

CREU CYFFRO EVALUATION

FINAL REPORT

FEBRUARY 2023

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1. Introduction

1.1. The Creative Industries in Wales

Creative Industries emerged as a priority for UK economic development in 1998, when the newly formed UK Department of Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) identified 13 business sub-sectors which *“have their origin in individual creativity, skill and talent and which have a potential for wealth and job creation through the generation and exploitation of intellectual property”*¹. The UK Government’s Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport reported that in 2019 the creative industries contribute £115.9 billion annually to the UK economy, equating to £13.2 million an hour². Within these figures the Welsh ‘share’ amounted to £2.2 billion generated by a workforce of over 56,000 people, with the creative industries considered to have long been in Wales:

*“one of the fastest growing parts of the Welsh economy [and] doesn’t just create jobs and wealth, it contributes to a strong national brand and helps to promote Wales and its culture and talent to the world”*³

Since the pandemic these figures have dropped, with Creative Wales⁴ currently stating that the creative industries in Wales have a combined turnover of over £1.7 billion and employ 35,400 people in Wales. It published the findings of its most recent survey in October 2022⁵. In it, it breaks the industry down into the following categories:

- Music
- Screen
- Digital
- Publishing
- Other e.g., artist, photographer

And segments it into the following business types:

- Self-employed
- Freelancer

¹ Hargreaves, I, Grant, A (2011) *Creative industries in the South Wales Valleys: a working paper*.

² <https://www.great.gov.uk/international/content/investment/sectors/creative-industries/>

³ Source: [Business Wales, written statement from Deputy Minister for Culture, Sport and Tourism](#).

⁴ [Creative Wales](#), set up in 2020 by Welsh Government is the agency tasked to “support the creative industries in Wales.[and] harness the power of our creative sectors, drive growth in our economy and help build a prosperous future for our country.” (<https://www.creative.wales/>).

⁵ Hood, S (2022) *Creative Wales Industry Survey 2022 Report*, Strategic Research and Insight, Welsh Government, <https://www.gov.wales/creative-wales-industry-survey-2022>.

- Employee
- Employer/director/owner

The headline findings of the most recent industry survey carried out in 2022 suggest:

- Over half the businesses trading in the industry (including sole traders) are located in south east Wales (54%), the region within which Merthyr Tydfil⁶ is located;
- Just over 1 in 3 people employed in the sector are freelance or self-employed;
- 94% of businesses have been trading for a minimum of six years; with 82% having done so in excess of a decade;
- 94% of respondents identify as white.

Understandably, creative industries state ‘Increasing profitability’ as their biggest priority in their next financial year (54% of respondents). In respect of Creu Cyffro’s aim of supporting more people into the creative industries, it is interesting to observe that the third most important priority is ‘Growing the workforce’ (21%). Further down the list of priorities was ‘Diversifying the workforce’, however, the survey does not define ‘diversifying’, though since it enquires about respondents’ ethnicity and Welsh language ability it is reasonable to assume it includes these elements, but not necessarily other areas of diversity such as sexual identity, faith/religion, class, disability, educational attainment.

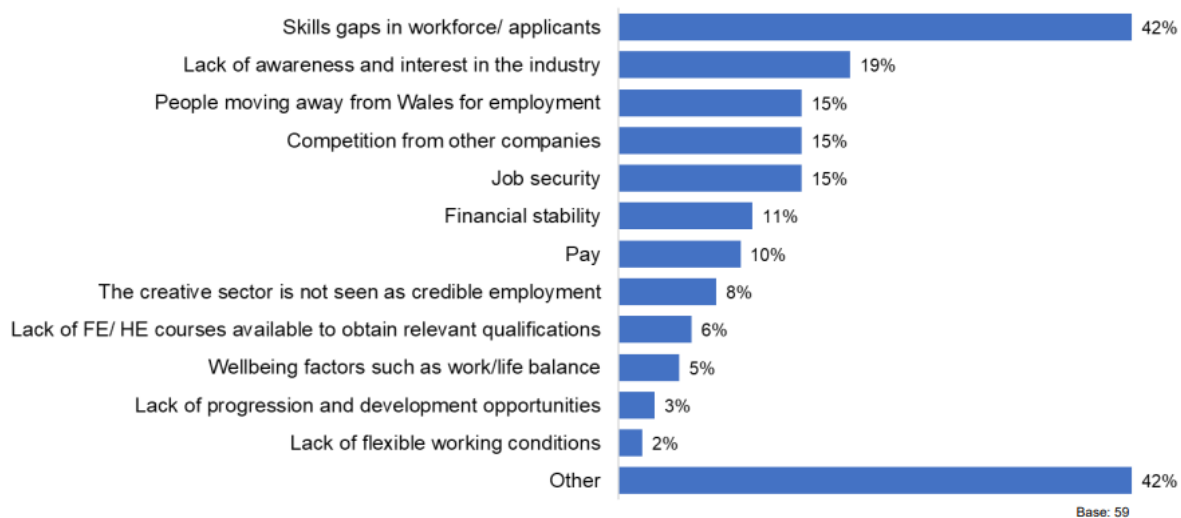
Nevertheless, many businesses in the industry were *not* recruiting at the time of the survey⁷, though a quarter of respondents had faced difficulties in recruitment, most acutely in the Music industry (48% of respondents) followed by Screen (36%) and Digital (32%).

Of the respondents who express experiencing recruitment difficulties, the reasons why they think this is reported as⁸:

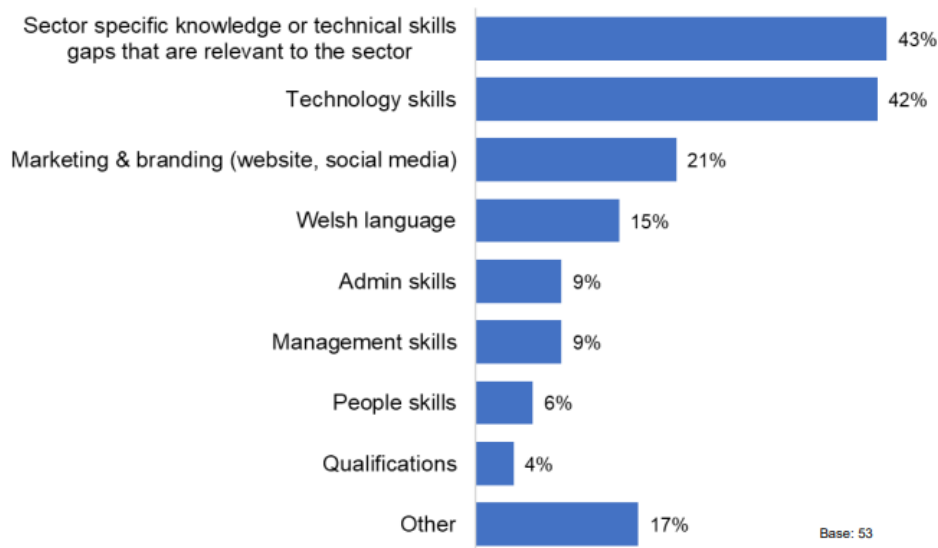
⁶ The report does not state the number/percentage of respondents located in Merthyr Tydfil county borough

⁷ *ibid.*, p.15

⁸ *ibid.*, p.16



Of the respondents that have a skills gap in the workforce the specific gaps were reported as⁹:



Pertinent to Creu Cyffro, the south east of Wales is the only one to register 'Growing the workforce' in its top 3 priorities. When segmented by industry category it is the screen industry that records 'Growing the workforce' as the highest priority: 28% of respondents placing it as its third biggest priority. Digital and Music also place it as the third highest priority, but to a lower percentage.

Interestingly, the most frequently mentioned recruitment source for those who were recruiting in the last year was online sources (16%), or word of mouth (17%). Only 8% tend to go through an agency, while only 3% use a freelance directory¹⁰. One of the report's conclusions was the need for more networking

⁹ *ibid.*, p.17

¹⁰ *ibid.*, p.18

opportunities to “bring about [the required] high-level skillsets, especially as word of mouth tends to be one of the main sources of recruitment.”¹¹

Overall, the survey concludes that industry confidence currently “*seems good*”¹² even though Covid-19 “*remains a firm influence on the lack of business turnover*”¹³ with employers reporting being the most confident for the year ahead in comparison with other business types (e.g., self-employed, freelancers). Those businesses operating in the Digital sector expressed the greatest confidence in running their business profitably in their next financial year (22% very confident, 26% somewhat confident), with, elsewhere, animation identified as a particularly resilient part of the industry because while live-action productions were affected by social distancing requirements, animation was affected to a far lesser extent¹⁴. The animation sector continues to report buoyancy in south Wales¹⁵.

Despite, the strong base, it is worth noting that Wales nor any part thereof is considered by the UK Government’s Department for International Trade as one of the country’s principal five ‘key asset’ areas for the creative industries, although Northern Ireland is (along with Manchester, London, Coventry and Warwick, and Guildford)¹⁶

1.2. A Cultural Network for Merthyr Tydfil

In June 2021, an application to the Arts Council of Wales Connect and Flourish fund was successfully won by four partners: Merthyr Tydfil Leisure Trust, Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council Regeneration Section, Canolfan Soar, and Merthyr College. The partners acknowledged that over the preceding decade Merthyr Tydfil had been without a Development Officer, strategy and network for the arts and culture; and that although they had worked together in the past, this was the first time they had come together to find a *strategic* solution for the cultural sector in Merthyr Tydfil. It was noted that “*many of the organisations, freelancers and arts venue spaces work in silos, sometimes causing a fractious working environment.*”

An R&D project was carried out by Straeon Research Ltd, to bring the sector together in meaningful discussion about what a cultural network would look like, what it could achieve, and what would be necessary for this to happen. There was a clear appetite for the cultural network to be established and the project was able to go some way towards bridging differing perspectives within the cultural sector in Merthyr Tydfil. The full report is available on the [Straeon website](#).

With the appetite for a cultural network strong, and the creative industries being seen as a growth area in the UK, Creu Cyffro brought an injection of cash into the creative industries in Merthyr Tydfil. One of the aspirations of the programme was to bring “*expertise and professional partners into the area to work... and upskill some of the trainers in Merthyr to give them skills to deliver training*”. It was felt that the

¹¹ *ibid.*, p.22

¹² *ibid.*, p.13

¹³ *ibid.*, p.12

¹⁴ O’Connor, S (2022) A thriving scene? Animation in Wales, in *The Welsh Agenda*, 69, pp.72-74.

¹⁵ *ibid.*

¹⁶ <https://www.great.gov.uk/international/content/investment/sectors/creative-industries/>.

creative industries are *“a way forward for a lot of sectors, so this is a way of opening up schools’ and young peoples’ eyes that there are these opportunities, and opening doors for people”*.

2. Creu Cyffro

2.1. The funding

Creu Cyffro was funded through the Community Renewal Fund (CRF), a £220m fund distributed to local authorities across the UK in order to support the UK Government's 'levelling up' agenda, first mentioned in the Conservative Party Manifesto in 2019. Levelling up is described as '*a moral, social and economic programme for the whole of government*' and aimed to address geographic inequalities of opportunity and success¹⁷. To help realise the goals of levelling up, four funding programmes were launched:

- The UK Community Renewal Fund (CRF)
- The Levelling Up Fund
- The Community Ownership Fund
- The UK Shared Prosperity Fund

The aim of the CRF was to '*help places across the UK prepare for the introduction of the UK Shared Prosperity Fund*'¹⁸. The £220m fund was intended to enable communities to pilot imaginative new approaches and programmes, with the emphasis being on communities being able to address local challenges.

In Wales, 160 projects were funded by the CRF, totalling £46m. It is worth noting that the Welsh Government was reported to be unhappy with the funding. On 3rd November 2021 a spokesperson was reported to have said that the funding was "*short-changing Wales by cutting the replacement funding we were promised. Instead of Wales receiving at least £375m annually in new money to invest from January this year, it confirms Wales will receive just £46m. This is not "levelling up", it's levelling down.*"¹⁹

Four CRF awards were given to projects taking place in Merthyr Tydfil; a relatively small number compared to other local authorities. However, Merthyr Tydfil is the smallest local authority by population in Wales, with just 60,424 inhabitants²⁰, so this is not surprising. Creu Cyffro was the biggest project to be funded in Merthyr Tydfil and the most ambitious in scope. The four awards were:

- Creative Industry Training Programme £1,027,119 (Creu Cyffro)
- Encouraging Enterprise £555,170

¹⁷ https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1095544/Executive_Summary.pdf

¹⁸ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/uk-community-renewal-fund-prospectus>

¹⁹ <https://www.walesonline.co.uk/news/wales-news/community-renewal-fund-brexit-eu-22055958#>

²⁰ <https://statswales.gov.wales/Catalogue/Population-and-Migration/Population/Estimates/Local-Authority/populationestimates-by-localauthority-year>

- H FACTOR Carbon Economy College (CEC) £218,360
- Merthyr's Roots - a living landscape £173,135

As far as we are aware, there was no plan to cross-pollinate or develop shared learning from the four projects taking place within the county; each took place independently. If there was any shared learning across the projects, this was not made obvious to the evaluation team, nor was it mentioned in any interviews.

