my past experience.²³

²¹ Survey respondent – Anonymous – May 2019

²² <https://www.thestage.co.uk/opinion/2019/lyn-gardner-theatre-glorifies-the-young-but-it-really-needs-more-late-starters/>

²³ Interview – Anonymous – July 22nd, 2019

Again, some spoke about assisting as a frustrating experience where the opportunity is “gifted” in a top-down and paternalistic way, where outmoded and unwelcome attitudes exclude, and where the assistant is not allowed to learn on an equal footing:

I find there’s an interesting dynamic between male directors and female assistant directors... I’ve had a couple of experiences with male directors where the director hasn’t known how to run the room properly or how to use me properly – I’ve had too many experiences now as an assistant where I’ve gone – “There’s no point in me being here.” Or “I’m being treated unfairly.”²⁴

The SDUK agreement encourages prospective assistant directors to agree on the definition of their role with their lead directors in advance. But even when this happens, it can lead to problems.

I have had those conversations, especially after my first few assisting jobs. I’ve learned to ask for that conversation. But often the director doesn’t know what they want you to do, doesn’t know why they have an assistant or why they need an assistant.²⁵

Others affirmed this lack of clarity about the purpose of the assistant director role:

It’s about the framing of it – part of their contract has also been to have this person. They’ve worked their arse off to get the job and then this. And they’re asked to be a mentor. And they’re only paid five grand or whatever it is. Often, they’re just as shoehorned as you are into this agreement. If you want to nurture someone, fine. If you want to bring someone into the room, fine. But I’ve had nightmarish experiences – I was an assistant in Manchester and then moved back to Wales and I’ve had – yeah – I’ve seen polar extremes.²⁶

Comments such as these are not confined to Wales and are indicative of the experience of being an assistant director across the board. The level of pastoral supervision and the capacity to deliver an enabling journey for assistants will inevitably vary from company to company. However, we were struck by the lack of overview about the role of the Assistant Director. Consequently, we see the need for an industry wide best practice model to guide their engagement.

²⁴ Interview – Anonymous – July 22nd, 2019

²⁵ Interview – Anonymous – January 29th, 2020

²⁶ Interview – Anonymous – July 22nd, 2019

These observations speak to one theme that was self-evident in the research – the need for directors to come together, share their experience and find their collective voice. In our survey, directors were quick to raise this as something they would like to see be more available to them as these three responses make clear:

I'm a fan of networks.

I think a chance to meet up regularly would be great as we don't come together. I'd like to hear more about how people work and what methods they use, as I never really trained as such. But I'm still very interested in methodologies.

A pan-Wales directors' convention that brings directors together to look at the challenges of the profession and offer practical advice and networking opportunities would be good.²⁷

This resonates with other thinking around the precarious status of freelance creatives manifesting itself across the sector. For example, as Sarah Shead – Director of Spin Arts and a leading figure of Artistic Mutiny - argues:

Independent creatives (need) to join forces, voice their needs louder, organise themselves better as a group, find independent-led solutions to sector problems and use collective power to make a stronger case for support and investment.²⁸

Theatre Directors Scotland was set up in response to a similar set of challenges being experienced by directors in Wales. Beginning as a Facebook group, the network has now grown to reach 326 members, but is now a constituted body with an active core of directors and a committee of ten.

Founder member Kolbrun Bjort Sigfusdottir explains what prompted the group to form:

Frustration. I got a bit tired of having the same conversation in the pub with other 'emerging directors' – people like myself who have been working over five to ten years as fully professional, self-employed people. So not straight out of school, not dipping our toes in, but what would normally be considered as being mid-career. We weren't being seen as that in any way and were not being offered the opportunities that mid-career would offer.²⁹

The group launched in April 2018 and used an inaugural Open Space to think about its role in addressing issues such as the lack of formal training, access to skills and improved

²⁷ Survey respondents – Anonymous – May 2019

²⁸ <https://www.artsprofessional.co.uk/magazine/article/want-justice-arts-freelancers-just-ask-pirate>

²⁹ Interview – Kolbrun Bjort Sigfusdottir – August 23rd, 2019 at Edinburgh Festival

practice, the need for community and visibility, the disappearance of associate roles and improving sustainability of a career in Scotland. As Theatre Directors Scotland says of itself:

We host events. We meet up. We discuss the challenges we face. We discuss the theatre landscape we are working within. We hold skill sharing workshops. We address the lack of opportunities available to 'emerging' directors - where are we emerging from and where to? We address problems affecting those just starting out as well as those maintaining careers. We want to increase diversity in the sector. We want to make the work of directors more visible, valued and accessible. We want to support each other. We want the theatre in Scotland to be the best it can be.³⁰

While trade bodies and unions have an important and even irreplaceable role to play, directors in Wales are somewhat remote from the urban centres where activity is centred and feel the lack of a single body that speaks and works for them. The research suggests Welsh directors – from early career to long-established – want to find a way to better articulate their needs and resolve their challenges.

Our survey included a question about what opportunities directors felt were available to them to advance their development. The question was deliberately open-ended and, as such, did not focus on the specifics of employment, developing relationships with theatres or structured opportunities, such as associate positions or call outs.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, most optimism about the possible opportunity to advance was evident in the young or emerging director category. Many spoke about the value of the experiences they had gained working on programmes such as the JMK/Sherman Directors Group and with NTW. There is some evidence that individual directors are starting to transition into other work through the experience they have gained and connections they have made. Having assisted on NTW's co-production of *On Bear Ridge*, Izzy Rabey is heading to the Royal Court to spend a year as a Trainee Director. Within the Sherman, there is some satisfaction that its emerging directors, such as Jac Ifan Moore and Gethin Evans, are displaying the benefits of support – much of which extends beyond the JMK group and through involvement in other aspects of the Sherman's work, such as its Associate Companies programme.

However, it is alarming that the sense of support and the opportunity to advance beyond this network of young and emerging directors fades away to a level that is practically non-existent among more experienced practitioners. It might be anticipated that freelance directors and independents might find the environment difficult, but it is shocking to discover how many directors working for - and even leading - companies also felt that

³⁰ <https://directorsscotland.weebly.com/about.html>

further development was not open to them. Time and again, when asked the question, “What opportunities are available to you in Wales to advance your development as a director?” the answer was simply, “None.”³¹

One director expressed this view more comprehensively:

*None. You have to do it yourself, and that means applying for Lottery grants in a highly competitive environment where the value of outcomes and impacts can change overnight, working for free to raise your profile and running a company that you are subsidising yourself, leading to great personal cost and financial loss. You cannot grow, sustain yourself or survive as a professional director in Wales.*³²

Another respondent answered that:

*I have to create the work for myself, I create my own opportunities.*³³

While another remarked:

*I have given up trying to develop my directing career.*³⁴

The crux of this issue revolves around whether this is a simple economic fact – that the infrastructure of Welsh theatre is too under-developed to support a sustainable career as a director – or whether something else is happening.

Some directors see it as linked to the former:

*I guess there needs to be more work to direct - theatres need to produce more.*³⁵

This may be an unwelcome reality, but one that prevails and is unlikely to change anytime soon. Certainly, in recent years, Wales has not benefitted from the level of arts funding in comparison with other parts of the UK. It also struggles to make as strong a case for additional funding from trusts and foundations or private philanthropy, despite the welcome investment of supporters such as The Carne Trust and others.

However, it is also apparent that, in order to make work, a lot of directors feel pressurised into self-producing and launching their own companies simply to access lottery funding. While it suits some directors to manage their own companies and work project-to-project, some feel it has become a necessary evil and even refer to it as “a ridiculous system.”³⁶

³¹ Survey respondents – Anonymous – May 2019

³² Survey respondent – Anonymous – May 2019

³³ Survey respondent – Anonymous – May 2019

³⁴ Survey respondent – Anonymous – May 2019

³⁵ Survey respondent – Anonymous – May 2019

³⁶ Interview – Anonymous – July 18th, 2019

Since the early nineties, only a tiny minority of independent companies in Wales – Volcano, No Fit State, Jukebox Collective – have found themselves able to transition into the portfolio of revenue-funded organisations. In the current climate, ACW remains understandably reluctant to add to their responsibilities by taking on a commitment to fund new entrants to the revenue portfolio. Unlike other parts of the UK, however, where revenue-funding can be considered a consequence of healthy growth, high-quality work and audience reach, this remains seemingly unattainable to Wales-based companies. Consequently, directors are offered little encouragement to see this as a route to a sustainable career.

Additionally, it is apparent that the number of project-based companies in Wales has grown exponentially as the opportunity to work in association and be produced by revenue companies has diminished. Whereas co-productions between the independent sector and revenue companies were common ten or more years ago, now they are rarer, especially as those companies see more value in seeking co-productions with partners outside of Wales.

There are other opportunities available for directors within the existing infrastructure of theatre. Alongside directing, participants testified to finding work in a wide range of ancillary theatre roles with over 65% working in some educational capacity and 72% as workshop leaders. However, this is often viewed negatively with directors feeling pigeon-holed. Participants spoke about an unhelpful hierarchy in theatres around areas of expertise:

I was told my CV was too diverse... With my CV, I'll put my directing work and I'll put my applied theatre work. They both have equal value. However, (the organisation) will have me doing community outreach projects... where it can be very challenging... But do I feel confident to pitch a show to them then? Probably not. I know there have been people in there who go, 'Nah, she's just community.'³⁷

Freelance directing opportunities remain rare within Welsh theatres. At the same time, our research evidences a widespread feeling that there is a general under-appreciation of the capability and work of Wales-based directors. One survey participant noted that opportunity would only improve if “organisations (...) stop overlooking the talent that is here in Wales. For those board members to see work beyond their own organisation.” Another said that “core funded organisations very often fail to even consider local directors.”

One emerging director who has benefitted from development within a producing venue agrees and identifies its roots in a form of exclusion:

³⁷ Interview – Anonymous – July 22nd, 2019

There's a balance – I think – between theatres in Wales that are trying to be nationally recognised and trying to break through and get their work on in London and other places and a feeling that they have to create a sense of prestige and create a name for themselves. And, for some reason, that might entail pulling the ladder up for the people who are trying to work – Welsh people trying to work with those theatres. It feels like there's a certain - to be honest - middle-class kind of culture around that. It is somehow less valued.³⁸

This is part of a wider debate that has attracted a level of significant controversy within the last eighteen months. One of the issues raised by the open letter to NTW signed by forty playwrights³⁹ was to do with a perceived lack of involvement of Welsh and Wales-based creatives in leading positions in the company's programme of work. All too easily this can explode into a divisive discussion around nationalism, rather than how seriously organisations take the responsibility to develop Wales-based talent from all backgrounds.

Nevertheless, these views are embedded and are represented by the survey respondent who wrote dryly:

Off the top of my head, it might help to increase opportunities for mid-career freelance directors if the Artistic Directors of the portfolio of Producing Theatre Companies occasionally considered using a Welsh or Wales based mid-career director to direct a production.⁴⁰

By contrast, Theatr Clwyd – one of the main producing venues in Wales – contends that: “As with appointing freelance directors for Theatr Clwyd productions, offering opportunities to local directors and companies and other Wales-based artists is part of our decision-making process.” Additionally, it is held to be a priority “to nurture and develop creative talent in Wales, particularly Welsh and Wales-based.”

Recently, Theatr Clwyd has launched several initiatives supporting the development of early career directors, writers and others. Until recently opportunity for freelance Wales-based directors to direct in-house productions has been limited. As Tamara Harvey points out, “It's very difficult, from North Wales, to get a true sense of who's making exciting work down south, even with regular visits.”⁴¹ This hints at one of the underlying problems facing directors who no longer consider themselves as emerging or eligible for training. However, this Autumn a Wales-based director will direct Theatre Clwyd's large-scale community show

³⁸ Interview – Anonymous – July 22nd, 2019

³⁹ <https://www.walesartsreview.org/an-open-letter-to-national-theatre-wales/>

⁴⁰ Survey respondent – Anonymous – May 2019

⁴¹ Interview with Tamara Harvey by e-mail – August 7th, 2019

and it would demonstrate significant commitment if every year there were similar opportunities available across the stages of Wales – at Clwyd and elsewhere.

