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Pioneer Area Programme Pilot Year Evaluation

Executive Summary

1. Research context, aims and objectives

- 1.1 This executive summary provides an overview of research undertaken by Amgueddfa Cymru - National Museum Wales, with support from the Welsh Government's Knowledge and Analytical Services, between June 2015 and January 2016, to evaluate the Pioneer Area Programme pilot year.
- 1.2 The full evaluation report provides a more detailed assessment of the Pioneer Area Programme; analysing its implementation to date, reviewing its design, delivery and effectiveness, and offering recommendations and improvements for the Programme going forward.

Context to the evaluation

- 1.3 In March 2014, the Baroness Kay Andrews report '*Culture and Poverty: Harnessing the power of the arts, culture and heritage to promote social justice in Wales*' (Welsh Government, 2014) was published. The report examined the connections between access to culture and social justice. It called on the Welsh Government, local government, cultural organisations, community bodies and schools across Wales to collaborate more effectively in order to maximise the benefits cultural participation can have for individuals living in Wales' most deprived communities.
- 1.4 In reply, the Welsh Government set out in detail a programme of work to respond directly to the report's recommendations. As part of this work, a new policy

initiative was launched in May 2015 under the title '*Fusion: Tackling Poverty through Culture*'.

- 1.5 The initial pilot phase for the initiative ran for one year from April 2015 and involved the establishment of six Pioneer Areas across Wales. Within each Pioneer Area, national, regional and local cultural and heritage bodies are working, in collaboration with Communities First clusters, local authorities, and local community groups, to explore opportunities for increasing participation in cultural activities at a local community level; in particular, amongst those individuals and communities who would not ordinarily engage in these types of activities. Through this shared approach, they are exploring how cultural participation contributes to tackling poverty initiatives and improves learning, employability, skills and wellbeing outcomes.

Aims and objectives

- 1.6 This evaluation focuses on the design, implementation delivery and impact of the Pioneer Area Programme pilot year since 1 April 2015.
- 1.7 The overarching aims and objectives of the evaluation were:
- to analyse the effectiveness of the Pioneer Area programme's processes, in terms of its design and delivery (the 'Process Evaluation'); and
 - to examine the extent to which the Pioneer Area programme pilot year has been successful in increasing participation by young people, adults and families living in Communities First areas in culture, arts and heritage activities, in ways that help them gain in learning, skills, confidence and wellbeing (the 'Outcome Evaluation').

2. Methodology

- 2.1 A multi-method approach involving primary, secondary and mainly qualitative approaches, were used to meet the evaluation objectives. The stages of the evaluation were as follows:
- literature and evidence review
 - in-depth interviews with members of each Pioneer Area partnership
 - in-depth local area case studies to map out activity in each Pioneer Area
 - synthesis of evaluation evidence.

3. Key findings

Programme impact

- 3.1 The Pioneer Area programme, in terms of its overall approach to using culture to tackle poverty and disadvantage in communities across Wales, is held in high regard by many of the stakeholders involved in its delivery. Evidence gathered from the stakeholder interviews indicates a clear understanding among partners about how its aims and objectives align with the work of the Communities First programme and with the Welsh Government's wider tackling poverty agenda.
- 3.2 The evidence collected as part of the evaluation indicates that, as a result of the Pioneer Area programme, cultural and heritage organisations, Communities First Clusters and local community groups across each of the Pioneer Areas have begun to align their priorities around tackling poverty objectives. This has enabled them to build and strengthen working relationships with both new and existing partners, and to work collaboratively, in a range of innovative and dynamic ways, to design, fund and deliver joint cultural activities and projects in disadvantaged communities.
- 3.3 The evaluation has highlighted that, prior to the Pioneer Areas being established, many of the cultural partners have not worked in strategic partnership with each other, or even been in contact, before. The lead organisations have played a crucial role in this process – convening, facilitating and brokering connections and collaboration between partners; shaping strategy; coordinating the partnerships; and providing guidance and ideas.
- 3.4 There is early evidence to suggest that the partnerships established under the programme have added value to existing projects and activities, as well as supported the development and implementation of new cultural activities.
- 3.5 Overall, the activities being delivered as part of the pilot year were based around three key themes: community and individual wellbeing; learning, education and skills; and employment and income, all of which relate to broader Communities First outcomes. There is evidence that all Pioneer Areas were working across a broad range of priorities under each theme, which reflects the fact that the cultural activities being delivered contribute to a wide range of outcomes and impacts.
- 3.6 The evaluation revealed a strong emphasis across the Pioneer Areas on developing structures and activities to guide and support individuals to develop appropriate pathways to independent living, learning and/or employment, and to monitor and facilitate their progression. There has been a focus on the targeting of both hard and soft outcomes, albeit to different degrees and levels across the Pioneer Areas. Activities have included musical and drama performances; art and craft courses; film-making and media workshops; guided walks and tailored visits to cultural, heritage and arts venues, museums and sites; training

opportunities linked to formal accreditation; work placements; and volunteering opportunities.