2.2. The project plan and aims

According to the application, Creu Cyffro, or the 'Creative Industries Training Programme' as it was called at the time of application and until the brand was created, aimed to *"inspire and enthuse people in our community to develop new initiatives by supporting them with training and learning opportunities as well as space to facilitate this process. This Strategic working will build capacity within our community by improving partnership working and providing local organisations and individuals with the skills they need to support each other on our way out of the pandemic."* The name Creu Cyffro, translated as 'creating excitement', reflected that ambition.

There were four strands to the project proposed in the application:

- *Creative Industries Training Programme*, a 6-month programme of training in a range of creative areas, designed to inspire people to pursue further and higher education, and employment. The programme also aimed to develop transferable skills in beneficiaries;
- *Events Programme*, delivered locally and intended for recipients of the above to develop key skills for employment through placements created in the events programme;
- *Work Based Training Programme*, via six apprenticeships for Merthyr Tydfil residents;
- *Arts and Business Development Programme*, centring on the creation of a 'creative incubator' where artists and creative entrepreneurs can develop and pilot work. In addition, 10 'makerspace' grants were proposed for £5k each to support the setup of businesses and new enterprises.

A number of objectives were identified in the application at individual and community levels, as well as longer-term impacts. At the individual level, the programme intended to increase the number of local residents engaging in creative industries activities, gaining qualifications, developing employability skills and progressing to volunteering or economic activity. At the community level, the programme aimed to support residents to contribute to their communities through the arts, to discourage anti-social behaviour, to increase the capacity of community facilities and social capital, and to deliver community-based activities. In terms of longer-term impacts, these included promoting the cultural amenities to attract economic investment, neighbourhood revitalization, creating employment, creating an 'arts incubator', branding, events and urban design and reuse.

2.3. Project delivery partners

The lead organisation for Creu Cyffro was Merthyr Tydfil Leisure Trust, with the Programme Manager based at Redhouse Cymru, one of the key arts venues in the town. Written into the application were ten delivery partners:

- Wales Millennium Centre
- GTFM Radio
- Community Music Wales
- Screen Alliance Wales
- Into Film
- Beacons Bees
- Anthony Bunko (independent artist)
- First Campus
- Open University
- Puppet Soup

The partners ranged from individual artists, to small start-up organisations, to nationally funded arts companies, and represented a diverse range of creative industry areas. Subsequently, the range of activities put forward for inclusion in the project by each organisation was equally diverse.

Each partner planned to deliver a programme of work as part of Creu Cyffro, however, this was not captured by the programme management team in one document, and plans changed considerably for some partners. The size of the project and diverse nature of the activities was a challenge for the programme management team, which is discussed more later.

A summary of all activities delivered by partners can be found in Appendix 1.

2.4. Changes to timescale

The original application stated a start date of July 2021, with two months for recruitment, marketing, engagement and finalising the project delivery plan. Delivery was due to commence in September, to coincide with the start of the academic year, with completion in March 2022. This was designed to allow some lead-in time to establish the project plans, staff and marketing. September was chosen as the start of delivery so that schools and colleges could be effectively engaged from the start of the academic year. However, the funding process involved several delays and changes of timescale, which had a severe impact on the project and its partners. After several date changes, the programme manager was appointed in December 2021, and delivery began from March 2022 when the project partners were brought together for the first time. The project was extended to December 2022 to account for the delayed start. The programme assistant started work in March 2022, at the same time that delivery began. These changes to the timescale had several deep implications for the project management team, project partners and beneficiaries, which are discussed in section 6.

2.5. Podcasts and community media

Since podcasts offer a unique opportunity to garner public attention with a low investment in effort and money²¹, we decided to incorporate a podcast channel into the evaluation methodology as a cost-effective way of casting a light on what Creu Cyffro was doing and achieving, and bring this to the attention of an audience beyond those directly involved in the programme. This involved some capacity building in the creative industries, so was both part of the programme and part of the evaluation.

An overview of the podcast episodes is provided in Appendix 2. The podcast channel is hosted on SoundCloud (https://soundcloud.com/creu_cyffro) and for the remainder of 2023 allows for unlimited upload content via the platform's Next tariff. It is syndicated to other podcast streaming platforms such as Apple Podcasts and [Google Podcasts](#).

The episodes vary in format but each comprises an element of interview and conversation, with some comprising ambient recordings from around Merthyr Tydfil, Creu Cyffro venues, and pre-existing audio content such as the dramatised interpretation at Redhouse Cymru of Keir Hardie.

Some episodes were recorded in person, but most were recorded remotely over the internet and edited:

- to enhance audio quality
- to provide a pleasant listening experience
- for brevity

All participants had the opportunity to listen to the episode before it went live.

²¹ Sienkiewicz, M, Jaramillo, D (2019) Podcasting, the intimate self, and the public sphere, *Popular Communication*, 17(4): 268-272.

3. The Evaluation

3.1. Partnership between Straeon Research Ltd and Grow Social Capital

[Straeon Research Ltd.](#) was set up in 2020 by Dr Ellie Farmahan and Dr Eva Elliott as an independent research consultancy in the field of health inequalities, culture, community, art and the creative industries. Straeon managed the overall evaluation team and approach and commissioned Russell Todd from Grow Social Capital CIC to lead on elements, including the commissioning of Steph Bridgeman of [Experienced Media Analysts](#) to undertake the media sentiment analysis (MSA).

[Grow Social Capital CIC](#) is a social enterprise set up in 2020 with a clear purpose to:

- make it easier to harness purpose and Social Capital to support positive personal, social, and economic change
- tackle the growth of 'UnSocial Capital': the changing levels of Social Capital which are leading to growing distrust, disrespect, division, and tribalism in society
- develop a learning culture around changemaking
- provide new narratives for harnessing the positive potential of and purposefulness and Social Capital to enable communities, teams, or organisations to realise greater togetherness and be more resilient.
- enable people to rise to the post-Covid challenge and the urgent need to realise a new 'normal': a normal of better collaboration, integration and synergies by working together, and caring about common goals.

Russell produced all the podcast output as well as attended for observations certain meetings and events. He also delivered some community media and podcasting training, with support from Dr Rob Watson of [Decentered Media](#) based in Leicester. Rob has also provided guidance on community-focused communications and its potential value to the creative industry.

3.2. Aims

The aims of the evaluation were:

- To understand the impact of the programme;
- To unpick and make visible the processes through which the programme is having an impact;
- To evaluate the implementation process, highlighting the barriers and facilitators to the delivery of the activities, and the acceptability of the programme components to participants, facilitators and stakeholders;

- To make recommendations for the sustainability and legacy of the programme beyond the end of the work.

3.3. Approach

Ellie, Eva and Russell explain more about their evaluation method in [episode 3 of the podcast](#). Overall, the evaluation took a qualitative approach, using an asset-based approach, working very much alongside the programme as it unfolded. We followed a grounded, inductive approach to data analysis, allowing themes to emerge, rather than applying a hypothesis or pre-determined analytic framework to the data.

3.4. Methods and scope

The initial intention was to develop a theory of change from the beginning of the programme. This would have made it possible to work with the programme organisers to anticipate the impact on participants and stakeholders. We wanted to understand the context in which the programme was operating and how the mechanisms put in place would achieve their intended outputs and outcomes. However, the time to do this was limited as the immediate focus was on delivery. This meant that it was not possible to set up all the systems that the programme organisers hoped would help to facilitate intended outcomes. For instance, the development of partnerships, through regular meetings, the setup of a cultural network to drive collaboration and the early establishment of clear links with different local authority departments, did not happen. Similarly the time-scale was too short to be confident that the social and economic changes anticipated would be achieved, or that the infrastructure for creative industry development in Merthyr Tydfil would be in place. In addition the evaluation team was itself not appointed until March 2022. However journeys of change were created and, for instance, early pathways have been created to enable children and young people to see the creative industries as viable career options through industry experiences which linked them to their own interests, aspirations and skills. Similarly partnerships and networks were an important driver of change but these emerged in unanticipated ways, which the evaluation team have described in this report.

Qualitative methods were used to collect data throughout the entire programme, from a range of different stakeholders and programme activities, including individuals taking part, partner organisations, local stakeholders, and programme staff. Data were collected via interviews, focus groups and observation, with a mixture of face-to-face and online methods.

In total, 34 interviews with project staff and partners were conducted. Before and after interviews were conducted with all creative industry partners. The programme manager was also interviewed at the beginning of the evaluation. Initial interviews were conducted to enable the evaluators to understand their previous connections to the people and organisations in Merthyr Tydfil, their own contributions to the programme and how they felt they would help to achieve the programme vision, where they were in terms of delivery and what training or activities they had planned. Some organisations had nearly completed or had made a start on delivery, though others had delayed their plans as by that time the extension of the programme had been announced. This helped to both set the context in terms of the resources of the programme, the context in relation to where the programme was at the time, as well as

informing the research questions that were asked at the end of the programme to assess the journey of change and the outputs and outcomes that were achieved. It also gave the evaluation team an opportunity to identify what events, processes and workshops we could observe.

Final interviews were conducted with creative industry partners, the programme management team, people in sectors and organisations that benefited as well as local participants. We felt that it was more important, in this evaluation, to focus on organisational beneficiaries, such as schools, as this is where the impact, legacy and sustainability was easier to discern. Participant feedback has been collected by the individual creative industry partners in their own evaluations.

Observations were conducted in a variety of workshops and activities. This provided an opportunity to understand how activities were delivered and articulated to participants. It also provided an opportunity to see how participants interacted and talked between themselves about the activities and how they might use the learning. It also provided an opportunity to assess the extent to which, for instance, visual links were made to the wider programme and, through informal conversations, if participants were aware of other activities and opportunities. Observations can provide valuable ethnographic information relating to the format of delivery and engagement of participants, as well as being able to collect informal 'in situ' feedback from participants and facilitators, which can sometimes be more insightful than asking participants to reflect in an interview setting on activities that have taken place in the past.

A focus group was held in October 2022. All creative industry partners were invited and seven participants from six of the organisations attended. This provided an opportunity for a more collective discussion on the aims and objectives of the programme and the extent to which they were a fit with their own objectives, their experience of working in Merthyr Tydfil itself, the extent to which there was partnership working, their experience of how the programme was managed (including communication and branding), the extent to which they made links with schools, venues, community organisations (and so on) and what they might have changed in the programme to achieve its aims.

All data were recorded via handwritten field notes, audio recorders, or online video recording. All participants were asked to fill in informed consent forms. They were assured of anonymity in terms of the personal views they offered. Where people are named, it is either because they have given special consent or these views have been offered publicly, such as in the podcasts that have been delivered as part of this evaluation. All data has been protected and stored in password protected files.

We commissioned Steph Bridgeman of [Experienced Media Analysts](#) to conduct a Media Sentiment Analysis (MSA) to support the evaluation, and assess how far the programme was gaining traction in local and national media. MSA is useful to explore how people talk about a brand, identifying the emotional tone and classifying what people say into sentiment categories (e.g. positive, negative, neutral). We felt this would be a useful addition to the evaluation, to give feedback not only on the Creu Cyffro brand, but on how people talk about Merthyr Tydfil in relation to culture and the creative industries. Steph analysed media content between January and November 2022, looking at earned media coverage, social sharing of news, and internet search behaviours. Published online news referencing 'Merthyr' were included in the analysis, along with a qualitative analysis and exploration as to the extent such stories were shared on

social media. The internet search analysis asked whether the phrasing used in common Google searches for Merthyr indicated positive or negative reputation.

The use of community media offered an opportunity for people involved in the programme to reflect and share observations in an informal conversational format. We decided to incorporate a podcast channel into the evaluation methodology as a cost-effective way of casting a light on what Creu Cyffro was doing and achieving, and bring this to the attention of an audience beyond those directly involved in the programme. Podcast media is growing rapidly, particularly in the 'social sector'. Even before the COVID-19 pandemic and enforced lockdowns transformed podcast listening and production, www.thirdsector.co.uk had described 2019 as 'the year of the charity podcast' with the sector grasping the opportunity to use the media to showcase its social and economic value. During 2020 almost 900,000 new podcasts were started globally, almost treble the 2019 figure²². Rajar estimates that in 2022 19% of the UK population aged 15+ (almost 1 in 5) listen to podcasts on a weekly or more basis²³. We therefore felt that the inclusion of podcasts would be an accessible and long-lasting output for the evaluation.