Julia Thomas is one of the few directors working in main-house theatres both outside of Wales and within. She summarises the problem:

*It helps to have a personal relationship. I think it helps for companies to support work, to see work, to be really transparent, so that everyone knows this is the process. Everything's outlined in terms of how you make a connection, so that it's fair and it's the same process for everyone. I think that can be quite a problem when we work in an industry where it can be about who you know. Actually, a company needs to have systems in place that offer a really fair way to recruit.*⁴²

This was underlined by one interviewee from a drama school who said about their directing recruitment process:

*"It's very in-house. It's very much who knows who and what that means for specific projects or productions."*⁴³

Artistic directors have traditionally felt the need to safeguard the curation of their organisation's programme through developing a level of trust in the freelance directors they employ. Incoming artistic directors bring with them their own experience and networks. Inevitably, it takes time to engage with a network of Wales-based directors, especially as most directors in Wales have not found their way into directing through conventional routes. While a more diverse demographic is beginning to challenge the prevailing culture in England, Welsh directors have always been in the minority if they are Oxbridge educated or have progressed from assisting to a fully-fledged career. This has rarely been the pathway for Wales-based directors who testify to the importance of acting experience, community theatre and education as the main contexts for their journey into directing.

Artistic Director of NTW, Kully Thiarai offered a sympathetic perspective on the barriers some directors face:

*I am really aware... that there are certain people who are very pushy and who will force their way through to the front of the line and others who are quietly disappearing, or feeling abandoned, or not at all visible. And so sometimes we have to look at ways that are not the obvious route...*⁴⁴

⁴² Interview – Julia Thomas – July 18th, 2019 in Cardiff

⁴³ Interview – Anonymous – June 10th, 2019

⁴⁴ Interview – Kully Thiarai – June 26th, 2019 at NTW

Similarly, Arwel Gruffydd - Artistic Director of Theatr Genedlaethol Cymru – testifies to receiving only a few directors coming to him with ideas and that the same three or four names recur:

*We do get theatre directors approaching us with ideas - not very often, but some directors will approach us unsolicited.*⁴⁵

However, in response to questions around how directors can access opportunities for work, time and again artistic directors talked about the importance of trust and developing relationships through ongoing, open-ended conversations. By contrast, freelance directors were keen to talk about the relative mystery of how jobs were accessed and their desire for transparency in the way theatres deal with available opportunity.

One young director identified how randomly some opportunities can emerge:

*One of my opportunities - I don't know how I got it. I was sent an email that I then went and interviewed for and that I then got. It was an incredible opportunity, but – as far as I know – it wasn't advertised publicly. But I hadn't even had a proper meeting with that theatre and I don't know how I ended up on their list... So there's a more mysterious side where it's more through connections and people you know. And if we're talking about barriers, or people who don't have the privileges that I have – on a fundamental level, if they don't hear about the opportunity, or if they're not made aware of it, then what do you expect is going to happen?*⁴⁶

Some producing companies argue that they would like to offer more directing work but find themselves prevented from doing so by a lack of budget. They argue that the use of an in-house director will often save the company money on fees. But whether it has arisen through necessity or choice, the clear conclusion from our research is that the current practice of employing directors needs to be much less opaque, especially when lacking access to certain historic networks becomes a barrier.

As Kully Thiarai puts it:

*I can understand that trust can be used in the same way that the idea of quality is used when you're talking about work in a different frame as a mechanism to stop things...*⁴⁷

Whilst Julia Thomas goes even further:

Systems should be in place offering people fairness at different stages.

⁴⁵ Interview – Arwel Gruffydd – June 12th, 2019 at Sherman Theatre

⁴⁶ Interview – Anonymous – July 22nd, 2019

⁴⁷ Interview – Kully Thiarai – June 26th, 2019 at NTW

The implication is clear – lack of transparency leads to exclusion and impacts most on under-represented groups.

In a sense, it goes to the heart of what an artistic director does to challenge their right to make qualitative judgements about who they work with and what artists they employ. The quality and success of their programme can determine the success of their work. To a great degree, it is how they are judged. Nevertheless, many artistic leaders are champions of progressive, inclusive change and feel that the competing challenges of their roles mean that there is always more to do. So, without fundamentally neutering the role of an artistic director, is there anything that can be done?

In recent years, there has been recognition of the issue and, as we have seen, some organisations have focussed on training the next generation of Welsh and Wales-based theatre directors in response. But, no matter how welcome and beneficial this focus is, training is inevitably a long-term approach to an urgently pervasive issue.

Call outs are one way of hearing from the artistic community about their ideas in response to a distinct need – such as a programming or the need to “give space,” for example, to under-represented artists. NTW’s Radical Creatures was mentioned positively by directors several times. Female theatre-makers with bold ideas were encouraged to submit to a process which resulted in several new commissions.

Kully Thiarai gave an insight into its wider value in enabling diversity – both of people and of ideas:

It’s interesting the kind of people we met through that process. Some of them we knew really well. Other we didn’t know at all. And others wouldn’t have responded in quite such a bold way despite the fact we knew them. Stepping up to the plate meant that we were having a different kind of conversation. Again, it might not be an immediate thing that results in an output, but the fact that they were shortlisted, the fact that they had to think about it, the fact that they built some relationships – all of that helped them think it was maybe not a bad idea and should help push some things forward.⁴⁸

Many companies post formal job opportunities on their websites as well as advertising elsewhere. However, freelance opportunities and guidelines for how to approach companies to discuss ideas and develop relationships are much harder to come by. NTW offer a useful exception to the norm in this and have a dedicated page for artist engagement

⁴⁸ Interview – Kully Thiarai – June 26th, 2019 at NTW

entitled “*Your Work.*”⁴⁹ Otherwise, while companies often release information through channels such as social media or e-mail lists, it is not widely accessible and easily missed even by those ‘in the know’.

Generally, commissioning companies assume that there is an understanding that they have an open-door policy and expect to be approached on that basis. At the same time, capacity is an issue for some companies in following work, responding to inquiries and meeting artists. Anecdotally, however, it is common to hear about emails being ignored and promised follow-up remaining unfulfilled. While companies could do a lot better at signposting how they wish to be approached and who is the most appropriate contact, there needs to be much more clarity and transparency around how artists can engage with our theatres. The recently published *directing best practice* handbook⁵⁰ produced by SDUK should become compulsory reading for theatres, urging that: *If you need a director – advertise!* It sets out several good ideas for companies to rethink their approach to their recruitment of directors, enabling more transparency and opportunity.

Some organisations in England now operate a policy whereby they make it known they are open to receiving ideas and pitches for a specific period in the year. While there was some initial criticism that a general level of openness was being withdrawn, it has provided greater clarity for many. In any case, as a rule, commissioning companies should have a clear and accessible policy about how they are happy to be approached, when they are open to receiving ideas, when programming decisions are being made and when directors can be considered for projects.

ACW’s Lottery rules specify that any role where the fee is £5000 or over for a project should be put out to tender unless an exception can be argued. In Welsh government tendering a similar rule exists – albeit with the fee set at a higher amount. Following on from Stage Director UK’s successful and welcome lobbying with Equity and other partners, directors’ fees can sometimes eclipse these limits. While many theatre productions are funded from core costs and, therefore, not subject to Lottery guidelines, arguably there are precedents around the most transparent use of public money.

As organisations reflect more deeply on the barriers to inclusion they pose to certain groups, our research has raised the question of whether theatres should engage in more formal approaches to recruitment – to the extent that, at least, some appointments are made through interview or other evaluative processes.

For example, the JMK award, which offers opportunity to emerging directors, has entered a new partnership with the Orange Tree Theatre. From 2019 onwards, the winner’s production forms a core part of the theatre’s annual programming and offers the

⁴⁹ https://www.nationaltheatrewales.org/creative-development/your-work/#saying_hello

⁵⁰ Available by contacting info@stagedirectorsuk.com

opportunity to direct a full-scale production. In this case there is a clear benefit from the resources provided by the trust, but there is nothing to prevent theatres in Wales exploring a similar kind of framework and not just in relation to emerging artists.

Despite the personal merits and good intentions of many of the directors in positions of power in Wales, there is an overwhelming sense in the research that the exercise of that power has possibly unintentional consequences that are divisive and exclusionary. When we contemplate the issues facing directors who have moved beyond the emerging category, there is a somewhat apologetic sense that there is nothing that can be done. Of course, lack of resource is an issue, but, given the overwhelming evidence that Welsh and Wales-based directors feel overlooked by the Welsh producers, producing theatres need to do something about this perception rather than looking repeatedly to a pool of directors from elsewhere. While it may necessitate an adaptation of how some power operates, our research suggests that it should not and need not be a barrier to change.

On November 13th, 2019, The Traverse Theatre announced its recruitment of a new artistic directorship; Gareth Nicholls and Debbie Hannan were appointed joint artistic directors with Leslie Ann Rose as a new Head of Creative Development. This is not the first partnership approach to the lead role in a theatre, but in the last year, we have witnessed a growing number of joint or collaborative artistic appointments. Similar recent appointments include Charlotte Bennett and Katie Posner at Paines Plough, Bryony Shanahan and Roy Alexander Weise at Manchester Royal Exchange and Sean Foley and Amit Sharma at Birmingham Rep. Joint Executive and Artistic Director teams are and have been commonplace, but a shared responsibility for artistic leadership is increasingly observed.

In her article for *The Scotsman*⁵¹, Joyce McMillan welcomed the appointments and focussed on two aspects that should be of interest to us.

As directors from working or lower middle-class backgrounds, working in an industry often marked by privilege, they are both passionate about theatre's role in making space for the widest possible range of voices, and in reaching out to a wider public. They are also conscious of the history of Scottish theatre in challenging these boundaries; Nicholls has been immersed in the world of Scottish theatre for almost two decades, and Hannan is the daughter of Edinburgh journalist and trade unionist Martin Hannan, and in some ways an inheritor of a radical tradition that goes back to the 1970s work of 7:84 and Wildcat...

⁵¹ <https://www.scotsman.com/arts-and-culture/theatre/that-sounds-like-a-manifesto-to-me-joyce-mcmillan-on-what-the-new-creative-team-at-the-traverse-could-mean-for-the-future-of-theatre-in-scotland-1-5045119>

Later, she wrote:

And although it's arguable that an artistic policy run by two people risks emerging as a beast designed by a committee, there's also something highly appropriate, at this moment of high concern around gender issues in theatre as elsewhere, about appointing a joint male-female leadership to navigate these times.

The first point made by Joyce McMillan emphasises the element of consistency that runs through the development of Scottish and Scottish-based talent. It includes a sense in which there is a ladder of opportunity, but, perhaps with equal significance, it recognises the value of Scotland's theatrical tradition and legacy.

While this approach was once more common in Wales too, the last ten to fifteen years has seen the recruitment of Artistic Directors almost entirely from beyond the borders. Despite many of the most coveted jobs in Welsh theatre changing hands in that period, only two of those appointments have gone to Welsh directors – posts that happen to have the requirement of speaking Welsh. It begs the question as to whether this is simply a question of “excellence” or whether other factors are at work.

Former Drama Officer and Portfolio Manager at ACW, Nick Davies offered his point of view in an article on the decade's theatre for *The Wales Arts Review*:

Why have we repeatedly witnessed a suspicion of, and even hostility to, artistic leaders who have arrived from outside Wales? ... Without them, we are much poorer and sink further into the abyss of insularity that led to Brexit and which should be anathema to the theatre community.⁵²

This is an important question he raises but his answer provides nothing in the way of systemic analysis and instead defaults to a charge of insularity. This is clearly a complex issue, but the danger of insularity is often the first defence that creative gatekeepers raise when any questions are asked about lack of opportunity for Welsh or Wales-based artists. On the other hand, the perception by directors themselves is that theatres are simply not interested in them. The survey contained several expressions of this:

I think the theatres in Wales need to have a process of having discussions with Welsh directors. At least it be a given that they will speak to you. Sometimes it feels you are a disadvantage in Wales in terms of getting work commissioned by theatres if you are Welsh!⁵³

Some see this as a question of access:

⁵² <https://www.walesartsreview.org/a-look-back-at-a-decade-in-welsh-theatre/>

⁵³ Survey respondent – Anonymous – May 2019

It's really hard to get in. I'm really lucky that I work here (in a theatre) and I was lucky to have a relationship with the Artistic Director without being a complete stranger. But how do you get in? It's hard as an outsider looking in. I feel there's not enough access.⁵⁴

Others see this in more individual terms:

Mae angen newid ffordd o feddwl Cyfarwyddwyr Artistig theatrau allweddol y wlad - h.y. y Sherman, Theatr Clwyd, NTW.⁵⁵

Abdul Shayek (Artistic Director of Fio) came to Wales in 2011 to work with NTW as a Creative Associate. As someone working within and outside of Wales, he grapples with the issues at stake, veering close to a call for quotas:

I think there should be a stipulation in every mid-scale venue that they've got to work with someone from within Wales because artistic directors don't leave very often and when they do they're replaced by people from London. So the problem again is this kind of constant – There's a real - Is it a crisis of confidence in Wales and its creative sector? Cos there's this constant looking outwards to bring people in... I don't think that model works. For Wales to really grow and for the directors in Wales to really grow I genuinely think that there's got to be something in place that enables directors... It shouldn't be Welsh directing jobs for Welsh directors, but I think there is definitely scope... If people in your sector aren't taking risks on you, how are people outside the Welsh sector going to look at you? "Oh, you're coming and speaking to me, but what about, say, the Sherman? Why aren't they working with you?" That is a question I've had.⁵⁶

Many directors value the fresh impetus, the interaction with different producers and welcome the addition to their community. At the same time, nevertheless, they recognise that those directors will be unfamiliar – sometimes ignorant – of their work, bring a fresh set of tastes and opinion, and networks of association and trust that do not include them. It is not necessarily a criticism that these appointments have been made as they have, but it is a fact that the overwhelming number of these leadership roles have repeatedly gone to individuals lacking history and experience of working in Wales. The net effect over time has been that people in our research and more widely readily identify it as a problem.