- 3.7 There is qualitative evidence that some individuals have been exposed to cultural activities who might not otherwise have had access to cultural sites and venues within their areas. The provision of cultural activities acted as an effective lever to engage individuals from disadvantaged backgrounds and encourage them to participate in activities outside their usual routines and environments.
- 3.8 The short timeframe since the introduction of many activities in the pilot year, along with the varying approaches to monitoring impact across the Pioneer Areas, means that it is difficult to obtain reliable numbers to quantify the overall impact of the programme, in terms of the numbers of participants engaged, the numbers who successfully complete accredited courses, or go on to attend further courses, or gain qualifications or employment. Nevertheless, well over 1,500 participants have engaged in activities brokered by the partnerships and, in areas where more focussed activities have been delivered and closely monitored, the data provided indicates that over 500 participants have engaged in structured programmes, courses and accredited learning.
- 3.9 Individual projects have provided data which suggests that participation in cultural, arts and heritage activities has had a positive impact on individuals. In particular, participation has resulted in the development and enhancement of soft skills, such as increased confidence and self-esteem; improved social participation; and higher motivation and engagement. From the evidence available however it is not possible to establish in a robust manner the extent to which improvements in these outcomes can be attributed to the pilot programme activities, as opposed to other factors.
- 3.10 The acquisition of new hard skills, such as language, literacy and numeracy; and practical craft, technical and digital skills has also been identified as a key outcome of many of the Pioneer Area activities. In some areas there was a strong focus on accreditation of skills development. In total, across the Pioneer Areas, 130 people have received training with 26 registering for Agored accreditation.
- 3.11 The ongoing nature of much of the activities means that the longer-term impacts on individuals and communities cannot be evidenced at this stage, therefore, further evaluation is required to establish overall impact over time.

Good practice

- 3.12 The direct link to the Communities First programme, and to the Cluster teams based within the local communities is a key strength of the programme; providing

a mechanism for aligning activities to local needs, key outcomes and priorities and facilitating successful participant engagement.

- 3.13 The evaluation provides evidence of the general success of the Pioneer Area partnership model. Overall, partnerships were valued by cultural partners for being very open, democratic and organic in their approach to define shared purpose, clear objectives and processes and to identify how each member could contribute. Lead partners emphasised that partnership success to date had been driven by a desire to reach shared outcomes and ensure mutual benefit for all partners and participants, not just to meet a specific funding remit.
- 3.14 There is evidence that the pilot programme is beginning to change perceptions of culture and particular stereotypes and misconceptions of the value of cultural, heritage and arts-based activities at Local Authority level and within the Communities First Cluster teams.
- 3.15 The evaluation indicates that having a specific outcomes framework, which relates specifically to broader Communities First outcomes, has helped focus the design and delivery of activities in the pilot year.

Summary of key challenges and areas for improvements

- 3.16 The findings demonstrate that longer-term planning and delivery of activities would facilitate even greater collaboration and influence locally, as well as providing a clearer picture of outcomes and impacts.
- 3.17 The short timeframe also impacted on the ability to assess outcomes across the Pioneer Areas. Due to the timescale, there is a shortage of consistent, robust and comparable monitoring information at project level. Where quantitative evidence was collected, much of the data lacked statistical robustness due to the small sample sizes, making it difficult to draw any definite conclusions on impact.
- 3.18 The evaluation findings also highlighted that the validity and reliability of data was highly dependent on the skill and capacity of the individuals responsible for monitoring and evaluation at organisational, programme and project level. This contributed to the inconsistent approach being taken across the Pioneer Areas. Many cultural partners need support to design effective and innovative monitoring and reporting processes.
- 3.19 The scope and design of the evaluation did not make it possible to estimate the counterfactual therefore it is difficult to assess to what extent changes can be attributed to the Pioneer Areas pilot.

4. Conclusions / Recommendations

- 4.1 Evidence across the Pioneer Areas has shown that the Pioneer Area partnership approach can enhance the provision of cultural activities for disadvantaged groups in local areas and there is clearly potential to expand and enhance the model. However, despite these successes, the progress and outcomes of the pilot partnerships would benefit from further review and exploration of effective practices as the programme progresses.
- 4.2 Partners felt that the networking events held as part of the pilot programme should continue as they were vital for sharing good practice and ideas.
- 4.3 Partners across the Pioneer Areas emphasised the strong link between the Fusion programme and the Future Generations Act and it was felt that this needed to be more explicit in any future programme.
- 4.4 Lead partners across the Pioneer Areas emphasised that the programme had involved a greater level of co-ordination than anticipated, placing pressure on their capacity to operate each local partnership, as well as fund activity. The possibility of providing additional financial and central assistance to participating Pioneer Areas in order to enhance the operational capacity of local partnerships and support the delivery of activities should be explored further.
- 4.5 Increasing the research capacity and skills of delivery organisation so that there is a more formal, robust and consistent approach to monitoring and self-evaluation of outcomes and impacts across the pioneer areas should be a key goal.
- 4.6 The evaluation design adopted was limited by the time-frame and the available evaluation budget. As a result the evaluation was unable to effectively measure the impact or value for money of the pilot programme. It is recommended that this be addressed should the programme continue. The possibility of building a more robust evidence base around the longer term benefits of cultural participation and engagement using data sets such as the National Survey for Wales should also be explored further.

Full Research Report: Pioneer Area Programme Pilot Year Evaluation Final Report
Available at:

<http://gov.wales/statistics-and-research/evaluation-pioneer-areas-pilot-year/?lang=en>

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

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