In addition to recording podcast episodes with delivery partners, we also delivered two training sessions for residents who might be interested in developing podcasts as a form of community media. It was our hope that local ownership of the Creu Cyffro podcast channel may see it develop into a vibrant local podcast. The channel could, for example, provide an outlet for Menter Iaith Merthyr and other Welsh language organisations to develop a local Welsh language presence in podcast media.

Podcast and community media training was hosted at The Talking Shop in Merthyr Tydfil on two occasions during the evaluation. The training aimed to build capacity among people connected to Creu Cyffro: participants, deliverers, venues and project partners. Participants came from Safer Merthyr Tydfil, Canolfan Soar, Merthyr Tydfil Heritage Trust, Artis Community, Urdd Gobaith Cymru; one attended in a personal capacity

Participants were set the task of recording interactions with people in the indoor market, including stallholders and customers, as well as market management. None of the first cohort were interested in taking over the Creu Cyffro podcast, mainly because they were interested in setting up their own. They could however see the value in something which was focused on the local cultural sector.

²² Chartable, How podcasts powered through the pandemic—and what comes next, 3 February 2021, <https://chartable.com/blog/2020-year-in-review>.

²³ Rajar, *MIDAS Measurement of Internet Delivered Audio Services - summer 2022*, https://www.rajar.co.uk/docs/news/MIDAS_Summer_2022_.pdf



3.5. Difference between podcasts and interviews

Everyone connected with Creu Cyffro had the opportunity to participate in a podcast episode. All participants were aware that their contributions would be made available publicly and so comments could be attributed to the participant. Furthermore their attention was drawn to potential implications of attribution and the mentioning of other people in the episodes. This process was part of the wider ethics of the evaluation and follows best practice outlined by Braun and Clarke²⁴. This point is important because it is in contrast to the evaluation's commitment that interviews and observations would remain *unattributed*. Podcasts offer an opportunity to offer animated reflection where tone and emotion in themselves become a way of creating meaning as intended by the speaker. The downside of traditional interviews is that the sense around 'quotes' is under the control of the evaluator who is the sense-maker. In addition, written quotes are flattened and devoid of the speaker's intentions to communicate in ways that are more dynamic.

However sense-making is necessary when trying to see patterns and develop theory about what is happening, or being articulated, across a number of accounts. In addition all expressions of opinion or accounts of events are shaped by the context in which they are given. Public accounts are often carefully delivered in the context of perceived risk such as reputation or accusation. With regard to research and evaluation there are often views and accounts that respondents wish to be unattributable. They may not wish to tarnish relationships or, in this case, perhaps risk losing opportunities for work or contracts in the future. And yet patterns emerge from these more private and protected accounts and it is the responsibility to ensure that, what may seem like very individual views reflect the experiences of others. However we would argue that podcasts and anonymised interviews complement each other well and offer different ways of hearing and understanding the programme.

²⁴ Braun, V, Clarke, V (2013) *Successful Qualitative Research*, Sage: London

In this report where quotes are drawn from podcast discussions an accompanying link is provided that takes you to the specific passage in the recording. Quotes originally made in Welsh are included with an English translation.

4. Findings from the Media Sentiment Analysis

The key findings from the MSA are shown in the graphic below. The full report is in Appendix 3.

Executive Summary

Perception of Merthyr Tydfil



There is a **perception** that Merthyr is **portrayed negatively** in the media. Analysis of **recent online news** (January to June 2022), content being shared on social media and common internet search phrasing reveals this **not to be the case**.

This suggests that **negative perceptions** about the area are **based on historic factors**. Reasons for any lingering perceptions could be explored through **qualitative audience surveys**.

Negative perceptions and historic factors



News of cultural activities



News of cultural activities aided **positive reporting**. **PR from local businesses** is also helping to portray the area in a **favourable light**. UK **national news** titles focusing on the area's tourism offer and **residential affordability** are also **portraying Merthyr favourably**.

Topics driving headline mentions of Merthyr are **sport** (content about the football team meant that a Vietnamese news site was amongst the most prolific news outlets), **residents' news**, **local business news** or **job creation**, **cultural activities** and **local politics**.

Topics driving headline mentions



Media signals of negative reputation

2% -ve

Media signals of negative reputation are **minimal** – just **2% of news** was **negative** (e.g. around anti social behaviour), **Google searches** for **negative phrases** such as "Merthyr Tydfil deprivation" or "how rough is Merthyr" receive **negligible search volumes** (<10 per month).

5. Stories of Success

Although certainly not without challenges, largely due to time and timing factors which were beyond their control, Creu Cyffro did progress in their aim to develop, and involve, the creative industries in Merthyr Tydfil. The following section includes case studies which provide details of interventions or ways of working that could be seen as demonstrating success and provide insight into ways of working that could be developed or inform future developments. Some of the sections overlap and the following case studies also hide some of the obstacles and challenges that also define the experiences of creative industry partners. These limitations are outlined in the next section. Industry partners gave permission for these examples to be reported and checked them for accuracy.

5.1. Developing pathways into the creative industries

The creative industries are dependent on a workforce that is skilled and innovative and in Merthyr Tydfil an intended benefit of the Creu Cyffro programme was the development of a skilled workforce. This is challenging, in a programme with such a short timescale, in an area where the former industries that sustained the local economy have long gone, and where the infrastructure for the creative industries is still in its infancy. Alongside growing the infrastructure for producers and consumers of industry products, there have to be viable local pathways for people, of all ages and at different stages of skills development, to be able to participate. It was clear that the Creu Cyffro programme did illuminate possible pathways into the creative industries from school age children and young people, adults wishing to develop their creative skills and those already in professional creative roles who wish to expand, refresh or refocus their skills and career opportunities.

Schools were an important focus for some partners, recognising that career options can only be seen as possible if young people are provided with insight into what creative industry jobs look like and what skills they may need to pursue them.

Industry Experience in Schools

Into Film is a charity supported by the British Film Institute (via National Lottery funding) and aims to put film into the heart of education in schools. Whilst they focus on the use of film literacy and filmmaking in the classroom (see below), for Creu Cyffro they also delivered a film industry experience programme for young people who may be interested in developing a career in this expanding area. Called ScreenWorks Cymru and based on the successful programme running in Northern Ireland (funded via Northern Ireland Screen), the aim was to enable young people to have hands-on experience of some of the hidden roles in the industry, through workshops delivered by film industry practitioners. The benefits of the ScreenWorks programme are that it illuminates the pathways into the film industry and attempts to show how careers are achievable.

Aimed at 14–19-year-olds they delivered hands-on three-day comprehensive practical experiences of work in a variety of industry areas including filmmaking, art department,

prosthetics, editing and sound effects. They also delivered some one-day workshops. They aimed to make the workshops as close as possible to what people in these roles actually do. For instance, in Pen Y Dre High School learners were given an unpublished script and had to consider a whole range of possibilities in bringing the script to life through film, such as which locations to choose, which clothes reflected the time and context, types of cars, props, lighting, furnishings and so on.

Workshops mainly took place in a hub school, whilst inviting young people from other schools to attend. Holding workshops in a hub school was felt to be easier, logistically, than in a community venue. It also helped to develop relationships with, and between, the schools themselves. As well as providing skills and film industry experiences, Into Film were also able to engage young people directly in thinking about their school subject choices and how these may help to create pathways into different industry options.

What Into Film brought to schools and young people was not just their teaching resources, but their relationships and connections with the film industry itself. It is a reminder that the creative industries can provide opportunities to young people who may otherwise not know what possibilities exist. However, whilst the *willingness* of the industry is there, its make-up (freelancers/SME/big companies) means that they often lack the capacity, regarding safeguarding and insurance, to offer that help and support to under 18s.

Careers advisors also play a crucial role in supporting young people in their early career pathways, but they often have little knowledge of the multiplicity of career options that are possible in the screen industries. Screen Alliance offered a relatively simple, yet effective, training offer to careers advisors themselves. As well as providing benefits for young people considering multiple options in the creative industries careers, it potentially benefits the creative industries themselves in accessing skills from people in demographics that are often overlooked or excluded.

Training for careers advisers

Screen Alliance Wales is an industry-established organisation which aims to support the screen industry in Wales through recruitment, career development and working with young people to inspire them to pursue careers in the creative industries. At the time that the application for Creu Cyffro was being developed, Careers Wales was looking for new training opportunities for its career advisers. A collaboration was forged between the two organisations and a programme of training was developed as part of Creu Cyffro. From Careers Wales's perspective, staff are mostly based in schools, and rarely get the opportunity to visit industry sectors to get a feel for what employers in the creative industries are looking for; things move on very quickly, and it is easy for advice to become out of date.

The training involved a combination of classroom-based activities, and a site visit to Dragon Studios in Bridgend. Staff fed back that having a site visit was very powerful as it helped them to understand more about the creative industries first-hand, including new tools and methods specific to the creative industries. One careers adviser noted that the training highlighted careers in the creative industries that are not seen as ‘arty’ and that it pointed out the range of local businesses that had been given opportunities to work with Dragon Studios, such as scaffolding companies. A representative from Careers Wales fed back that two careers advisers felt it was the best training they had received in 40 years of being at Careers Wales. It was felt that not only was the training of an excellent standard and valuable to careers advisers, but that it was an effective team bonding experience which the organisation is keen to repeat on a regular basis.

Rhys Bebb from Screen Alliance Wales spoke of how part of SCA’s remit is to raise awareness of the diverse range of career opportunities that exist in the TV and film sector. Creu Cyffro had helped with this but even though SCA’s knowledge of the sector was extensive already, the programme had helped deepen this further ([link](#)):

<p>O fy safbwynt i oedd e’n eitha diddorol achos un o’r gweithgareddau lle on i di oedd hyrwyddo nifer o gwmnïoedd [sic] sy’n gweithio yn yr ardal; yn ystod gwneud y gweithgaredd, fe nath e hyrwyddo i fi cweit gymiant o gynydd sy’n cael eu cynhyrchu yng Nghymru. Dyn ni’n ffodus efallai, achos bod cwmnïau cynhyrchu wedi’u sefydlu i wneud rhaglenni ar gyfer S4C. Nhw’n hefyd cynhyrchu gymaint fwy o gynydd ar gyfer rhaglenni dych chi erioed i’w clywed amdano, ac ar gyfer sianelau dych chi erioed eu clywed amdano. Ond mae’r cynydd ma yn digwydd ac mae cymaint fwy yn digwydd yn ne Cymru</p>	<p>From my perspective it's been quite interesting because one of the activities where I have worked has been promoting the number of companies which work in the area; while doing that activity it brought home to me quite how much gets produced in Wales. We are perhaps fortunate because there are production companies which have been set up to make programmes for S4C. But they also produce lots more content for programmes that you've never heard of and channels you've never heard of. But this content does exist and a lot more happens in south Wales.</p>
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Careers Wales were one of the beneficiaries of this expertise and spoke highly in episode 8 of the podcast of the experience of working with SCA, and in particular how careers advisors’ knowledge of the media sector has been broadened ([link](#)):

<p>Maen nhw’n meddwl bod dim ond y camera neu actorion sy’ [eu] angen yn y diwydiant yma.</p>	<p>They think that it is only the camera or actors for whom there is a need in this industry.</p>
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<p>[Ond bu'n] grêt i weld sut mae'r diwydiant yn gweithio ac agor ein llygaid ni a llygaid y cyngorwyr gyrfaedd am sawl gyrfaedd ar gael i greu ffilm neu tv. Felly byddant nhw wedi siarad â'r plant ac yn gwybod iddyn nhw faint o swyddi sydd yna a sut maen nhw'n edrych ar y swyddi.</p>	<p>[But it's been] great to see how the industry works and open our eyes and the eyes of the careers advisers about how many careers are available to create film or TV. So they will have spoken with children and let them know how many jobs are available there and how they look for the jobs.</p>
<p>(link)</p>	
<p>Pan aethom ni lawr i Stwdio Dragon roedd yn grêt i weld sut mae'n gweithio ac i <i>kind of</i> cael blas o sut maen nhw'n gweithio a pha rolau yn gwneud beth a sawl rôl maen nhw yn[ddi]. Achos mae rolau gwahanol mewn ffilmiau gwahanol yn dibynnu ar beth mae'r ffilm yn sôn am[dano]</p>	<p>When we went down to Dragon Studios it was great to see how it works and to kind of have a taste of how they work and which roles do what and how many roles there are. Because there are different roles in different films depending on what the film is about.</p>

Beyond the formal educational system, apprenticeships offer a pathway to employment for people just leaving the educational system and/or to those who have not had opportunities to find stable full time work. Apprenticeships can offer skills in an environment where they can also develop productive social relationships with people working in the industries themselves.