⁵⁴ Survey respondent – Anonymous – May 2019

⁵⁵ Survey respondent – Anonymous – May 2019 Translation - "There is a need to change the thinking of the Artistic Directors of the country's key theatres - ie. the Sherman, Theatr Clwyd, NTW."

⁵⁶ Interview – Abdul Shayek – June 18th, 2019 at Chapter

Arwel Gruffydd recognises some of these feelings:

There are issues around identity - national identity, class identity - that are very complex and go beyond the theatre sector. But there's also a sense that we 'little old Welsh' can't do it ourselves, we need help from elsewhere because the guys over there know better.... So somebody who's got a track record somewhere else - we think we can just grab them and plonk them here without recognising... there's a risk you're not taking your stakeholders and audience with you... Somebody helicoptered in from elsewhere, there isn't that cultural knowledge and that carries a different kind of risk. I wish the boards of these organisations would make their appointments from within Wales, because we want the work we do to be representative of the community and represent our audiences. Even if they're not on paper the most experienced, we have to assist them to get there. For example, when I went to Theatr Gen, I had not run a company before. I had some experience of management, but because it was a Welsh language organisation, you couldn't bring someone in from outside. So the board had to take a bit of a chance with me and gave me that support to grow into the role. And I was offered mentorship and training to do so.⁵⁷

Again, one must confront the issue of whether Wales has a singular lack of talent when it comes to stage directing that leads ultimately to the failure of potential artistic leaders to be suitable for these roles. As one Artistic Director explained, artistic decisions can revolve around and test:

the understanding that anything that is – at least in part – based on taste and opinion is bound to feel opaque to those who don't share the same taste or opinion.⁵⁸

Nevertheless, while much is made of the water in Port Talbot giving rise to some of our leading actors, unfortunately, there appears to be no such elixir for directors. In any case, the issue is unlikely to be about divine talent and more to do with the fact that risk-averse boards fail to see the empirical evidence that Welsh applicants have the background and experience to lead the main producing companies.

Julia Barry, Executive Director of The Sherman, thinks a turnaround is simply a matter of time:

I honestly believe – my genuine belief – is that when this job next comes up (ie. Artistic Director at the Sherman) it will be taken by someone from Wales, because I

⁵⁷ Interview – Arwel Gruffydd – June 12th, 2019 at Sherman Theatre

⁵⁸ Interview with Tamara Harvey by e-mail – August 7th, 2019

*think there are people now who are gaining the experience and getting those opportunities that will let them walk into a building like this and go: I can do that.*⁵⁹

Underlying this view is the faith that over time and with continued support, directors that show early promise working across scales and across organisations will develop enough understanding of the leadership role to step up and play a part. However, Julia acknowledges herself that, while the talent may have been there in the past, it might not have been supported:

*One of the other issues – possibly – is that, as a sector, we haven't supported people in that transition from one scale to another. We've got lots of directors who make excellent work at the smaller scale, but the opportunities to then transition are not there.*⁶⁰

The idea of transition is significant. As Theatr Iolo's Lee Lyford points out:

*I don't know whether I had training opportunities, but what I have always been given is employment opportunities across a broad spectrum of work.....So, at the same time as I was doing all this work for children, I was also doing plays about sexual violence for example at Bristol Old Vic in the Studio. The support that I had there enabled me. I was really lucky. It was to do with my relationship to the building (ie. The Egg at Bath Theatre Royal) and the time that I'd been there. It becomes quite obvious, really. You just have to make plays and direct plays.*⁶¹

The prevailing financial pressure on producing companies has seen the emergence of a different kind of business model for theatres in Wales. There is much more emphasis on co-producing partnerships, especially with producers outside of Wales, aimed at raising profile, bringing in resources and enhancing impact. Implicitly, there is a stronger outcome for any investment in terms of audience numbers, reach and a perception of qualitative improvement. There is a certain logic, therefore, in the appointment of directors who are well-networked and can capitalize on their connections.

However, there is also an undeniable impact for the development of the arts in Wales. As Abdul Shayek argues:

I think Wales - as a whole - needs to decide where it sits within all of that, you know. How important is London to its theatre scene and sector? And what are the terms of engagement with that sector? For example, I was having a conversation with (an

⁵⁹ Interview with Julia Barry – June 12th, 2019 at Sherman Theatre

⁶⁰ Interview with Julia Barry – June 12th, 2019 at Sherman Theatre

⁶¹ Interview with Lee Lyford – June 18th, 2019 at Chapter

Artistic Director) about how her board wanted transfers to the West End from the (theatre) and she was quite clear that wasn't what she wanted to do. The board wanted one thing because it meant they might be able to bring some extra money in, but she didn't want to do that as an Artistic Director. There was an interesting tension there.

While Wales-based directors were generally very open to the idea of developing their careers outside of Wales – London is, after all, one of the biggest marketplaces for theatre in the world – opportunity for the directing pool here is additionally limited by the attitudes of some of the gatekeepers. For example, some directors have been told that they won't even be considered for freelance directing work:

In conversations with venues that offer out work I've had: "I can't give you a job because you need to work in London." That's the feedback I've been given, directly.⁶²

By contrast, Catherine Paskell (Artistic Director of Dirty Protest) argues passionately for the value of an organic connection between audiences in Wales and the directors who make work for them:

The only reason I came back was because I got the (NTW) Associate job here, so it is double-edged. I don't know if I would have come back if it hadn't been for that job... because I didn't particularly see that there were any opportunities for me here. Then the reason I stayed is because the work I make is for the audiences of Wales. That's why I stay here because I want to make work with and for the people that are here. And I think that's something that is lost if you're recruiting from outside. There isn't necessarily that understanding or valuing of audiences and what it means to be Welsh or to tell Welsh stories when you don't have that experience. Some of it is innate and some of it's through living here. You can see that in the work that's made because sometimes the Welshness feels tokenistic or layered on. Or it doesn't feel like it directly connects to audiences because it's about something else. Then it feels like the work is being made by the theatre for the industry and it's not being made for audiences.⁶³

To return to the issue of transition raised by Julia Barry, Wales lacks structural opportunities within and across organisations to enable directors to make the transition to leadership. When our survey asked whether respondents had any suggestions for improving opportunities for mid-career directors, one in five focussed on the lack of Associate Director positions.

⁶² Interview – Anonymous – July 25th, 2019

⁶³ Interview – Catherine Paskell – July 25th, 2019

In previous years, ACW has focussed much of its leadership development resources on support for a Fellowship on The Clore Leadership Programme and associated opportunity, such as the Short Courses. All graduates of the Clore Programme testify to the extraordinary learning it provided, the networks it generated and how transformational it has been in their lives. Between 2005 and 2018, fourteen Fellowships were funded and two others from Wales were able to access Fellowships sponsored by other agencies. Ten of the fourteen Welsh Fellows have a background of some kind in theatre. Until recently, there were two Fellowship beneficiaries from outside of Wales, leading national companies – Kully Thiarai at National Theatre Wales and Fearghus O’Conchuir at the National Dance Company. Additionally, David Wilson has recently been appointed as Director at Theatr Brycheiniog.

However, it is questionable whether this considerable investment in the UK’s flagship leadership development opportunity has had any meaningful impact on leadership positions within Welsh theatre. As Abdul Shayek – a former NTW Creative Associate and ACE-funded Clore Fellow – argues:

We have to try something quite radical and quite different - otherwise what was the point in all that investment? It’s just crazy to think that it was around £30K per Clore place – That’s a lot of money to invest in someone and then not take the risk.

ACW has currently suspended its support for Wales based applicants to the Fellowship Programme, but small grants are still available on a case-by-case basis for other programmes.

The relevance of Julia Barry’s point is that enabling a meaningful transition for individuals in theatre would now seem to require hands-on experience of working within a major venue. Leadership capacity can be developed through a bespoke programme, particularly when carefully selected work attachments and residencies are available. But the key experience for directors moving towards leadership is around how a large producing company or venue functions – its programming, its capacity, its scale, its artists and audiences.

Associate roles have been intermittently a feature of our theatres. While the Creative Associates at NTW were intended to be developmental in nature, directing the work was not central to the position. At one time, Phillip Breen and Kate Wasserberg were New Writing Associates at Theatre Clwyd. Elen Bowman, Mared Swain, Amy Hodge and Róisín McBrinn held similar roles at The Sherman. Aside from Bowman and Swain, who were expected to develop Welsh language work, the remaining individuals referred to came into Wales from elsewhere and, in most cases, have moved back beyond the borders. Aside from at NTW where there is now an Associate Director and a Creative Associate, these roles have disappeared. It is also of note that these significant appointments at NTW were made without the posts being advertised.

More recently, Gethin Evans has been Artistic Associate at The Sherman. Although an early career role rather than a conventional Associate Director position, he directed productions and gained useful in-house experience, especially as he was part of Cwmni Pluen – the Sherman’s then resident company. Having moved on, he has worked for Theatr Clwyd, Chichester Festival and The National Theatre as an assistant, associate and facilitator, before being appointed the new Artistic Director of Cwmni Fran Wen.

As in Gethin’s case, the research made it clear that directors felt the availability of meaningful Associate opportunities would make a big difference to careers. While it was felt that theatres could and would do more if the funding was available, it was also felt that a partnership approach, such as an Associate Director role shared between the main producing companies should be given consideration.

During the 1990’s Wales had far fewer directors. At the time, Jamie Garven (until recently Senior Acting Lecturer at RWCMD) was one of the few working on mainstage shows, as well as on small scale touring for companies, such as Hijinx, Spectacle and Y Cwmni. Working with ACW, he was able to devise a scheme that supported him to be an Associate Director working across three of the main producing venues – The Sherman, Theatr Clwyd and The Torch. While the scheme has never been repeated, it gave Garven a significant platform to develop his career while directing productions within those theatres. The lack of a similar attachment within Wales currently feels like a missed opportunity.

Governance and how our artistic companies’ boards are constituted relate to issues that are much wider than this report can cater for. Longstanding issues around how boards are made up still prevail, particularly regarding their lack of diversity. That said, the responsibilities and undertakings of the modern-day board are often under-appreciated and misunderstood.

Ten years ago, Sir Brian McMaster produced a DCMS report where he argued for the increased presence and use of artists as trustees.

The most important task of the board of any cultural organisation is to appoint the Chief Executive, Artistic Director or Director. However, the move in recent years towards boards encompassing a variety of skills has in some places been at the expense of artistic expertise. Appointing the right person for the job is a complex task and when undertaken by individuals without a professional knowledge of the sector, the effects can be hugely damaging. It is individuals that matter and we need to put

*the focus of the appointments process on getting the right people into the right places.*⁶⁴

Whether this has been widely adopted or not is a moot point. Artists do feature on the boards of several of our main producing companies. However, their influence is harder to assess. In a world of increasing business pressures and diminishing resources, a focus on robust financial management and the mitigation of risk still seems paramount. At the same time, boards are being asked to become more representative of the rest of society. Nevertheless, at a certain level, business experience, corporate affairs and public life remain the most valued criteria for board membership. This also has an impact for the kind of person applying for a leadership role.

David Loumgair founded Common to support working-class artists and conducts research into socio-economic inequality across the UK theatre industry. He points out that, in these types of circumstance, *“applicants are rewarded on their ability to clearly, concisely and compellingly articulate both themselves and their skillsets”* – but that working-class creatives may often have a *“learned sense of inadequacy”*, apologising for themselves or even talking themselves out of applying.⁶⁵

Abdul Shayek identifies an aversion to risk as an additional barrier:

I just think it’s all a bit overrated. Look, I’ve had experience. (Laughs) But everyone who goes into a new job probably goes, “I don’t know what I’m doing!” Right? It doesn’t matter what you’ve run and what you’ve not run. You go into a new space and go, “God, this is going to be different.” And you learn.

Perhaps in response to McMaster’s point about the complex task of appointing an Artistic Director and lack of professional expertise, many of the key appointments in recent years have been undertaken with the help of head-hunters. Given the high-level nature of these appointments and the growing focus on external reach, it was inevitable that the headhunters have mostly been based outside of Wales and valued for their knowledge of talent that is concentrated on London. Inevitably, feelings amongst directors are mixed about this influence.

Some directors report being told by head-hunters that to be eligible for high-level jobs in Wales, first they need to become Associate Directors of companies in London. For some directors - particularly those from working class backgrounds or who have dependents - this is an unrealistic and undesirable option. However, declaring this is not easy. Directors are highly aware that relationships with head-hunters can make or break careers. There is also

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<https://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/+http://www.culture.gov.uk/images/publications/supportingexcellenceinthearts.pdf>

⁶⁵

<https://stagedirectorsuk.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/DirectorsVoiceDec2018.pdf>

an awareness that head-hunters have “go-to” lists of people that are based in mutually reinforcing networks of influence that can feel impenetrable and exclusive.

Despite the industry’s bedrock of privilege and what Lyn Gardner has called the “*Oxbridge-to-theatre pipeline... allowing an elite group to make connections and unlock opportunities,*” appearances are not everything. The fact is artistic directors are not born; they are made. Fundamental to that making is the inter-locking relationship between the boards who govern producing companies, the funders and the head-hunters recruited to lead on their processes.

In the survey, we were interested to hear ideas that might create more opportunity, especially for mid-career directors. We have noted the desire for more associate positions and there was consensus around the need for more investment to stimulate work and the public’s appetite for the work through audience development. Clearly, however, this would require a sea-change in the level of public subsidy for the arts which currently seems unrealistic. Perhaps more tangibly, however, there was significant consensus around the need for mentoring opportunities – it was the most common preference for surveyed directors, as these examples suggest:

I think mentoring is invaluable, and I have certainly gained from the relationships I have developed with mentors on Hijinx projects.

Buddying, shadowing, mentoring.

Perhaps more funded mentoring scheme like the one offered by SDUK, so that time can be put aside to be mentored by a director further on in their career. I can imagine this being really valuable.⁶⁶

Mentoring can take many different forms and directors may have different ideas about exactly what mentoring means. At its most transactional, it may seem to some directors like a route to work that would not otherwise be available. But it holds out deeper potential. Directors can feel isolated and it is one of the most difficult and least sustainable careers to negotiate in the arts, partly as there are no recognised pathways. Directors are expected to lead and initiate, so a space in which to ask questions and appear vulnerable can be transformative. It should be an opportunity for directors at different stages in their careers to build a relationship and exchange insight based on experience.

Action Learning Sets offer similar outcomes. Action Learning is a form of peer-to-peer coaching pioneered by academic and management consultant Reg Revans that functions

⁶⁶ Survey respondents – Anonymous – May 2019

through structured questioning, listening and reflection. It can be applied to any number of different professional (and personal) challenges. It takes place in groups or 'sets' of around 5-7 and meets regularly over time to explore solutions to real problems and decide on real action. The emphasis is on learning from experience and then acting on that learning.

Although Action Learning Sets are now commonly used in workplaces to discuss work-related issues, the process could also be a valuable tool for directors. Other freelance creative professionals have had some experience of it in Wales after the Independent Theatre Council (ITC) supported their establishment for arts managers, but this was then picked up and developed for artists with sets at Chapter, The Sherman and the Wales Millennium Centre (WMC). A new group is being formed at the WMC currently. There is an advantage in that once the process is understood and established, it is sustained by the group itself.

Some directors can access conventional mentoring without it being formalised, but, if mentoring becomes a service and the mentor is paid, it begs other questions. While often very willing to support as a mentor, some directors can find it difficult to dedicate the time and repeated meetings that make for a successful mentoring relationship. In other respects, like a good facilitator or coach, it is desirable in a good mentor that they can ask open questions, be a good listener and synthesise information quickly – qualities not possessed by everyone.

Mentoring featured strongly in *The Directors' Voice* report. Whilst highlighting its overall value and understanding its bespoke nature, the report focuses on an example of how mentoring could operate in a more intensive and engaged way than is usually understood. For example, it raises the possibility of the mentor being someone who can sit in on pre-production, rehearsal and offer a sounding board, as required. The proposition comes with several caveats:

Such a scheme would be highly bespoke, and it hinges on finding the right director – someone who has the ability to mentor (not every director can), and who has the trust and ear of the Artistic Director, as well as absolute trust from the director being mentored. The roles need to be set out with absolute clarity, and time and space put aside in order to give the project a chance. Directors who can direct on the Olivier stage tend to be busy directors, but this scheme cannot work if it's phoned in. It isn't a costly scheme, but it does need time, and it needs to be bespoke to the director being mentored. In this respect, it is a scheme that runs only when appropriate – it can't become a training scheme conveyor belt.⁶⁷

Interestingly, formal mentoring of this kind is offered by Elen Bowman of Living Pictures. Living Pictures has a tradition of offering directors training in both Wales and London. Elen's

⁶⁷ <https://stagedirectorsuk.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/DirectorsVoiceDec2018.pdf>

experience as a coach to other directors began in 1999 with Katie Mitchell, James Macdonald and Ian Rickson and is recognised in the final chapter of Mitchell's book *The Director's Craft*. Her impact as a teacher and mentor is acknowledged by many directors particularly women and directors working in the Welsh language.

One aspect this research has been interested in exploring is around a more diverse and collaborative approach to artistic leadership as a way of addressing some current challenges. In this respect, Topher Campbell spoke at the Theatre 2016 conference arguing that theatres should abandon the single vision of an Artistic Director. Topher commented:

*Even though I have been an artistic director myself, we should see the end of artistic directors. The idea that one person has the knowledge, vision and know-how to create all the necessary work that a building needs in terms of output is a bit old-fashioned.*⁶⁸

He added that one person's vision for a venue resulted in "*repetition of work based on an idea of what people think people should see,*" resulting in fewer opportunities for new voices to emerge.

In a recent *Stage* article, Paines Plough's Charlotte Bennett affirmed the basis of her co-artistic directorship with Katie Posner in similar terms:

*"There's this old idea of artistic director as rockstar," Bennett says. "But the idea of a singular vision is not something I buy into." As a pair, Posner says: "You're scrutinising things through two lenses. You're challenging each other all the time in a really healthy way."*⁶⁹

While there was support for the single artistic director within organisations and a certain scepticism about how other models might work, there was a much stronger appetite for the idea among the directors we spoke to.

As Campbell hints, artistic directors operate under an immense amount of pressure – expected to be simultaneously inspiring visionaries, astute managers, vivid communicators, expert fundraisers, programmers, innovators, industry networked and rehearsal room specialists. There is some evidence to suggest that the intensity and stress associated with these kinds of role have associated impacts for health and longevity. With a Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act enshrined in law 2015, we now have a unique obligation to consider the long-term impacts of how we work. Where this is an increasing focus and limits

⁶⁸ <https://www.thestage.co.uk/news/2016/scrap-artistic-directors-urges-red-room-boss/>

⁶⁹ <https://www.thestage.co.uk/features/interviews/2020/paines-ploughs-katie-posner-and-charlotte-bennett-our-usp-is-touring-so-we-help-give-writers-a-national-voice/>

to the working week are under consideration, it seems regressive to be expecting artistic directors – among others – to work longer and longer hours.

Alongside her successful tenure at Theatr Clwyd, Tamara Harvey has found a typically engaging way to explore some of these pressures with her tweets using the hashtag *#workingmum*. Many of her followers find solidarity with her experiences and it is brave of an artistic director to reveal some of the less visible impacts of a stressful and busy job.

More collaboration and team leadership offer some routes to a different configuration of workload and a healthier work-life balance. Plenty of theatres have a team-based approach to their operations and management, but few, if any in Wales, have what could be described as collaborative artistic leadership.

For many years, the National Theatre of Great Britain has had an Associate Director group. Under David Lan, the Young Vic had an Associate group that was a primary source of artistic vision and ideas that was fiercely protected by Lan himself. Now members of that group, such as Indhu Rubasingham, Rufus Norris, Matthew Dunster and Joe Hill Gibbons are leading industry figures.

Monetary resource is frequently cited as a practical obstacle to such a way of working, but it does not necessarily have to apply only to large-scale theatres or require everyone to be on salary. Associates can be paid for their time contributing to planning and programming while benefitting from the close relationship with that theatre to pitch their own ideas and develop trust.

But Topher Campbell was speaking about the role of the artistic director in a much wider context. His comments were less geared to the development of directors and much more focussed on transforming the lack of diversity in theatres and making them more relevant and accessible to audiences. This aligns with views expressed by Sheena Wrigley (formerly of West Yorkshire Playhouse (WYP) and Manchester Home). At WYP, Wrigley was key to the revitalisation and redevelopment of the theatre at a time where it was felt to be struggling to meet the needs of its audience and had lost its way. Although it was part of an overall plan, Wrigley's view was that they needed to "upend hierarchies" and develop "porosity:"

It is time we considered dismantling our regional theatres. I say that because I think they are a critical part of the ecology of our industry. Dismantling them creates the opportunity to reassemble them and that is what is really interesting – we can reassemble them with a more collaborative, diverse and less hierarchical mode.⁷⁰

One example of this working successfully was the reinvention of The HotHouse Theatre in Victoria, Australia:

⁷⁰ <https://www.thestage.co.uk/news/2016/sheena-wrigley-dismantle-regional-theatres-to-focus-on-collaboration/>

In 1996, during a period that saw the demise of many regionally based theatre companies in Australia, the board of the Murray River Performing Group decided that the structure which had carried the Company through its first sixteen years was no longer the most effective way to achieve the aspirations and goals of the Company. The mission of the newly formed HotHouse Theatre was to challenge the immediate and wider communities with locally produced, high quality, professional theatre. The role of Artistic Director was expanded into an Artistic Directorate of (initially) 12 key individuals – a mix of local arts workers and others from state capital cities. Since its beginning, the Artistic Directorate featured an eclectic mix of skills in directing, writing, dramaturgy, design, choreography, music, composing, performing, programming, strategic planning and arts advocacy.⁷¹

Until recently, HotHouse continued to be managed by an artistic directorate, including an artistic manager, as a way of training and developing artistic directors while ensuring artistic relevance and vibrancy for the company.

Among many early career directors, Samantha Alice Jones finds sympathy with the idea that collaborative approaches can lead change:

I find it with politics and other things. It's the way it's always been. It's been one artistic director. It's tradition. It's reluctance to change. Or it's the attitude of "It works this way, so we just keep doing it." But the truth is it creates more job opportunities, more diversity, if you've got a team of creative people.⁷²

On the other hand, Kully Thiarai expressed a note of caution that any one model can be a solution or the key to change:

I think in the end it all depends on who the people are. There are plenty of examples of artistic leaderships that are multiple. The only time I've been a co-artistic director was at Leicester Haymarket and I really enjoyed that, but I wasn't a CEO – neither of us was the CEO. And that worked really well for a while – until a new CEO came in and it became really clear that wasn't going to work anymore, so I moved on. Structurally, there all sorts of creative models but it's what your intent is – what are you trying to do and how are you best going to do it? I believe – and I have a collaborative approach to working – that not everyone likes that. It's clear to me that some people just want you to be the figurehead. They want you to drive your vision and that what they see in a collaborative leadership style, they perceive as weakness. It hasn't got that certain machismo that is associated with leadership... It happens on all sorts of levels... The assumption that you're asking questions in certain circumstances – that's read as you don't know what you're doing. I know exactly

⁷¹ <https://hothousetheatre.com.au/about-us/history/>

⁷² Interview – Samantha Alice Jones – January 29th, 2020 at Sherman Theatre

what I'm doing. The fact that I'm asking questions doesn't mean I don't have an answer. It's because I want to both inform myself and make sure that everyone's views are taken and that stronger decisions are made as a consequence. But not everyone sees it like that... There are lots of models, but is there a will for those models to work? I'm not sure Wales is ready for those models. That's my perception of what I've witnessed for myself and how I'm reading the scene. Some of the discussions in Wales are twenty years behind other places... I'm being harsh, but it is to do with the integrity of what it is you're trying to do and the values... A model is only as good as the people you want to engage in the model. Even if you're the CEO and Artistic Director there is no reason why you can't create a collaborative space for other artists to work with you and, in some ways, that might be an associate director, it might be a creative associate, it might be an advisory board. It comes back down to – what are you trying to do and what's the best model for that?⁷³

Whatever the nuance of this argument, shared artistic leadership approaches are being taken more and more seriously across the UK. The benefits of diversity reside in the range of ideas and viewpoints as well as in the cultures and identities of the people included. If Wales is to fast forward twenty years, it is a feature of leadership that needs to be urgently addressed.