Apprenticeship Scheme

Wales Millennium Centre and Redhouse Cymru ran an apprenticeship scheme for 5 individuals starting out in the creative industries. The aim of the scheme was to work with people who had been in receipt of Universal Credit, to develop skills in a number of different areas of the creative industries, with a focus on events and set design. A key aim for apprentices was to build up their contacts and networks in the industry, with a view to obtaining employment following the scheme.

A range of training opportunities were given, including crewing, setting up and taking down sets, lighting and sound, flying, rigging, First Aid and production management. There were some challenges in the running of the apprenticeship scheme, but in terms of outcomes the results were positive. Three of the five individuals have gained full time employment in the creative industries, as a direct result of their participation in the scheme. One apprentice was offered a job during his first placement,

and another at the end of her placement. The third grew in confidence throughout his placement and has been working at Redhouse alongside a technician to further develop his skills. As one of the apprentices said: *“my goal was to find employment... I’m working full time as a scenic artist now at one of my placements during the [scheme]... so I feel I’ve really benefited from it”*.

Skills development and industry participation does not necessarily stop when people start their working careers. People at any age can discover that they have skills and creative passions but with little opportunity to develop and utilise these. In some cases opportunities for skills development, and the associated growth of confidence, and familiarisation with other people working in the industries can lead to creative industry participation. In Merthyr Tydfil it has been felt that there is both latent and overt talent that is overlooked and underutilised. Many of the industry partners offered workshops to people, and to families, living in the borough. These included Open University (creative writing and music) Community Music Wales (weekly ukulele sessions; soundwalk and animation, Rock School for young people, drumming, animation and sound recording – all bilingual) and the Wales Millennium Centre (dance, circus skills, radio production, cooking). In one project a local successful artist ran workshops in creative writing to people in the area who wished to develop and focus their writing skills for film.

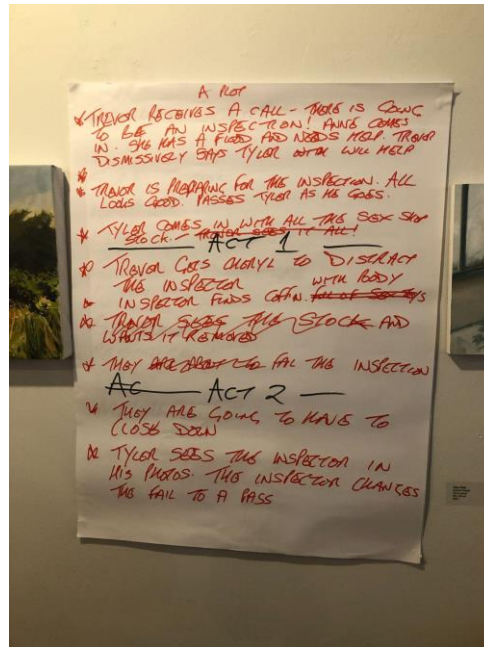
Creative Writing

Anthony Bunko, a local author, playwright and film script writer, provided a creative writing course focusing on the development of film scripts. The course started in early March and finished in May 2022. There were 14 participants in total, usually 10-12 in each session, and they were recruited through his own Facebook site and through a couple of other writing groups in the area. Some already had experience of script writing. They met, every Monday, in a pub in the centre of town. This is an example of a project in which a local artist is teaching, mentoring and developing local talent in Merthyr Tydfil, for the film industry itself. It was noted, by one of the Creu Cyffro management team, that there was a high retention of participants until the course ended, indicating the commitment, fulfilment and enjoyment that was also reflected in evaluation forms.

The ultimate aim was to develop a film script and the sessions provided him with an opportunity to teach the right and wrong ways of writing for film. The delegates wrote short stories – either in pairs or by themselves. In between sessions, participants would send him their own scripts and he would communicate with them individually.

Originally they had 30 stories which were reduced to six scripts with which they could work. Individual evaluations were positive and indicated an interest in progressing. Anthony Bunko continues to keep in contact through group emails and is planning to continue once further funding is secured. It should be noted that as a freelancer he depends on funding for independently running sessions, though he has also delivered film script training with media students at the local college. Here he worked

with students to write a brand new play which was then performed to learners in year one as part of their college course



Finally local creatives themselves, even if established professionals, need to have opportunities to develop their skills as well as their connections to other artists and creatives to improve their career options and their professional development. Such opportunities also enable professionals in Merthyr Tydfil to see the area as a basis for development without needing looking out of the area.

Capacity building in the creative industries

Community Music Wales (CMW) is a national arts charity, newly based in Redhouse Cymru, Merthyr Tydfil. As part of Creu Cyffro, CMW had the opportunity to expand their portfolio of activities to a wider range of beneficiaries, and to pilot some new activities. These included training courses for professionals and an improvisation course for college students at the beginning of their careers. These enabled new and established professionals to develop their careers in the sector. Feedback from participants was very positive, and included musicians who, having taken part in the training, were now finding work in Merthyr Tydfil for the first time. Students who took part in an improvisation course felt that the skills they had learned would benefit them as they began their careers in music, and that they wanted to seek further opportunities in improvisation. In this way, the activities offered by CMW contributed to capacity building within the local area, for those beginning or developing their careers in the creative industries

5.2. Developing networks and partnerships

One of the drivers for change in the original bid for the Creu Cyffro programme was the development of networks and partnerships which would help to grow the capacity for cultural and creative industry development.

Lis McLean, from Canolfan Soar, recorded a podcast ([link](#)) in which she stated:

Beth i ni [Soar] wedi trio gwneud yw dod â phartnerau nad ydym ni ddim wedi gweithio â nhw o'r blaen, yn enwedig Lee [Davies], er mwyn gweld sut maen nhw'n gallu darparu yn ein hardal ni er mwyn cryfhau'r cysylltiadau yna i'r dyfodol rili. Ac wrth wneud hynny [felly] bod y lleoliadau sef y glinig, y Redhouse Cymru, Theatr Soar yn cydweithredu.	What we [Soar] have tried to do is bring partners together with whom we haven't worked before, especially Lee [Davies], in order to see how they can provide for our area and in order to strengthen those connections in the future really. And through doing so that locations like the Clinic, Redhouse Cymru, Theatr Soar are co-operating.
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The [report by Straeon Research Ltd](#) in developing a model for a cultural network in the borough highlighted the need to facilitate ways of working together as cultural partners, with third and public sector organisations and with residents and community organisations themselves. One of the challenges for creative partners in the programme, was in delivering activities in the absence of such established relationships. There was an intention to use the programme to launch and establish the cultural network as well as to bring the cultural partners together on a monthly basis to encourage joint working and innovation. This did not happen, but it was also clear that important and potentially productive relationships were created. It is important to establish how these happened and where, so that these can be developed, or be the basis of learning and discussion as to the role that partnerships and networks play in developing and supporting the growth of the sector locally.

For organisations that were not already based in Merthyr Tydfil, or who had a regional or national remit, the challenges in delivering activities locally were particularly evident. One-off activities in the absence of prior engagement mostly failed to attract participants. For the Open University, however, one strand of activity focused on co-production as an end itself, leaving a legacy of new partnerships and relationships, as well as ideas for future developments. Rather than using this approach across the borough they focused on a small defined area. In this way they could learn what might work in engaging with other communities.

Engaging with hyperlocal organisations and residents

With a design team (from their base in Milton Keynes) the Open University wanted to co-create an event that would capture some of the issues of concern to local people. Starting

small they focused on a particular area of the borough, Gurnos, one of the most economically deprived areas in the UK and also the target of negative, and therefore often stigmatising, media stories about the area. They wanted to draw on strengthening approaches which celebrated the area whilst not ignoring shared matters of concern. The aim was to harness the resources and ideas of local people and organisations to help shape the future. They wanted to do this creatively, so involved people in the creative industries to help them do this together.

The result was the Celebrating Gurnos event held in September 2022. The aim was to use the event to engage local people in matters of concern in a positive way, which unlocked their imaginations. Much of the focus was on housing and the involvement of Merthyr Valleys Homes, the provider of social housing locally with a commitment to community engagement, was crucial. Activities, including an engagement tree (designed by a schools based artist-in-residence and developed by school students, a graffiti wall led by a graffiti artist, activities focused on the natural environment, and roaming musicians. Students on the Radio Platform programme (delivered by the Wales Millennium Centre) interviewed participants throughout the day.

The process of co-production, which started with a design event which included a walking tour of the area, over the months was as important as the event itself. As a result, the Open University has established relationships with the local housing association (which would like to roll out the process of engagement to other areas of the borough) and strategic relationships with the education sector at the local authority level. In addition, the Open University has made its presence and commitment visible to the local community, which has created the basis for future potential engagement.

For local residents, the process has left a legacy in terms of artwork which has found a place in schools and in visual banners that will be used for future events and developments.

As one organisational participant reflected:

What stands out for me is that it was all done through this strength-based lens. You're not going to tap into any potential in any of these areas, like Gurnos by reinforcing stigma and reinforcing stereotypes. You have to bring a dialogue that tells people that the skills, passions and talents that they have got are the very thing that communities can really benefit from and we saw that on the day. I think that strengths based philosophy stayed from the design phase through to the evaluation that is going on currently.



In some creative industries partnerships are evolving but need to be established more clearly in Merthyr Tydfil. Community radio is an area of development that could be seen as creating a form of bridging social capital between different community groups, cultural industry partners and other sectors. Creu Cyffro funding helped to strengthen these as part of a long-term plan (led by GTFM which was originally established in the neighbouring borough of Rhondda Cynon Taff (RCT)), to establish community radio in the Merthyr Tydfil.

Developing future radio reach (GTFM)

GTFM is the Welsh Government's Flagship community radio station, and the longest running community radio station in Wales. Prior to Creu Cyffro, GTFM did not claim to cover Merthyr Tydfil. Creu Cyffro funding enabled GTFM to explore the development of a community radio station for Merthyr Tydfil, working with community stakeholders, volunteers and the UK Communications Regulator, OFCOM. This is a long-term goal which will continue past the time frame of Creu Cyffro, but significant advances were made in terms of local engagement, buy-in and strategic development and relationship building. GTFM worked collaboratively throughout the project period with OFCOM to set up a new

digital platform covering the Merthyr Tydfil County, which will be able to carry a future Merthyr Radio community station. GTFM established links with potential funders along with many local organisations, including the Merthyr and Valleys MIND branch and the local Cwm Taf Health Board, representatives from whom regularly appear as guests on GTFM. Links were also developed with Merthyr Borough County Council and local emergency services and significant Merthyr Tydfil news, travel and weather updates are broadcast on GTFM. This networking will only grow as the prospect of a community station for Merthyr Tydfil becomes closer.

Some of the problems that Creu Cyffro had in the early stages had a negative impact on the activities that creative partners could deliver (see the next chapter). However, in one case this led to the development of innovative solutions in the form of new partnership development. For First Campus some damage to relationships led to a programme of repair which had a positive impact on their relationships to local organisations and community groups that they had not initially anticipated. The case study below highlights again the importance and value of investing in relationship building.

Increasing learning networks and relationships

Reaching Wider First Campus (RWFC) planned to deliver a series of one-off arts workshops with community groups, as well as three 6-week courses led by academic partners, through June and July. For a number of reasons, these did not go ahead, and the programme of activity was pulled. This resulted in a financial loss, as well as damage to relationships with academic partners. RWFC regrouped and brought in an extra member of staff to repair some of the damage done to relationships, co-ordinate activities, and work with local organisations to maximise uptake. After an initial regrouping period where the new team member met with organisations and groups in the area, new relationships were forged over the summer months. These included organisations such as MIND Cymru, Canolfan Soar and Twyn Community Hub. After this initial relationship building and understanding the needs of potential beneficiaries, activities were delivered successfully with a range of participants. Through the re-profiling of their Creu Cyffro activities, RWFC has been able to bring adult learners into their wider strategy. In particular, RWFC was able to work with adults with special needs at a local community hub. As well as providing activities that the group would otherwise not have had access to, and impacting on their mental health in a positive way, RWFC has been able to extend their reach into a new area with new beneficiaries. RWFC feels that there is potential to extend the project and is committed to continuing delivery in Merthyr Tydfil following the completion of Creu Cyffro.

As well as cross community, sectoral and creative industry partnerships is the need for people working in, or who feel they could be part of, a creative partnership to network and evolve their skills and profile. Beacons Bees was the only partner to focus on local visual artists and makers. By establishing a creative hub they have been able to enable local artists to come together to drive the direction in which this part of the creative industries may be heading.