⁷³ Interview – Kully Thiarai – June 26th, 2019 at NTW

3. Recommendations

We understand that many of the issues revealed in this report are not subject to a quick fix or the actions of a single body. In many cases, it will require the concerted efforts of several bodies working together and in partnership. However, we are calling on funders and producing theatres to show leadership and work together on the issues we delineate. Our recommendations are made with an expectation that they will be subject to further detailed exploration and pragmatic dialogue about the way forward.

In consideration of this, we are making the following recommendations:

- Assistant Director positions are now common in Wales. Assisting is a learning opportunity but is not synonymous with training. It is a job in its own right. By and large, assisting roles are now paid and industry-standard contracts need to be utilised. However, we are calling for **a code of practice** to be established across the sector in Wales. NTW has a code of practice based on SDUK's guidelines, but we are calling for there to be an agreed code of practice that all theatres in Wales abide by. Where required, incoming directors should clearly understand the mentoring role they are expected to provide in terms of an assistant. Terms should also include a named individual within the organisation who takes responsibility for managing the learning journey of the assistant with agreed expectations, milestones and evaluation.
- Training programmes are all too often disconnected from production. We welcome the opportunity to direct a production that is entailed in Theatr Clwyd's training programme. But this should not be an isolated event. Emerging directors reported a feeling of being abandoned, having completed schemes with producing companies. It should be a matter of course that theatres follow up on their schemes and maintain contact with their directors, helping nurture a sense of involvement moving forward. However, we would like to see collaboration – potentially with a trust or foundation and between theatres – around **a showcase production** for at least one emerging director every year.
- We wish to see action aimed at **building the strength and resilience** of the directing community in Wales. We would like to see an end to the isolation and fragmentation that directors currently experience through the exploration of **initiatives** such as:
 - **an annual convention or forum** bringing directors together to explore practice and issues of mutual interest
 - **a director's laboratory/studio** with a focus on developing craft
 - **network groups or action learning groups** where directors can come together to support each other
 - support for **shadowing** to enable directors to sit-in on each other's rehearsals
 - **mentoring**

- Theatres need to address their **lack of transparency** in the offering of work. We are calling for each producing company to have a page on its website which makes clear its policy for receiving work ideas, meeting potential creatives and the process by which that can happen. It should be accompanied by clear commitments to respond to approaches in a clear, timely and accessible manner.
- We are calling for **a shift in the way work opportunities are offered** to a more diverse approach involving some direct recruitment, but also a mix of call outs, interviews for productions and other projects, delegated programming opportunities for mini-festivals and other curation, as well as pre-advertised pitching sessions or meet and greets.
- We call for all core appointments to artistic positions within a company – temporary or permanent – to be **advertised** in all circumstances.
- We call for **the employment of Welsh and Wales-based directing talent to be the norm**. This was the second most pressing theme that emerged from the survey and focus groups.
- We welcome training schemes for new directors, but strongly recommend that **Associate Director positions** pitched at mid-career level directors are re-instated in theatre in Wales.
- We are also calling for a partnership-based approach to the creation of **a new development opportunity – an Associate Director role** that is shared between major theatres and is a practical leadership development initiative for a mid-career director in Wales.
- We wish to see independent **artists playing a greater role in the governance of theatres** in Wales either in an advisory capacity or as legitimate trustees and board members.
- Funders should work with boards to develop a more conscious and overt **strategy for talent development** of Welsh and Wales-based directors, rather than relying on a market-driven approach that favours talent from outside of Wales and the expertise of head-hunters. As a part of this, we wish to see **succession planning** as a requisite part of funding arrangements with a commitment to **five-year terms** for senior artistic posts which are only renewable through a formal re-submission.
- Many directors expressed a desire for mentoring. As previously recommended, access to career mentoring is something that should be explored. Twenty years ago, assisting was not widely practised in Wales. We call for **individual mentoring on specific productions** to become a more practised and supported feature of work in Wales. It could have a game-changing role to play.
- There is still too much attachment, particularly within the boards of our theatres, to the twentieth century idea of a single, visionary leader driving change. We recommend that boards and funders look to more innovative models of artistic leadership rather than the conventional single artistic director model. **Collaborative leadership approaches** - as illustrated by some of the examples given in this report –

will enable development opportunities and support a more diverse body of artistic leaders.

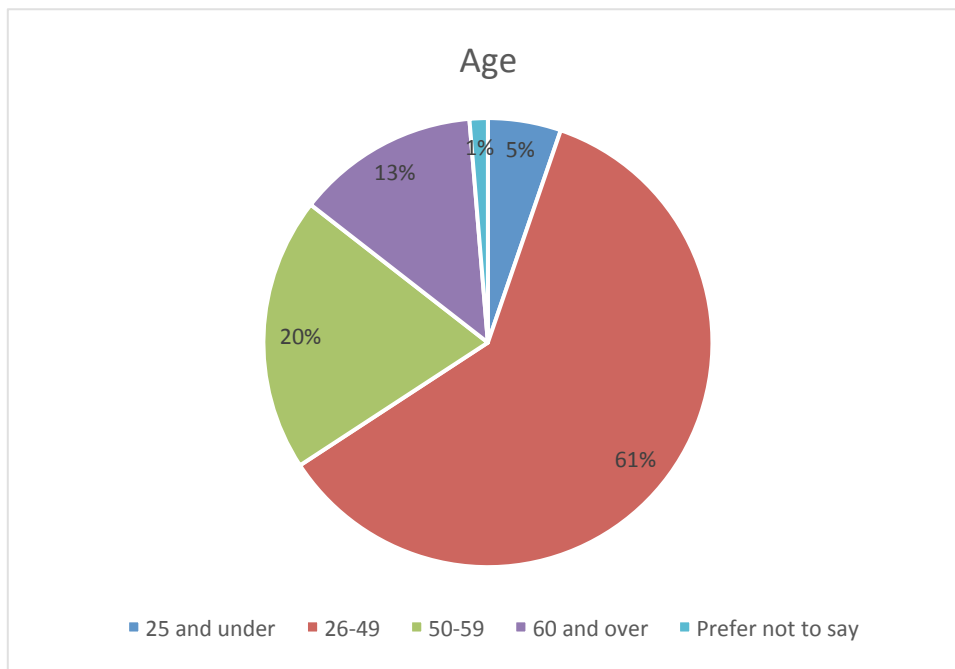
We believe that all theatres working with directors should familiarise themselves with SDUK's recent publication – *directing best practice*. This offers a clear and up-to-date overview of useful guidelines and current thinking on how best to work with directors.⁷⁴

⁷⁴ Available by contacting info@stagedirectorsuk.com

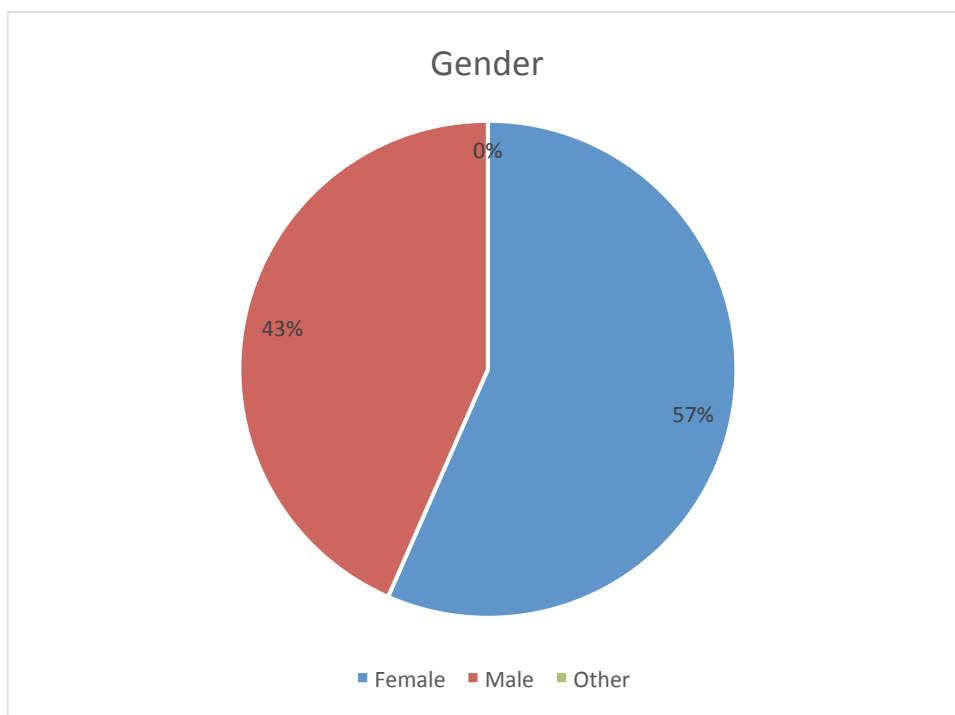
4. Appendix 1: The Survey

The survey consisted of a range of quantitative and qualitative questions. In some cases, to respect confidentiality and, in others, to capture consensus, some of the qualitative responses have been aggregated and broken down into general headings or themes.

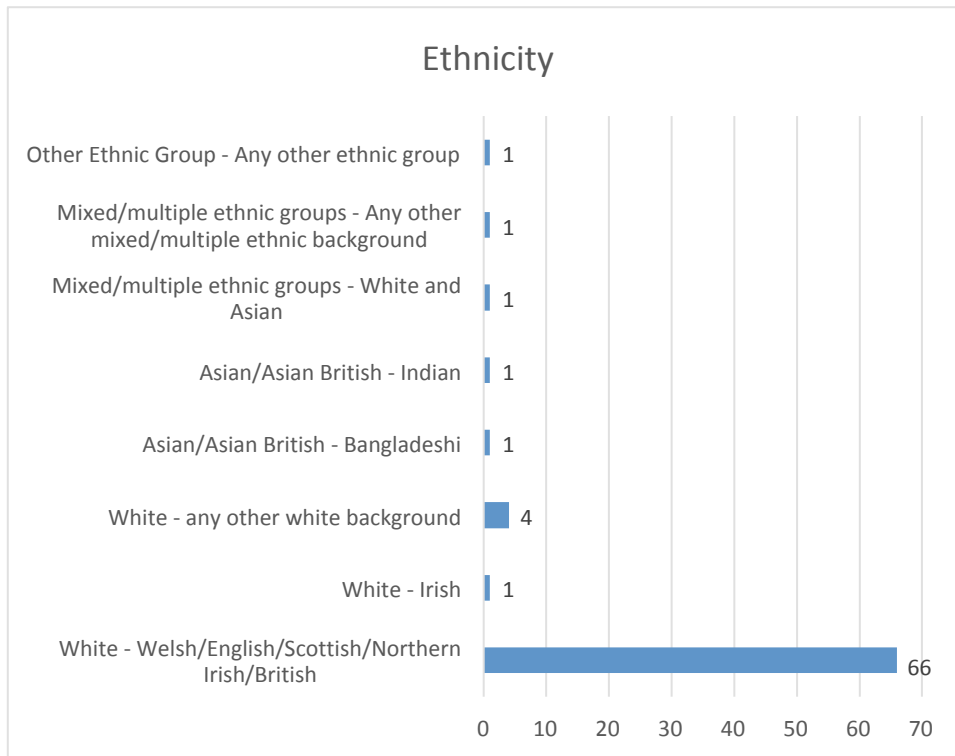
Question one: Age



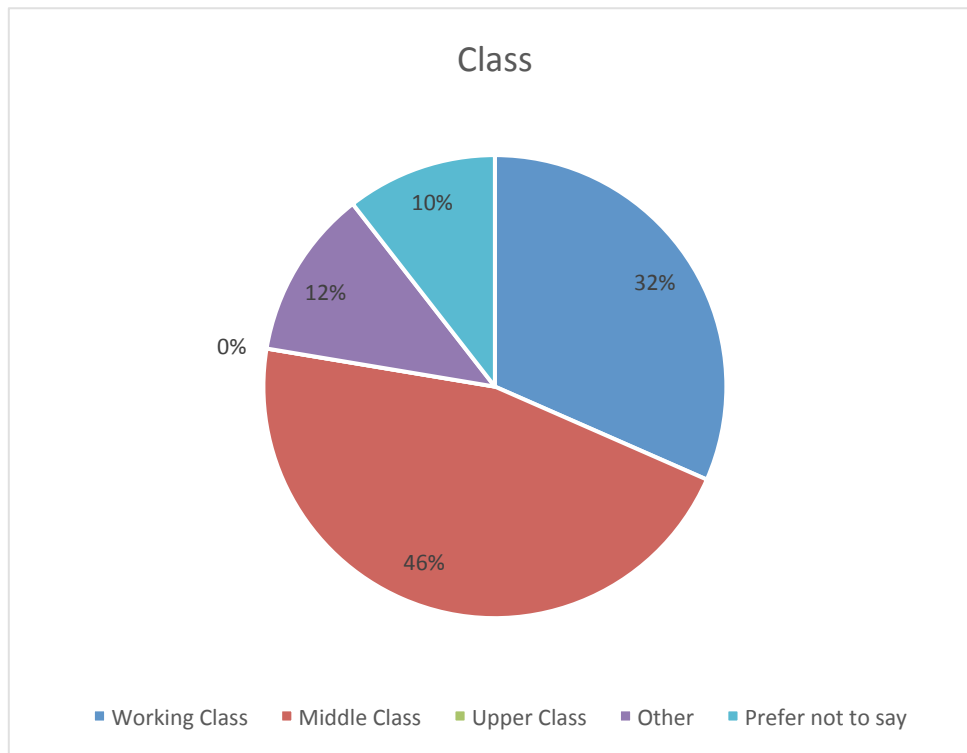
Question two: Gender



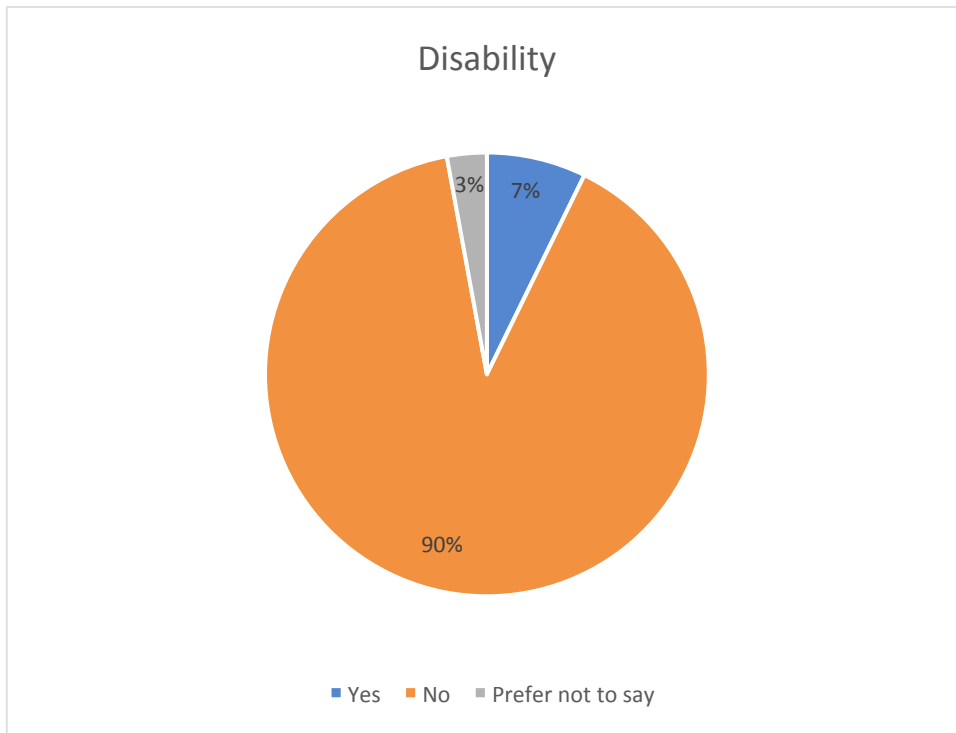
Question three: Ethnicity



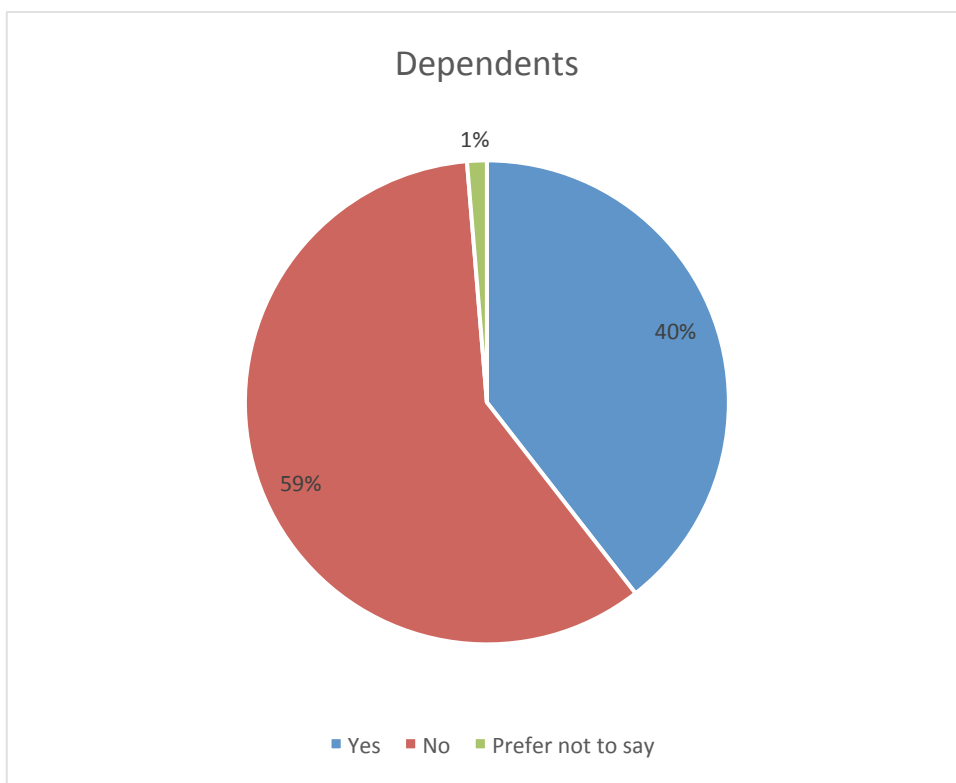
Question four: Class



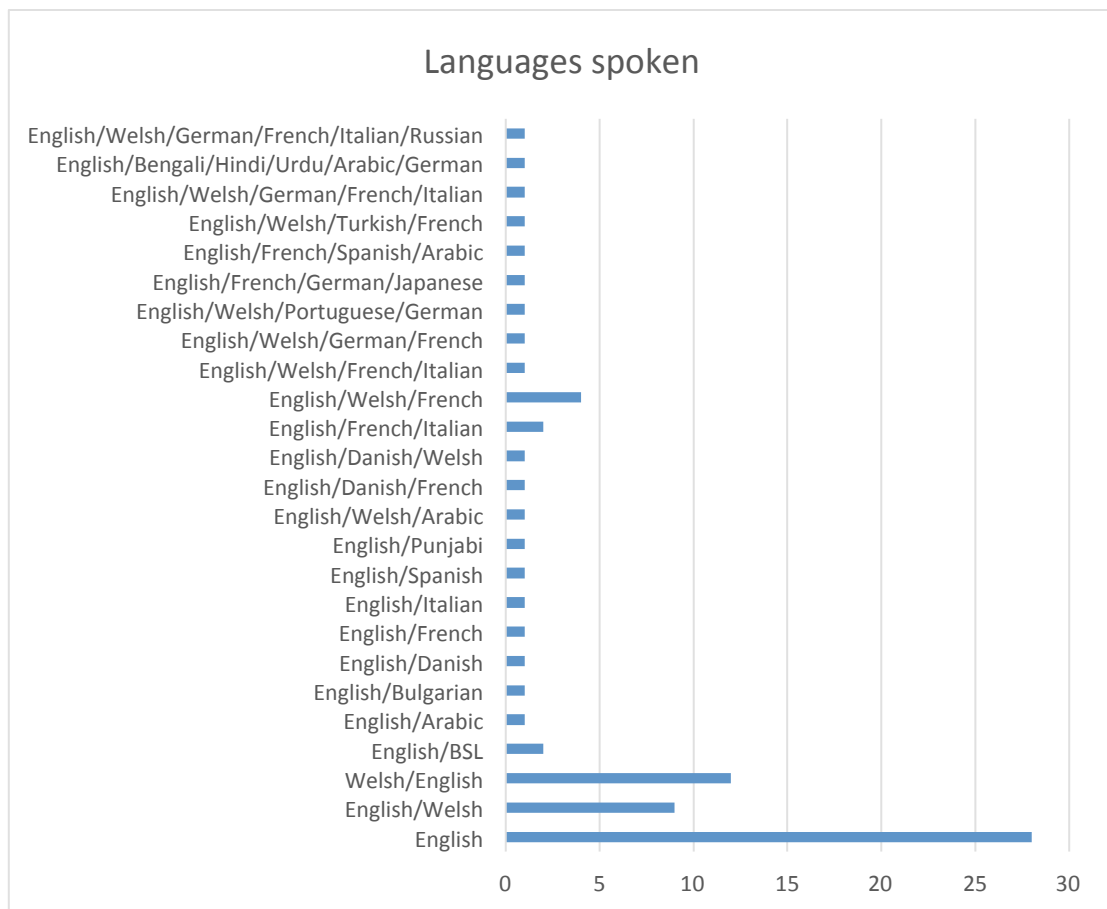
Question five: Do you consider yourself to have a disability?



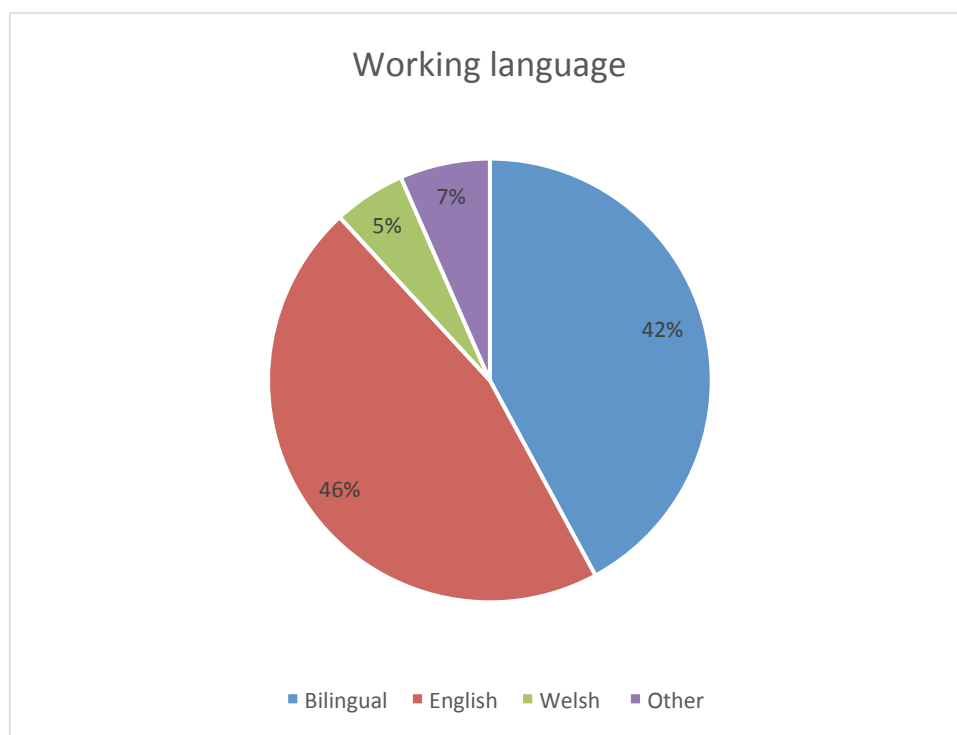
Question six: Do you have any dependents?