Development of a creative hub

Beacons Bees is based in the Bothy (a café and art gallery/workshop in the grounds of Cyfarthfa Museum) and led by Rob Taylor and Alison Richards. Their aim is to support makers and painters develop their practice and have a platform for selling their work. The creative hub is the driver to bring artists together so that developments are informed by participant needs and ambitions. By the end of the project they had met eight times. Alongside the creative hub Beacons Bees held 28 workshops in 38 sessions (a combination of one-day tasters and six-week courses) in a variety of arts practices including fused glass, silversmithing, watercolour/acrylic painting, flower arranging, willow weaving and calligraphy. They have an email list of about 200 people who have expressed an interest in being involved. Some heard about the development through word of mouth, others drawn by curiosity when visiting the gallery and café at the Bothy.

Whilst at the beginning of the Creu Cyffro programme they delivered workshops entirely themselves, sharing their own expertise, they are now getting volunteers from the relationships developed in the creative hub, to deliver workshops thereby extending the development of creative leadership, opportunities, resources and skills in the area. Interviews highlighted that there was an appetite from participants to be able to develop their skills further – with the Bothy (or somewhere larger and more suitable) through hot-benching opportunities where they would have access to materials, tools and expertise.



A different type of creative hub, linked to democratic participation, was also established as part of Wales Millennium Centre's programme of activities. With a physical presence in the town centre, The Talking

Shop would become a hub for creative activity, information sharing, networking, conversations and democratic participation. The Talking Shop is described by Omidaze Productions below:

“The Talking Shop (created by Yvonne Murphy/Omidaze Productions) is being trialled in towns and cities across Wales by Omidaze in order to create a blueprint for how to use The Talking Shop and The Democracy Box as models for ‘A Conversation with the Nation’ and to increase democratic participation both at and beyond the ballot box. The first trial Talking Shops™ open in Newport in April and in Cardiff in May 2022 for with collaborators the [Riverfront](#) and [Youth Cymru](#). Merthyr is the third and longest trial to date. All Talking Shops© contain [The Democracy Box©](#). The Talking Shop© is a non-partisan cultural and democratic information centre. The Talking Shop is a physical ‘what’s on’ hub which everyone helps curate. It is a public space which explores the intersection between cultural and democratic participation. A shop which sells nothing and ideas, information and conversation is free. And so is the tea. A space with information, creation and conversation at its core. A space in which to articulate, champion and strengthen the role of the creativity and democracy in society and empower through a sharing of information and knowledge. A place which encourages and facilitates public engagement with creativity, arts and culture and democratic participation. An open and safe space for the public and creatives to be informed citizens and collide, converse, connect, collude and create.” See more at <https://www.omidaze.co.uk/the-talking-shop/>, and in [this Decentered Media podcast episode](#) with Rob Watson from April 2019.

Developing creative spaces for democratic participation

The Talking Shop opened in Merthyr Tydfil on 8th October 2022, and has been a key success of Creu Cyffro and the Wales Millennium Centre’s activities within the programme. Within just two months the Talking Shop had welcomed over 3000 visitors. Visitors of all ages, from pre-school to octogenarians have walked through the doors since its opening, and visitors have been signposted to a number of services including mental health services, support workers and elected representatives. Four visitors have become volunteers, and five have applied to become paid young creators with The Democracy Box. Twelve freelance creatives have been recruited and trained as hosts to add to the existing team , seven of whom are from Merthyr Tydfil and the surrounding areas. In terms of events at the Talking Shop, there were regular sessions run by organisations such as Head4Arts, Communities 4 Work and Wales Millennium Centre, along with knit and natter, Welsh language sessions, poetry readings and music sessions. In addition there were 26 one-off sessions including arts and crafts, exhibitions, educational talks, creative writing, dance, illustration, collage, advice sessions, collective rehearsals, and recruitment days. Yvonne Murphy felt that the Talking Shop had been a success from the outset, despite challenges such as lack of lead-in time, which is discussed in section 6 below. People were queuing up at the door on the opening day. *“I’m just overwhelmed by just how much they want it and need it”*, she reflected. With no lead-in time and minimal advertising, the Talking Shop was averaging 60 people per day. This shows the potential reach if this model was sustained. People say that they love the Talking Shop because *“there’s nowhere else we can go that’s non-judgmental, we feel safe here, we don’t have*

to buy anything here”; in this way, the Talking Shop is a welcome antidote to consumer culture and the commercialization and monetization of public space.

Omidaze Productions were not aware that the funding for the Talking Shop came from the UK Levelling Up Fund. As a non-partisan organisation, they are concerned about the association with the fact that the funding could potentially be viewed as party political, which would go against the ethos of the Talking Shop and the Democracy Project.

5.3. Sector Development - teaching and learning

There was some evidence that the Creu Cyffro could impact on a range of factors that could be developed to facilitate joint working with other sectors and services. For instance the reporting of health and wellbeing impacts suggests possible links with public health and local health services. Similarly the Open University developed what appeared to be productive relationships with the social housing sector (Merthyr Valleys Homes). However the most clearly delineated relationship was with schools and the involvement of creative partners in supporting the delivery of new curriculum in Wales where there is a clear role for the expressive and creative arts in teaching a range of subject areas. Whilst College Merthyr (Merthyr Tydfil’s further education college) expanded their e-sports training through Virtual Reality (VR) training, the clearest development was in schools.

Teacher Training

Whilst accessing schools to deliver Continuous Professional Development (CPD) training, was a major challenge, creative industry partners were able to demonstrate its value where it happened. Both Into Film (see above) and Puppet Soup (a puppetry theatre company) provided training to teachers on how to use specific expressive arts practices in curriculum delivery. This is particularly pertinent now that the new curriculum is being rolled out across Wales. This includes an emphasis on the value of a more holistic approach to teaching and the use of expressive arts in delivering a wide range of subject areas.

Into Film provided two main training courses: film literacy (how to use existing films to support teaching in a variety of curriculum areas, and filmmaking (how to make short films with school learners or for teachers themselves to communicate ideas or information). Into Film stress that filmmaking is also about telling stories and teachers being able to give young people the platform to tell their own stories as well as developing key life skills such as communication, teamwork, and problem solving.

Puppet soup provided workshops to teachers on the use of different kinds of puppets in different curriculum areas; as a way of communicating *to* young learners; and as a way of working *with* school learners.

Into Film delivered film literacy and filmmaking workshops to teachers in Merthyr Tydfil and in neighbouring boroughs. Whilst there were challenges in supply cover for workshops held in venues, they worked well as twilight sessions in particular schools – where there could be more of a focus on how the sessions were relevant to delivery *in situ*. There was evidence of teachers using film in their teaching practice as well as recognition of the achievements of some teaching staff (e.g. Pen Y Dre submitted a film for the Into Film UK film of the month competition and were runners up in October; and a member of staff is now a member of the Into Film education ambassadors UK). Into film also provide online resources for their courses, guides and events to support educators who have set-up an account on its website as further legacy and ongoing support to all the educators involved.

Puppet Soup held a one-day workshop in Greenfield Special School, inviting teachers from schools across Merthyr Tydfil. Well over 100 teachers and teaching assistants attended (mainly from Greenfield School). The session involved a mixture of talks: the role and the value of the expressive arts in delivering the curriculum; puppetry as a means of communication and as a means of teaching discussing challenging subjects; puppetry and team working; and puppetry as an inclusionary art form able to explore diverse identities and bodies. It was interspersed with practical opportunities to make several different types of puppets as well as experimenting with techniques as to how to animate them. All the materials were provided and could easily be accessed and replicated. Interviews with teachers indicated that some had already incorporated the use of puppets into their plans for curriculum delivery (e.g. shadow puppets to teach ideas of light and dark) as well as a mechanism for communicating with pupils who had experienced trauma or who found the classroom setting challenging.



5.4. Profile of Merthyr as Cultural centre: cultural activity, training and capacity building.

The two main cultural centres in Merthyr Tydfil are Redhouse Cymru and Canolfan Soar. Both were important in the Creu Cyffro programme as venues and as centres for cultural activities in the form of workshops and training events. Canolfan Soar is known for its focus on Welsh language events and activities.

The Creu Cyffro programme included £100k for events which both venues felt was successful in attracting audiences, generating income and developing the reputation of Merthyr Tydfil as a place to visit for a range of cultural events. It has also helped to develop joint working between the two venues with the appointment of shared technical staff.

Merthyr Tydfil as a destination for events

The events programme written into the application is an area of definite success for Creu Cyffro. Although delivery of this element of the programme changed from the original proposal, the programme enabled 76 events to take place across two key venues in the town: Redhouse Cymru and Canolfan Soar. Historically there have been some tensions between the two venues. Creu Cyffro was a key factor in boosting the collaborative work both venues have been aiming towards more recently. One example of this is that there is now a joint member of staff who works across both venues.

In the original application, £100,000 was included to support 40 events across both venues. This would be a mixed programme of events, with opportunities for workshops to run in areas such as set design, stage management and graphic design. Although these

were the ideals set out in the application, unfortunately they did not come to fruition as fully as the programme manager hoped.

However, the events programme was a definite success for both venues. The increase in capacity afforded by Creu Cyffro meant that both venues enjoyed bigger audiences and many sell-out events. The programme manager commented that people from the town came into Redhouse Cymru who had not stepped foot inside since it was a nightclub in the 1990s, and that the events programme attracted people from further afield. The increase in events also helped to generate additional revenue for both venues, and increase their prominence and key places for cultural and arts participation.

Whilst Redhouse Cymru has increasingly been seen as a place for theatre and music events and exhibitions, it struggles in being a cultural space for community facing activities. Some partners had difficulty in booking workshops and activities there and felt that it had too much of an events focus.

However, the location of Community Music Wales in the Redhouse Cymru has helped to change this as well as contributing to the increased joint working between the Redhouse Cymru and Canolfan Soar that the events programme also facilitated. This has also meant that both venues are increasingly being seen as a destination for music related education and activity.

Venues as destinations for creative activities

Through Creu Cyffro, Community Music Wales (CMW) was able to expand its delivery of activities within Merthyr Tydfil, which was a new area for the charity. Recently moved into new premises at Redhouse Cymru, CMW was keen to develop relationships and networks with local groups and organisations. Through Creu Cyffro, CMW was able to make inroads into the local area much quicker than would have otherwise been possible. Running sessions at two key venues in the town, Redhouse Cymru and Canolfan Soar, meant that collaborative relationships were forged which will continue beyond the life of Creu Cyffro. One noteworthy point is that people from outside of Merthyr Tydfil travelled to take part in some activities such as Rock School and the musician training sessions. CMW learned that nothing like Rock School is offered in the surrounding areas to Merthyr Tydfil, which is why people travelled from as far as Hereford to take part. So, as well as engaging with a large number of people from within the town, CMW also brought new faces to Merthyr Tydfil and boosted its profile as a place to come to for the creative industries.

The media sentiment analysis (MSA) revealed a wealth of data that suggests that Merthyr Tydfil is seen as a cultural and *cultured* place by people both in the town and outside, perhaps more than is perceived. The extent to which the partners see themselves *internally* as involved in creative industries has also shifted. As Lis McLean suggested despite seeing Canolfan Soar as “more in the arts field rather than [as] a creative industry” (podcast episode 5) Creu Cyffro has made her realise that there are ways in which a capacity building and/or employment angle can be weaved into its activities ([link](#)):

On i dim ond mewn cyfarfod y bore ma yn sôn am sut ydym ni'n gallu uno cynllun ieuenctid yr ydyn ni ei wneud, academi perfformio yw e, academi sioe a cherdd. Mae pobl ifainc yn rhedeg y peth ac on i jyst yn meddwl y bore'ma y dylem ni weithio gyda Screen Alliance achos on i'n ffilmio rhain, 10 minute musicals wedi'u creu fel sioeau cwta, cerdd bo' ni ffilmio nhw ac on i'n meddwl y gallen ni ddysgu'r pobl ifainc sut i ffilmio nhw a rhoi nhw ar y we a pethau fel yna.

I was in a meeting only this morning talking about how we can bring together our youth plan that we have which is more of a performing academy, an academy of music and show. Young people run it all, and I was just thinking this morning that we should work with Screen Alliance, because we're filming some 10 minute musicals that have been created as little shows, little music shows, that we film, and I was thinking that we could teach the young people how to film them and how to put them on the Internet and things like that.

6. Challenges

Four risks were identified in the funding application that could impact on delivery of Creu Cyffro. These were:

- Changes in Covid-19 Regulations
- Lack of capacity within partner organisations to deliver
- Lack of uptake on Courses
- Delay in Start of Project

Although Covid-19 regulations, outside of health care settings, did not change over the course of Creu Cyffro, the continued impact of the pandemic was nevertheless felt. Linked to this, and as a result of other factors, lack of capacity within delivery partner organisations also had an impact on some areas of the programme. Lack of uptake was identified as a challenge by several delivery partners, particularly those where little to no engagement was possible prior to delivery. Finally, the delayed start had a significant impact on the programme. These and other challenges are described in more detail below.