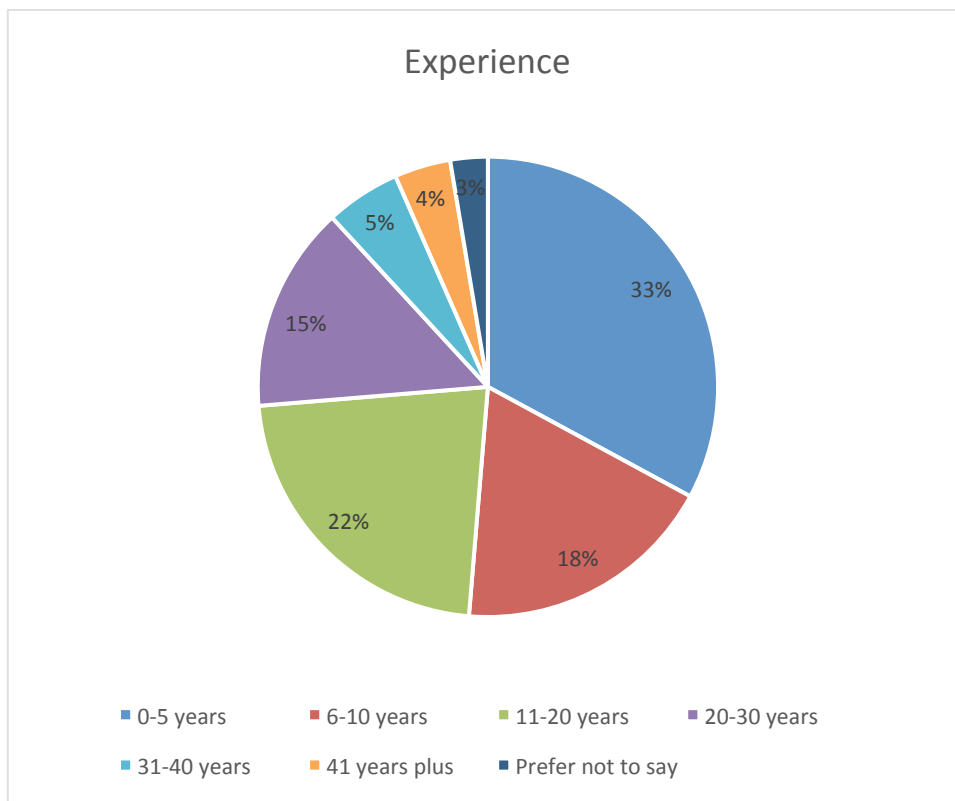
Question seven: What language/s do you speak?



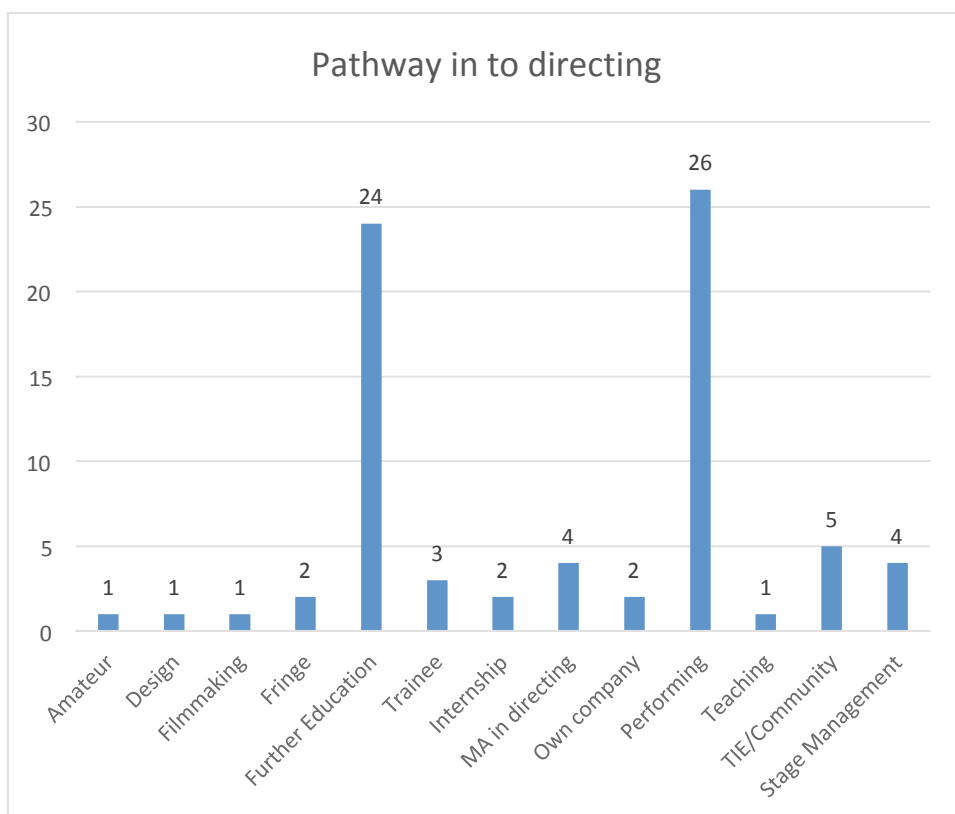
Question eight: What languages do you make work in?



Question nine: How long have you worked professionally as a stage director?



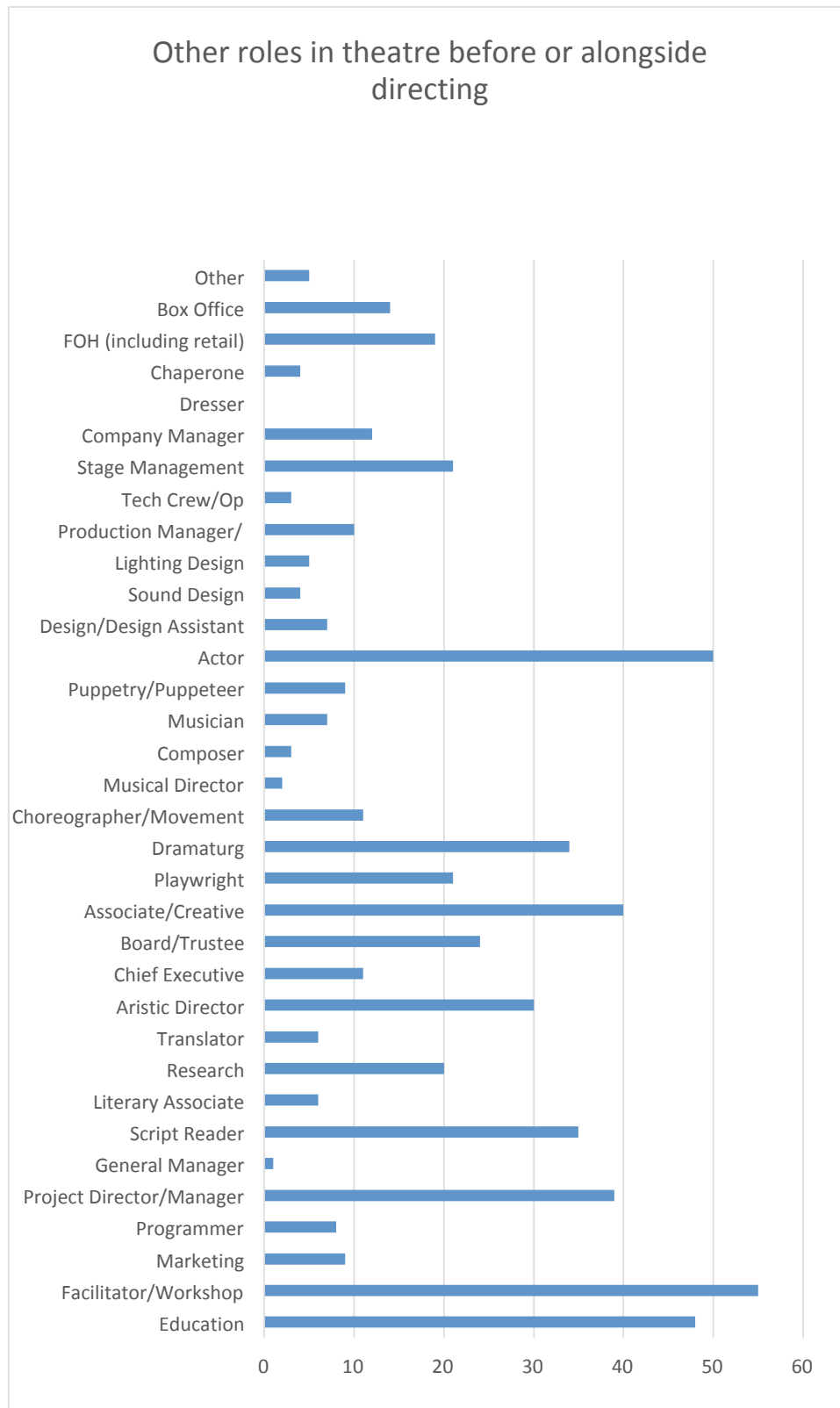
Question ten: What was your pathway into stage directing?



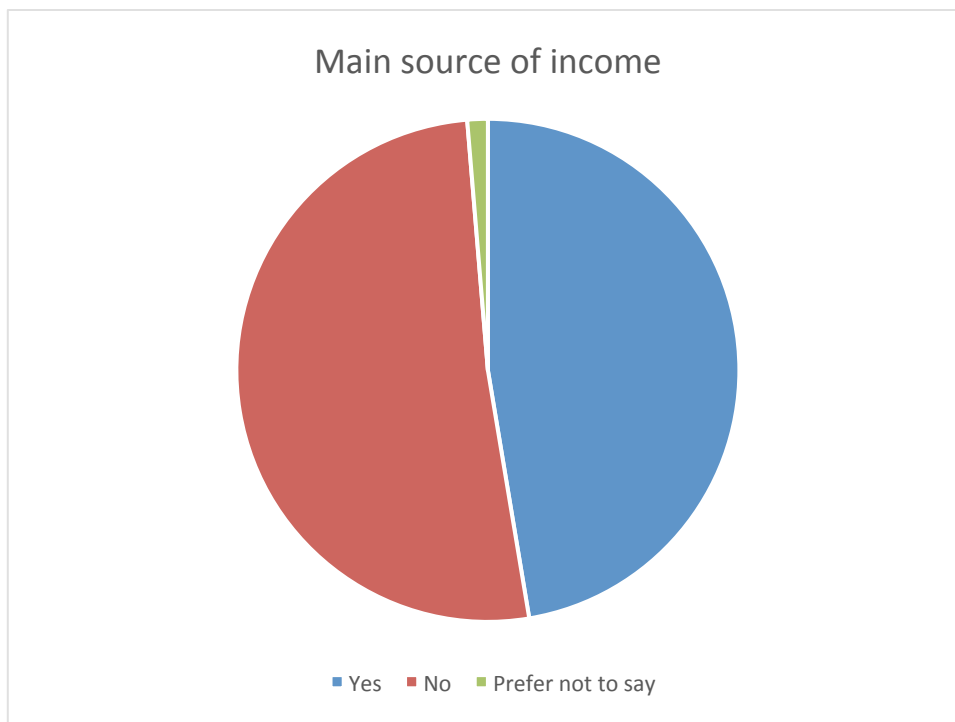
Question eleven: Describe any kind of training/opportunity you have received in terms of director training/mentoring.



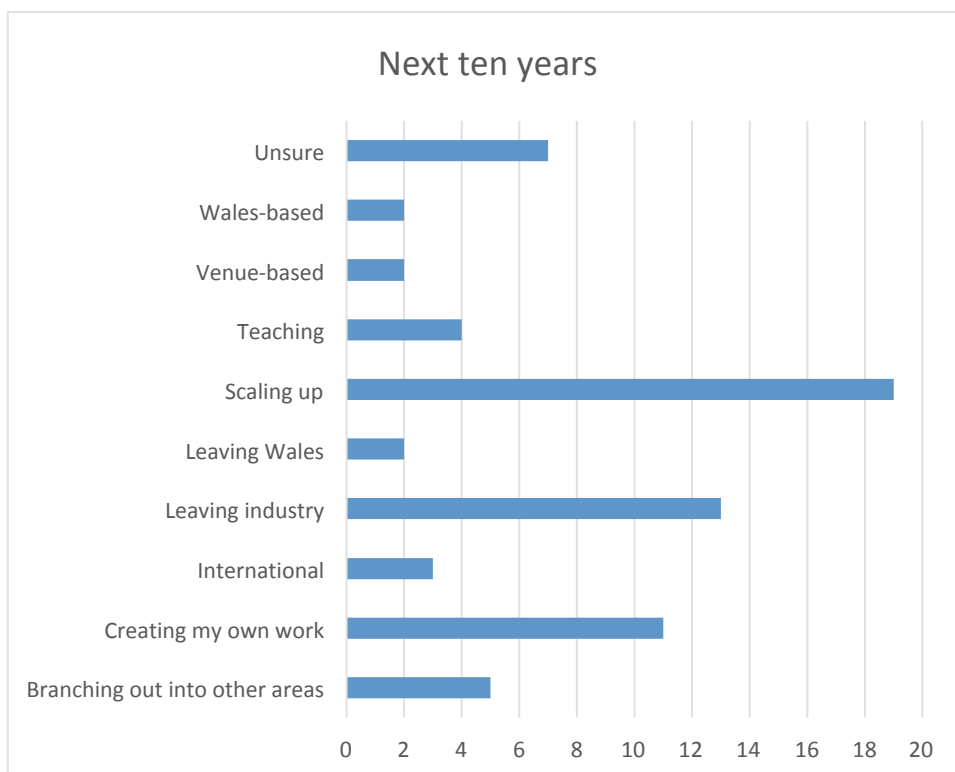
Question twelve: Have you worked in other roles in a theatre – either before becoming a director or alongside directing?



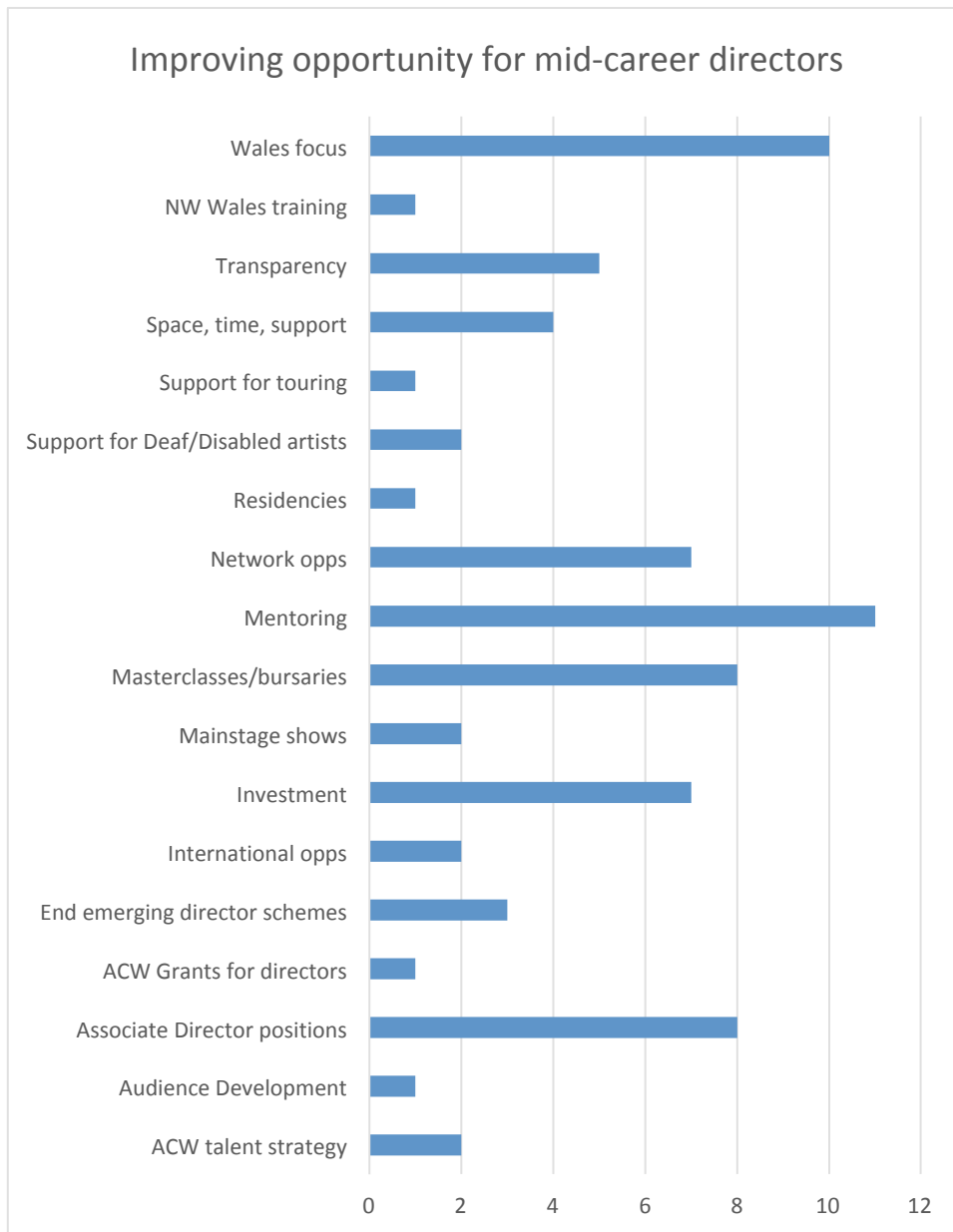
Question thirteen: Does the majority of your income derive from directing?



Question fourteen: How do you see your career developing over the next 10 years?



Question fifteen: Do you have any suggestions for improving opportunities for mid-career directors and theatre makers in Wales?



5. Appendix 2: Survey Respondents

Anonymous
Abdul Shayek
Adele Thomas
Aimee Burns Walker
Aled Bidder
Alice Eklund
Andrew Sterry
Arwel Gruffydd
Ben Davis
Ben Pettitt-Wade
Bethan Morgan
Betsan Llwyd
Bridget Keehan
Caroline Chaney
Catherine Paskell
Charlotte Lewis
Chelsey Gillard
Chris Durnall
David Cottis
David Mercatali
Dr Paul Davies
Duncan Hallis
Elen Bowman
Elise Davison
Emyr John
Erica Eirian
Ffion Haf
Francesca Goodridge
Francesca Pickard
Geinor Styles
Greg Eldridge
Hannah McPake
Hannah Noone
Holly-Robyn Harrison
Ian Wooldridge
Izzy Rabey
Jac Ifan Moore
Jain Boon
Jennifer Lunn

Jeremy Turner
Jonny Cotsen
Judith Roberts
Kevin Lewis
Kristoffer Huball
Kully Thiarai
Laila Noble
Lee Lyford
Luke Hereford
Mared Swain
Mathilde Lopez-Norton
Matt Ball
Matthew Holmquist
Memet Ali Alabora
Nina Brazier
Oliver Lamford
Paul Jenkins
Peter Doran
Phil Clark
Rachel Pedley
Rhian Hutchings
Rhiannon White
Rhys Ap Trefor
Roanna Lewis
Robert Bowman
Robin Tebbutt
Samantha Alice Jones
Sarah Argent
Sarah Bickerton
Sarah Jones
Sera Moore Williams
Siobhan Lynn Brennan
Sita Calvert-Ennals
Wyn Bowen Harries
Wyn Mason
Yvonne Murphy

6. Appendix 3: Interviews and Focus Groups

Abdul Shayek – Artistic Director (Fio)

Anonymous

Arwel Gruffydd- Artistic Director (Theatr Genedlaethol Cymru)

Ben Pettitt-Wade- Artistic Director (Hijinx)

Catherine Paskell – Artistic Director (Dirty Protest)

Charlotte Lewis – Director

Dan Jones – Artistic Director (The Other Room)

Dave Ainsworth – Programme Director (University of Wales Trinity St David)

Elen Bowman – Artistic Director (Living Pictures)

Hannah McPake – Co-Director (Gagglebabble)

Julia Barry – Executive Director (The Sherman Theatre)

Julia Thomas – Associate Director (National Theatre Wales)

Karen Pimbley – Head of Arts Management (RWCMD)

Kolbrun Sigfusdottir – Founder (Theatre Directors Scotland)

Kully Thiarai – Artistic Director (National Theatre Wales)

Lee Lyford – Artistic Director (Theatr Iolo)

Rachel Pedley – Artistic Director (Avant Cymru)

Samantha Alice Jones – Director

Sara Lloyd – Director

Sarah Argent – Director

Sarah Leigh – General Manager: Arts and Creative (Wales Millennium Centre)

Simon Coates – Head of Creative Development (National Theatre Wales)

Siobhan Lynn-Brennan – Director

Tamara Harvey (by e-mail) – Artistic Director (Theatr Clwyd)

7. Appendix 4: Report authors

Simon Harris

Born and brought up in Swansea, Simon Harris trained at the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art, having studied English at University College, London. He is an award-winning theatre writer and director with a professional track record as a producer both within organisations and as an independent for over twenty-five years.

With over forty professional credits, much of Simon's work has been developed in Wales where he has been based since 2000. For seven years, he was Artistic Director of Sgript Cymru – the national company for new work by playwrights – and a driving force in contemporary theatre across the nation. Subsequently, he became the first ever Welsh Fellow on The Clore Leadership Programme, a development programme to encourage leaders in culture. He has been an Arts Council of Wales National Adviser and a Creative Wales Award winner. He has been an Associate Director at the Torch Theatre, a project manager for Creu Cymru brokering relationships between audiences, artists and venues and he teaches annually at the RWCMD.

Simon is now the founding Director of Lucid that takes as its mission to produce “*vivid, urgent, must-see theatre... exploring the world through heartfelt new writing and boldly re-imagined classics.*” After productions of Chekhov's *Platonov* and an acclaimed version of Ibsen's *Little Eyolf* (re-imagined under the title *Little Wolf*) which toured nationally in 2017, Lucid is currently developing a version of the fantasy novel *Howl's Moving Castle*.

Simon and Lucid have also been actively involved in strategic developments within the performing arts as a facilitator, convenor and advocate. In 2016, he created and delivered *Culture Lab* – a ground-breaking leadership programme for the creative sector in Wales. Until recently, he was a board member of Stage Directors UK and is a founding member of *Producers Place* (an informal association of Wales-based independent producers). Working as consultant, he was integral to the development of Chapter's *Pilot* programme for Associate Artists and is a board member for The Other Room.

Over the years, Simon has often worked closely with ACW and is deeply engaged with the performing arts sector. Simon is particularly interested in work that supports organisations and people to work more collaboratively, fairly and developmentally.

Dr. Bridget Keehan

Born in Gloucester to Irish parents, Bridget has made Wales her adopted home. She studied English Literature at Aberystwyth University as a mature student, and on graduating moved to Cardiff and co-founded Alma Theatre, an all-female, physical theatre company. She also worked at the Centre for Performance Research, which introduced her to the work of performance practitioners from all around the world.

She has also worked in literature development, managing the African Writers touring programme for The Africa Centre in London, and running the writers programme for young people from marginalised communities for Literature Wales.

Her passion for social justice has been a motivation for her work in creating writing and theatre projects with the broadest mix of people. In 2004 she became Writer-in-Residence at HMP Cardiff where she worked for several years. During this time, she directed and facilitated numerous theatre productions as well as establishing a prison magazine. In 2006 she was the recipient of a Creative Wales Award which enabled her to travel to Italy and to the USA to further her understanding of prison theatre within an international context.

She was Co-Director of Community Engagement for the Sherman Theatre, where she facilitated new writing projects with asylum seeking and refugee communities. She was awarded a PhD scholarship from the University of South Wales and in 2013 received her Doctorate. Following this she took up post as Creative Practice Teaching Fellow at the University of Birmingham and then became Leverhulme Theatre Artist in Residence at Swansea University.

In 2014 she established her company Papertrail/Llwybr Papur, which specialises in developing new writing for site-specific theatre. Directing work includes the Welsh premiere of *The Container* by Clare Bayley for the Sherman; *Day to Go*, co-written with Anna Maria Murphy, a production spanning the town of Barry via a magical bus tour; and *A Night in the Clink* by Matthew Bulgo, Branwen Davies and Tracy Harris, a production set in the Clink Restaurant at HMP Cardiff. Current work includes *Project Hush* – a large-scale site-specific production with Theatr Clwyd – and a new production with Clean Break that explores the experience of prison visits.