6.1. Covid-19

The impact of the pandemic was felt in Creu Cyffro in a number of ways. Coming out of lockdown was difficult for many people, and delivery partners reflected that this could have been a factor in the low attendance figures at some activities. Anxiety over Covid-19, but also social anxiety, may well have contributed to this. One delivery partner felt that *“people’s habits have changed, not to go to stuff, and I think not just this project but across the board, recruiting is much harder than before Covid”*. Creu Cyffro was very much an ‘in-person’ programme, with the vast majority of activities taking place face-to-face. It was felt that expecting people to leave their homes and attend workshops, especially when the weather was poor, may have been too high an expectation for many.

Staffing was also affected by Covid-19, with periods of staff sickness negatively impacting on the programme. This was particularly difficult for partners working with schools. Getting teaching staff released from school was a challenge as supply teachers were in high demand, as well as personal or family illness, which impacted on attendance numbers. One delivery partner decided to switch to online delivery for part of their project, which was successful in reaching the numbers they had hoped would attend in person.

6.2. Impact of programme timing

As mentioned previously, the timing and timescale of Creu Cyffro had a profound impact on project management and delivery. Many of the challenges across the programme stemmed from the underlying issue of time. This section looks at the impact of programme timing on two key areas: lack of lead-in

time and change in timescales. These factors were outside of the programme management team's control.

6.2.1. Lack of lead in time

It is well known in the field of community-based work that projects wishing to engage with the public require a certain amount of trust and relationship building in order to succeed. Planning time is even more crucial in complex projects such as Creu Cyffro, especially if there are goals relating to collaboration and networking. The short programme timescale allowed little time for lead-in, which meant that marketing, recruitment and project planning had to take place at the same time as delivery for many partners. One partner reflected, when asked what changes they would like to have seen to make the programme more of a success, that *"from a UK government point of view, longer term funding, much more lead-in time, so not going 'from funding to delivery'"*.

At the application stage, it was felt by some that there was no strong sense of what the project was, from delivery partners' point of view. Lis McLean, Chief Officer at Canolfan Soar, recorded a podcast for the evaluation, in which she reflected on the need for planning time prior to project delivery:

<p>Dwi eitha profiadol ar gynllunio prosiectau, gweithredu prosiectau a chodi arian a dwi wedi gweld os nad wyt ti ddim yn cael yr amser cynllunio yna, a sicrhau bod y partnerau i gyd yn rili gwybod beth yw eu cyfraniad nhw dych chi ddim yn mynd i lwyddo o'r cychwyn, reit ar y cychwyn achos mae'n cymryd amser i ddatblygu'r perthynas i rili adnabod beth ydych chi'n gallu cyfrannu fel sefydliad a pa fath o gefnogaeth i chi'n gallu cael wrth y partnerau eraill.</p>	<p>I am quite experienced at managing projects, coordinating projects and raising funds, and I have seen that if you don't have the planning time, and the certainty that partners really know what their contribution is, you're not going to succeed from the start, right from the outset. Because it takes time to develop a relationship and to really know what you can contribute as an organisation and what sort of support you can get from the other partners.</p>
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The short timescale of Creu Cyffro meant that these foregrounding activities were underdeveloped. This impacted on recruitment of staff, branding and communication, and engagement with schools, community organisations and participants. It was also mentioned by several delivery partners that the application was put together very quickly, and that more time at this stage would have enabled delivery partners to explore how they could work together to achieve the project's objectives. In an evaluation focus group, partners reflected on the beginning of the project, and that they *"hit the ground running"*. They felt that *"with a bit more time we could have planned it more strategically, perhaps"*, which is a key point for similar work in the future.

6.2.1.1. Recruitment of staff and participants

The immediacy of the funding had an impact on recruitment of core staff for the project team. Although the programme manager was in place from December 2021, project support staff were not recruited until the following March, when delivery started. Delivery partners felt that earlier recruitment of programme staff would have helped to establish the programme with internal and external partners more effectively, but the nature of the funding did not allow for this. The rush to recruit staff may have meant that there was some confusion over roles and the capacity of staff to support and deliver such a complex programme in a short space of time. One respondent reported that at least one member of staff recruited at the beginning left early and they felt that this was because the scope of the role was overwhelming.

In terms of participants, low uptake of activities was identified as a risk in the funding application, and this was an issue for several delivery partners. It was felt that the short timescale was a contributing factor, and the change in timescale which is discussed further below. There was little time for potential participants to hear about the programme or understand what it had to offer. More importantly, in terms of sustainability, the programme allowed little time for engagement with members of the public prior to activities taking place. For partners wanting to engage people in creative activities for the very first time, or who were not working with established groups, participant recruitment was lower than expected.

6.2.1.2. Branding and communication

For any public-facing project to be a success, branding and communication are key factors which require planning and strategic oversight. There were challenges in both of these areas throughout Creu Cyffro, which delivery partners and the programme management team discussed in interviews. One delivery partner said: *“I don’t think there was a joined up kind of approach to communication and marketing”* which was echoed in others’ accounts.

Because of the lack of lead-in time, no marketing officer could be appointed until the funding had come through, by which time delivery had started or was due to begin imminently, for many partners. One partner said that *“it felt like it was done the wrong way around – we had our programme, dates, venue etc., but what should have happened first was all the publicity and marketing”*. One factor in this, noted by a member of staff, was that the standard of applications for this post was very poor and so recruitment took longer than anticipated. In some cases, partners had been delivering activities for some time already. By the time the logo and marketing materials had been produced in June 2022, there was very little time to build a brand for Creu Cyffro and badge all programme activities consistently, which impacted on recruitment for activities. In the worst cases, this led to a failure to recruit participants, and with the added problem of errors in the communication of activity dates, this meant that delivery plans had to be abandoned, or re-programmed. For others the impact was less severe. However, the lateness of the Creu Cyffro brand meant that a strong identity was not established within the programme or externally. Observation of events highlighted that participants and local partners rarely understood the programme and had little knowledge of other activities, projects and events, other than the one they were attending, let alone that there was a connection between them. Delivery partners did feel, however, that the Creu

Cyffro brand could have a legacy and be continued as a badge for the creative industries and cultural activities in Merthyr.

Another issue raised by several delivery partners, which is not specific to Creu Cyffro, was related to marketing and recruitment specifically for the creative industries sector. When it comes to activities in the creative industries, many people have no idea what to expect. It is difficult to describe in an advert the impact that taking part in creative activity can have on individuals. Those of us who are within the sector understand the benefits that the creative industries can bring, but that can be missed in the messaging to potential beneficiaries. Several delivery partners felt that audiences may have felt intimidated to attend an activity if they did not fully grasp what was on offer, and suggested that more engagement beforehand could have boosted recruitment. Again, with little lead-in time, it was not possible to enhance recruitment in this way. As one delivery partner stated: *"We can't really explain...what a workshop is until they arrive, maybe people don't quite know what they're getting themselves in for. With stuff like [activity], if you're not interested you're not gonna come. Once they have a look, then they want to do it. It's really hard to get that across in a poster"*.

It was reported that in general in Merthyr Tydfil the ways in which creative activities tended to be communicated as a leisure activity, under the same banner as sports activities, prevented the carving out of an identity to which creative industry and cultural partners could identify, and potential participants, recognise. As one respondent commented, *"If you are interested in art or dance or music I am not sure that attaching it to sport and the other stuff ... it will just get swallowed up."* The Creu Cyffro branding presents an opportunity to create that identity and to communicate what creative activities and cultural events have to offer. The programme could therefore have benefited from a strategic, tailored approach to marketing that could have built the brand and taken into account peoples' fears, and targeted specific audiences.

In terms of communication about the programme, we found that the organisations working with delivery partners also often had little grasp of what Creu Cyffro was or what its aims were. There was very little information available online about the programme, and no overall induction into Creu Cyffro for delivery partners and staff. This proved challenging in planning activities with local organisations and sectors that could have benefitted from the programme who, from observations of meetings, continuously asked what it was about. Very rarely were activities branded as Creu Cyffro and at one training event the funding source was completely wrong.

In terms of internal communication, one member of staff felt that they and the programme management team could have benefited from more engagement with delivery partners across Creu Cyffro. Engagement tended to be when interim reports were due, or ad-hoc requests for support from delivery partners. One delivery partner commented that *"we'd like to understand what others are doing at an earlier stage to see if we could collaborate"*, and suggested that there could have been a one-page summary of each partner's activities so others could identify potential points of collaboration. This was echoed by other partners throughout the interviews. The data suggested that few structured project management processes were set up, such as monthly meetings or a shared calendar, and partners commented that the meetings that were arranged were often very last minute which meant not everyone could attend. The

meetings that did take place were felt to be helpful, and partners valued face-to-face communication with each other. One partner said that conversations could at the very least help to establish that “*they were not treading on each other’s toes.*” Whilst some partners admitted that it could be difficult to always attend meetings, there could have been some online space where they could get to know each other, share what they were doing, and perhaps identify shared opportunities.

A point raised in a focus group with delivery partners was related to the funding and communication. Due to the way in which the funding came directly from Westminster, there was no support for advertising or communication from the Welsh Government. It may have been different if the funding had come via the Welsh Government, who may have mobilised its mechanisms of advertising and communication and boosted this element of the programme.

6.2.1.3. Engagement with strategic partners

Creu Cyffro represented an opportunity to connect the creative industries with other sectors such as education, regeneration, Communities 4 Work, health and other public services. The programme aimed to develop capacity in the creative industries and pathways into the industry. Delivery partners engaged successfully with organisations as part of their individual delivery plans, and this could have been enhanced with a more strategic engagement plan at the programme level.

Although there are stories of success, which were discussed above, the impact could have been deeper had key agencies and organisations been involved in a structured and meaningful way from the outset. In some cases creative partners had already established relationships with, for instance, education or regeneration at the local authority level and the programme manager did his best in trying to create connections as the programme progressed. Had this strategic sectoral engagement happened from the outset then the subsequent bid for Shared Prosperity Funding may have least been informed by a shared understanding of the opportunities for creative industry infrastructure development that could benefit the local economy and the wellbeing of its residents. It was suggested that it could be a challenge for some departments within the local authority to understand the concept and value of the programme, which highlights a possible training need within the civil service on the value of creative and cultural projects.

6.2.2. Changes in timescales

As mentioned above, there were changes to the timescale due to delays in the funding being released. These changes were beyond the control of the project management team and the delivery partners. The original application stated a start date of July 2021, with delivery starting in September 2021, and ending in March 2022. The UK government did not announce funded projects until November 2021, by which time many of the delivery partners and staff had moved on to other projects. The change in timescale shifted project delivery from September 2021 to March 2022, with an end date of September 2022. The end date was later extended to December 2022. Even by March 2022, not all project staff were in post. Delivery plans were affected, and many activities had to be re-scheduled or even abandoned and re-designed.

For others, their plans were relatively unaffected, or even enhanced, as they ended up with slightly more time to deliver their activities with the extension to December 2022. For example, one delivery partner told us that *“we were really grateful that we were given more time [from September 2022 to December 2022], mainly because of the school calendar... the young people wouldn’t have been available”*. Some partners began their delivery before the funding arrived, as they were able to fund via other internal sources. Community Music Wales, for example, began delivery in January 2022 and continued until towards the end of November 2022, so they were delivering activities for almost 12 months. Wales Millennium Centre was also able to take advantage of the longer delivery window.

The impact on activities taking place within educational settings was significant. Initially, delivery was intended to begin at the start of the academic year, to embed activities into the academic timetable, and for teachers training and student experience workshops to fit into schools’ annual plans. It was stressed that inset days were usually planned some time in advance and that opportunities for out of school training were limited. The numbers of teachers from Merthyr Tydfil attending training at community venues were therefore small due to limited capacity in schools to release staff and another delivery partner had to abandon an extensive Merthyr wide training event and festival completely. One organisation was asked whether they could cover the costs of supply teaching from their own budget. Another delivery partner described how the change in timescale and subsequent extensions impacted on the delivery of a key element of their project. One of their aims was to run taster workshops and then subsidise those participants to complete accredited modules, developing a pathway into the creative industries. This would have worked with the original start date of September 2021. However, with the start date delayed until March 2022, it would have been impossible to complete this aspect of their work as there was not enough time for an individual to go through the entire process before the end of the programme (September 2022). However, the programme was then extended to December 2022, which *would* have given sufficient time for participants to have completed the process, but by the time that was announced they had missed the start date for the modules. She summarised that *“that was a bit of a shame for us. Had it been a decent amount of time, delivery time, in the first place, that wouldn’t have happened”*. However it has to be stressed that had the programme ended in September 2022 then it would not have been possible to deliver a schools programme of any substance.

6.3. Programme and project management

With such an ambitious scope, it was unsurprising that the programme management of Creu Cyffro was complicated. Reflecting on the overall programme management of delivery partners’ activities, a staff member stated: *“...it’s really hard to keep your finger on the pulse...”*. The sheer volume of activity was intense for such a short project, and activities were often subject to change. Each delivery partner required input, but to differing degrees. Some were established in the area with existing connections, whereas others were completely new to Merthyr Tydfil and needed more support in developing relationships and booking suitable venues, particularly within the short timescale.

The programme manager, who was also working across several other areas, did not have project support in place until delivery had begun. Two further members of staff were recruited to support the programme manager. We believe these roles were programme assistant and project assistant, however there was a

lack of clarity about these roles. From what we heard in interviews, the specific roles of each member of the team were never fully clarified within the wider programme either to the team or to delivery partners. This lack of clarity was felt acutely at the beginning of the project, when the programme assistant was left to begin her role without the programme manager, who was on annual leave (booked at a time when it was assumed the start date would be in September 2021). Again, this was due to the change in timescale, and not the fault of any staff members. This understandably meant that staff were confused and unfairly stressed about the roles that they were expected to undertake.

The confusion over roles was felt within the wider programme and several delivery partners said they were unsure of who was responsible for what within the central programme management team. One area of agreement was the availability and dedication of the programme manager who partners across the programme, felt was responsive and helpful. This was particularly true when it came to linking partners with people and organisations in Merthyr Tydfil through his extensive networks. However, it was also acknowledged that, because of his helpfulness, a great many tasks fell to this individual, which meant he was unable to prioritise maintaining an overall view of the programme. As one delivery partner summarised:

“I think a lot of the successes of what partnerships did happen was down to [the programme manager] – because he’s so well connected and knows people and organisations so well – the moment that he was away – if you’d have pulled [the programme manager] out of the equation at any point, the work would have been so siloed, because, you know, even right up to the end [the programme manager] was saying ‘you need to speak to this person, and this person, and this person’ but you know he’s so valuable in making those connections across such a massive group of partners”

It was suggested by delivery partners that, in future projects, having more clarity on what support staff are able to help with, and having regular points of contact across the programme, would be of great benefit. It was also highlighted that knowing reporting deadlines in advance would be helpful for organisations so that the correct information can be collated in time. This was an issue beyond the control of the programme management team, who also would have benefited from early warning of reporting deadlines.

From what we heard in interviews and the focus group, few monitoring systems were put in place by the programme management team. Very few further partnership meetings, which were supposed to be monthly, took place throughout the duration of the programme after the initial meeting in March 2022. Opportunities for collaboration and cross-pollination still took place, but could have been enhanced via regular partnership meetings. Furthermore, a shared programme timetable was not produced, which also could have aided recruitment across the entire programme. Instead, partners reported that they recruited for their activities individually, with sporadic support from the programme management team. One delivery partner felt that support was not consistent and that some partners received more in terms of social media marketing than others. Others felt that the programme management team had promoted their activities when asked.

In terms of delivery, project management requirements varied depending on the size and scope of the plans. Some organisations were delivering very clear activities, for example Screen Alliance Wales delivered a training programme for Careers Wales careers advisers, over one week in September. This was relatively unaffected by the changes in timescale and the lack of lead-in time, as the activities were discrete and self-contained. In fact, SAW reported that moving the training to the beginning of the academic year rather than the end, as they were originally planned, was an unexpected advantage. Similarly Beacons Beas, as an organisation based in Merthyr Tydfil, had a relatively straightforward programme, and were able to see the programme as an opportunity to build on an existing ambition to build a creative hub of makers and painters in the area. They were relatively self-sufficient and, as a small organisation, they were agile and set up to adapt to new challenges and ideas. Finally, the creative writing project needed little support to deliver the project as it was.

Other partner organisations had much bigger and experimental delivery plans. A large arts organisation planned an extensive programme of activities including training, productions, new creative spaces, workshops, apprenticeships, and community tickets. Project managing these activities would therefore be a more complex task, and we heard from staff that there were significant challenges in the management of this element of the programme. The interview data suggested that changes in staffing, staff moving on and not being replaced, and unclear expectations of staff, meant that the overall project management of the activities was not as strong as it could have been. We heard that junior staff ended up delivering the activities with reduced support, which was a challenge at times. As one member of staff joked, *“I haven’t felt like an assistant on the project really, because there’s no-one to assist!”*. This was acknowledged by the delivery partner, who felt that the funding was at odds with genuine community development approaches, and that a reduced workforce meant they were no longer able to deliver what had been proposed. This perspective of the funding being at odds with community development approaches was echoed by other delivery partners. As one partner pointed out *“we tried to design a programme that was targeted at people who were economically disadvantaged, but engaging some of those communities takes such a long time”*. This is a key point raised multiple times by different partners. Community-based work takes time, which is the one thing Creu Cyffro lacked.

The evaluation indicated that, in a small number of cases, relationships were damaged as a result of Creu Cyffro. There were three clear examples: (i) a community group was promised resources from an individual on behalf of the delivery partner. The individual subsequently left the programme, and the delivery partner was unable to honour the promises made; (ii) staff enlisted to run workshops were let down at the last minute due to errors in advertising and low recruitment. They had set aside time to deliver workshops and this damaged relationships between them and the delivery partner; (iii) several staff members talked about the impact on their own wellbeing, or of others, where their roles were perceived to be unclear or the scope over demanding.

Practical challenges reported in interviews included difficulty in booking venues, and out-of-date booking systems. This led to confusion over spaces, with people arriving for activities and no room having been booked. Lack of support with regard to finding suitable venues had reputational risk for delivery organisations as well as effectively downloading unanticipated and unfunded administrative responsibility on them. One partner reported that:

“I provided the schedule, what would be happening and what they would need. All I needed help with was with “do this one here and do this one there”. It didn’t matter to us where we delivered them in Merthyr so long as the venue was suitable. And what I had hoped there was that it was complimenting what else was going on. Either in subject matter or not having three things going on in the Redhouse on the same day or, you know. So I think that could have supported in a better way, a bit more proactively, a bit more joined up and definitely more timely.”

A number of partners felt that the difficulties in accessing space at Redhouse Cymru was particularly frustrating, leading to cancellation of workshops in the absence of an effective booking system. One partner complained that they had been told that they could have space for the workshops they had planned and subsequently told that space was not available. A number of comments were made with regard to Redhouse Cymru being more set up as a venue for events rather than as a community facing, artist/creative led hub. If an aim of Redhouse Cymru is to indeed become more community-facing and led by artists/creatives, then a review of the role and management of the venue would be prudent. Given the centrality of Redhouse Cymru in current plans for the development of the creative industries locally, and the overall ambitions of the programme, we recommend this is considered as a priority going forward.

7. Legacy

Whilst the Creu Cyffro programme undoubtedly experienced difficulties in implementation there are clearly legacies that should be celebrated and developed. Whilst these are indicated in Chapter Five (stories of success) it is important to clarify what the programme has left, even if the programme ceases to exist (which we are not recommending). Some local people did find work and there are some more established routes to employment; a small number of new relationships between creative industry organisations and local organisations have been established; new teaching practices developed; a new creative hub for makers and painters has been created; and a model for podcast training has been established. There is both an opportunity to celebrate and communicate these achievements and to learn and develop the opportunities that they suggest for the future.

7.1. Job creation and routes to employment

Whilst the numbers of local people finding employment was not as high as hoped and anticipated, jobs have been created or sustained, both through the apprenticeship scheme and through the implementation of the programme itself. One example of this is the employment of a technician that has been employed to support both Redhouse Cymru, Canolfan Soar and The Clinic in Gurnos. Three of the five apprentices gained employment in the creative industries as a direct result of Creu Cyffro. At GTFM, Creu Cyffro funding covered activities which has allowed one member of staff to continue their employment at the station. Musicians trained by Community Music Wales also reported that they had gained new work in Merthyr Tydfil as a direct result of Creu Cyffro.

In terms of routes to employment it is a shame that funding has not yet been secured for the film industry experiences programme which Into Film piloted in Merthyr Tydfil through ScreenWorks Cymru. This was reported to be an established and flourishing programme in Northern Ireland and it is hoped that the organisation will secure funding for Wales soon. If this is the case the school and education relationships that have been developed (see below) make its implementation in Merthyr Tydfil relatively easy. More tangible is the careers advice programme run by Screen Alliance to which there is a commitment to embedding the training into Careers Wales. A representative from Careers Wales reported that the training was so useful, not just in terms of developing careers advisers' understanding of the creative industries, but in terms of team bonding and development, that they have already booked more training sessions and hope to make it an annual occurrence.

7.2. New and developing partnerships

In terms of local venues, the partnership between Redhouse Cymru and Canolfan Soar has become more established in ways that were felt to be positive. It was reported that they were working together in a way that had not happened before. This was partly through the apprenticeship scheme (which meant that apprentices could work with both venues), and partly through the appointment of a technician (who was also able to support the apprentices). In terms of venue development this collaborative, rather than

competitive, relationship is one that can be built on in terms of the branding of Merthyr Tydfil as a focus for cultural events and creative activities.

Although it was felt that the programme could have better supported creative industry/school relationships, Puppet Soup and Into Film did create or develop positive relationships with some schools. Both industry partners felt, where it happened, that this has been a success of the opportunities they had through the programme and will serve as the basis for future activities. Whilst Puppet Soup already had connections with the school they engaged with (see below), the school is keen to ensure that they have more opportunities to work with the company. Into Film also felt that they had established a route into Merthyr Tydfil as a whole, that they did not have before as well as a relationship with the education department at the Local Authority. Puppet Soup also worked with young people supported by Barnardo's, again deepening that relationship. The Open University (though not in itself a creative industry partner but with links to the industries) also felt that they had developed a strategic link to the schools' sector which the Creu Cyffro programme had set in motion.

First Campus Reaching Wider has also left a legacy via relationships built with organisations in the town that they did not have prior to the programme. Despite a difficult start to delivery (due to issues beyond their control), and having to completely regroup and redesign their activities, First Campus has now established links with the Merthyr Tydfil branch of MIND Cymru and Twyn Community Hub, which will last well beyond the duration of the programme. This was due to the hard work and dedication of the project assistant they recruited to repair the damage done by the programme to relationships with their academic partners.

Finally, the co-produced event, Celebrating Gurnos, established a relationship with Merthyr Valleys Homes (MVH) through the process of co-production. This felt to be a win-win for both MVH, who felt that the creative co-production model could be extended to other local areas, and for the Open University, who have a strategic commitment to develop relationships with the social housing sector across Wales.

7.3. Teaching practice and courses

As well as *relationships* with schools it was felt that the Creu Cyffro programme had made a direct impact on *teaching practices*. With regard to the school staff interviewed, and in conversations with teachers in observed sessions, it was reported that both puppetry and film had been included, or were planned to be used, in delivering curriculum areas or being used in some way to communicate with learners. In addition it was reported that as a result of the VR training to e-sports students at The College Merthyr, that the course was going to be more VR centred (as an industry area that it was felt "*was going to explode soon*") with the potential career opportunities for students. They have changed one of their Higher National Diploma (HND) level 5 units from something that was felt to be a bit bland to VR based units. It was reported that a capital bid has been submitted to buy headsets.

Should Creu Cyffro build on these foundations then it is possible that some of the 'mystery' surrounding cultural activities, and wider creative industries opportunities, will be dispelled. Should creative practices,

performance and events become familiar through their use in education so should the confidence of young people in engaging with these in the future.

7.4. Creative Hub

A tangible legacy of the programme, at the time of writing this report, is the development by Beacons Bees of a creative hub for makers and painters. This did not exist before the Creu Cyffro programme and now meets on the first Monday of every month to develop the vision as well as planning training workshops, exhibitions, art competitions and projects with other organisations. Operating from a newly created cafe and gallery space in The Bothy in the grounds of Cyfarthfa Castle, it also acts as a platform for makers and painters to sell their work. It was reported that 20 artists signed up to exhibit in the Bothy and that they have sold over 50 pieces of work on their behalf. The project has created a tangible gallery space which attracts visitors and people who are interested in buying local artwork. Beacons Bees have explored the idea of developing their model which would enable them to offer space, materials and expertise for people wishing to hot desk or hot bench and develop their skills in different maker and painter practices at their own pace.

7.5. Locally inspired artwork

The Open University intended to use the process of co-production to leave a legacy to the community (ensuring that the process, the event and what it produced had value). Workshops and activities at the event created artwork that have been left to the community as a way of celebrating Gurnos, the locality in which the event took place.



An engagement tree was built by an artist in residence, Adam Griffiths, who is based at Pen Y Dre High School, during the summer holidays. He then worked with a core group of students at the beginning of the school year where they added street names of the area and wrote on leaves what they liked about the community. At the event local people added their own thoughts and ideas. The tree was gifted to Goetre School (where much of the Celebrating Gurnos event took place). Adam Griffiths also created a mini sculpture which went to St Aloysius primary schools. It was felt that the schools would continue to add to them as living art pieces that continue to celebrate place.

The Celebrating Gurnos event was also used to engage local people in conversations about local issues, such as graffiti and damage to trees, but in a positive and creative way. Graffiti workshops were held at the event and run by a local graffiti artist. What was seen as a problem was turned into an opportunity, recognising the appetite for graffiti that could be valued. The graffiti boards used on the day now have permanent sites in local schools and young people have signed their names on them, giving them a local feel. They have also used a high quality printer to create a version on canvas that, it was reported, will go around the perimeter of any Merthyr Valleys Homes development sites in Gurnos, leaving a clear visual legacy in the community. The legacy is also in the development of engagement processes that can take place in a creative and strengths based way, and it is intended that this be developed in other local areas.

7.6. Increased access to the creative industries

Wales Millennium Centre provided 272 free tickets to residents of Merthyr Tydfil, which increased access to the Cardiff venue and its professional stage productions. This has led to an increased awareness of the community ticketing scheme, which residents can continue to take advantage of beyond the lifetime of Creu Cyffro. This is significant as it has been noted in this project and elsewhere that some members of the public feel that large, national venues such as Wales Millennium Centre are not ‘for them’ and may be reluctant to attend shows in the capital. Of course, there are structural barriers to this such as transport (specifically a lack of late night public transport back to Merthyr Tydfil and many other Valleys towns) and the prohibitive cost of tickets. Increasing access to the arts in this simple way, and illuminating the opportunity to take advantage of community ticketing prices, is part of a positive legacy left by Creu Cyffro.

8. Conclusions and recommendations

To recap, the aims of Creu Cyffro were to 'inspire and enthuse people in our community to develop new initiatives by supporting them with training and learning opportunities as well as space to facilitate this process. This strategic working will build capacity within our community by improving partnership working and providing local organisations and individuals with the skills they need to support each other on our way out of the pandemic.'

To what extent did the programme achieve these aims? New initiatives were certainly developed, and the funding enabled organisations to increase their offer to Merthyr Tydfil residents, or for some, to work in the area for the first time. We found that projects that were larger in scope tended to struggle with recruitment and engagement more than those with smaller, more defined parameters. With the largest share of the funding, the Wales Millennium Centre proposed to extend its entire community offer to the town, which enjoyed partial success, however this proved to be too ambitious to complete within the scope and timescale of the programme.

On the other hand, smaller projects such as Screen Alliance Wales's training for Careers Wales, and Into Film's teacher training, proved to be highly successful and left a lasting legacy on the education sector. Beacons Bees have also managed to set up a creative hub for local makers and painters as well as a workshop and gallery space, rooted in the community, which can serve as a platform for local artists to sell their work. As a representative from Wales Millennium Centre said in an interview, funding of this nature is not conducive to genuine community development, which takes time. It is therefore unsurprising that those elements of the programme that required public engagement and recruiting participants from scratch were most at risk of failure. Although there were elements of inadequate management, the funding structure simply did not allow for thorough community engagement prior to delivery. This points to wider structural issues of how Levelling Up and other government funding is rolled out without consideration of the impact this may have on community development and partnership relationships. In some cases, despite a considerable amount of money coming into an area, damage may be done by such short bursts of funding. We found some cases of this happening within Creu Cyffro, although these were minimal.

As a result of Creu Cyffro, Merthyr Tydfil saw an increase in the number of public opportunities to participate in the creative industries for the duration of Creu Cyffro. These included 76 events at Redhouse Cymru and Canolfan Soar, over 140 workshops and taster sessions, along with a number of 'fun days' in different communities. Uptake of these opportunities among the public was lower than expected due to a mix of unavoidable, and avoidable, issues.

There were indeed a number of training and learning opportunities provided by the programme. Some were aimed at building capacity within the various professions involved in the creative industries, such as the apprenticeships, community musicians, makers and painters, teachers and careers advisers. In general, these were very successful elements of the programme. There were also a number of training

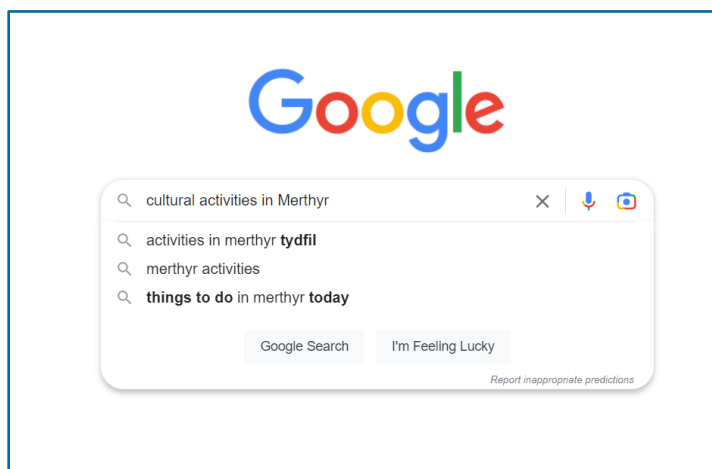
opportunities for members of the public, such as 6-week courses in music, dance and drama therapies, community radio training, 'Rock School' for young musicians, creative writing and VR training for students. Uptake of these varied across the programme.

Capacity was built within the education sector, in careers advisers and teachers, as well as in freelance artists wanting to work with communities, people making their first steps into careers within the creative industries, and people who wished to develop their existing creative skills. Feedback regarding capacity building activities in the education sector, particularly, was very positive.

The extent to which partnership working was improved is less clear, and although some new relationships were established, there were also a lot of missed opportunities in this area. We have reflected on the challenges of the programme management, and have made some recommendations for similar programmes in the future. This section also explores a few areas we feel are opportunities for future development for Creu Cyffro and the creative industries in Merthyr Tydfil.

8.1. Making the most of media going forward

There were some interesting findings from the Media Sentiment Analysis (MSA), and Steph made some recommendations for future projects to make the most of media promotion. Having a strong media and communications strategy can impact on local uptake and recognition of a programme's brand, as well as the wider profile of a programme and potential legacy building in the form of follow-on funding.



As Steph Bridgeman said in [episode four of the Creu Cyffro podcast](#) an MSA can serve as an “*examination of the eyeballs*” in the sense that it offers an insight into people’s internet search behaviours, i.e., the terms they search for and their frequency. It is beyond the scope of this report to account for how search engines’ algorithms operate to place which websites at the head of searches. Nevertheless, the MSA highlights some actions in which successor activities to Creu Cyffro might wish to invest time in order to draw attention to what is going on in and around the town, and which can continue to portray cultural activity in Merthyr in a positive light:


- Cultivating positive relationships with a small number of journalists that cover south Wales and/or culture
- Identifying key messages which are recurrently deployed in press and social media activity
- New social media platforms take time to build an engaged audience who can help you extend reach. So even if the Creu Cyffro brand is to be discontinued, the engagement built to date can be retained if the existing accounts are re-purposed and rebranded for successor programmes/activities


Considerations For Future Communications Activity

HEADLINE ↓


Remember the power of the headline
80% of audiences don't read beyond the headline.


Headlines are often what gets shared on **social media**. Can the **key message** be distilled into the headline? Engaged audiences can help to **increase the reach of news through social shares**.






Discrete media spend can help to **drive audience awareness and consideration** – an advertorial about Redhouse was the second most socially shared item which referenced Merthyr overall during the six months.





Social media activity from **Creu Cyffro's** own social accounts commenced in late June / early July; post performance will be available in an addendum to this report in November. **Targeted social media promotion to reach local people** could help to **boost audience reach and engagement**.



Internet search volumes can indicate **potential audience sizes and aspirational communications performance targets**. More people search for Merthyr Tydfil for example than simply Merthyr.

8.2. Potential for the development of *community* media

Within Creu Cyffro and the evaluation there was a focus on community media. Wales Millennium Centre's activities included two Radio Platform training courses for local people interested in community radio, and GTFM extended its volunteer training programme with the additional funding. The evaluation team

also ran two training courses: one in community media; the other with a specific focus on podcasting. All of the attendees were from the voluntary and community sector suggesting there is appetite for locally-owned news generation and circulation. One of the organisations who attended commissioned further capacity building (funded by themselves) with young people from their service users, while another community group in Dowlais has enquired about commissioning its own training.

The Creu Cyffro podcast channel could, we feel, be a key element in this community media, in particular if it is located within a community-focused communications model (see below). Creu Cyffro funding has been utilised to allow for unlimited uploads until 2024 should any organisations be interested in taking on the podcast channel. At the time of writing there are a couple who are provisionally interested.

We know that what constitutes ‘news’ is varied. National and international affairs unsurprisingly dominate the content of principal broadcast and print news outlets, and while towns like Merthyr Tydfil used to once have a thriving local ‘news desk’ with dedicated local journalists who would bring local news to the attention of regional and national outlets, and help interpret and scrutinise those affairs for their local readership, these have largely disappeared due to the centralisation of local newspapers into a small number of large news corporations. Social media has to some extent filled part of this void, as well as ‘hyperlocals’²⁵ and new news websites such as Nation Cymru. Towns like Merthyr Tydfil also retain a strong ‘word of mouth’ means of communication, which was emphasised in both training sessions. Given the scope of the media sentiment analysis - which focused primarily on peoples’ online search engine inputs - we feel there is the potential to develop this type of analysis to include a community-focused communications (CFC) model²⁶ (see Appendix 4 for a graphic representation of the model). CFC takes the idea of civic engagement and Social Responsibility (SR) as a set of integrated social processes for developmental awareness activity. This integrated process can be both collectively and individually expanded because it seeks to demonstrate how people experience and understand a changing and renewed sense of meaningfulness in a shifting world²⁷.

In the context of Creu Cyffro this meaningfulness might go beyond employment, career prospects and increased income to include unrealised creativity, broader cultural horizons and a sense that ‘people like us’ can forge careers in the media and/or creative industries. All participants on the training courses acknowledged the importance of trustworthy and accountable media as a key element of SR. A community-focused (or owned) media outlet - be it radio, podcasts, or some other form(s) - should be explored in future developments within the creative industries in Merthyr Tydfil.

²⁵ Wrexham.com is a successful online example of a Welsh ‘hyperlocal’ dedicated to local news; but others, such as the *Caerphilly Observer*, have a print and online output (see Gurner, 2022 for more information).

²⁶ Watson, R (2022) Community-Focussed Communications Model, *Decentered Media* 2022, Leicester, <https://decentered.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/01/Decentered-Media-Community-Communications-Model-002-2022-06-22.pdf>

²⁷ Anderson and Björkman (2017) in R. Watson (2021) FUTURES on Air: Community radio and public engagement, *Interactions: Studies in Communication and Culture*, Vol. 12, pp.113 - 121.

8.3. Potential for The Talking Shop model and Cultural Network

The Talking Shop was undoubtedly one of the biggest successes of Creu Cyffro, in terms of public and stakeholder engagement, capacity building, and moving people towards pathways in the creative industries. Having previously had a location in one of Cardiff city centre's arcades and with aspirations to pollinate across Wales²⁸, the model of The Talking Shop, which espouses the virtues of and means of engaging with democracy, whilst remaining independent of party politics and local government, lends itself very well to hosting any cultural network that emerges as a result of this project and of the development of a cultural network for Merthyr Tydfil that took place prior to and in the early stages of Creu Cyffro. There is a definite appetite for The Talking Shop to remain open in Merthyr Tydfil, if sustainable. One partner felt that the pilot in Merthyr Tydfil could allow for the testing of new economic models to enable Talking Shops to be sustained. Partners involved in the development of a Cultural Network for Merthyr Tydfil project are also keen to host any resulting network meetings at The Talking Shop, due to the neutrality of the location and stakeholder interests in the shop. A key need from a cultural network is for it to be neutral and not 'owned' by any one organisation in Merthyr Tydfil. In addition, respondents to the earlier work on the development of a cultural network highlighted the need for more creative spaces in Merthyr Tydfil and spaces for discussion and conviviality. Such spaces have the potential to support the development of local artists and creatives (and relationships between them), as well as being community facing; they also are open to the public without any expectation that they must spend money. It could also help to dispel suspected preconceived ideas about who the cultural and creative sectors are for, and start to break down barriers between local residents and artists.

Reflecting on the success and appetite for The Talking Shop can inform the ongoing discussions in Merthyr Tydfil regarding the role, function and management of Redhouse Cymru. This has been a contentious issue for the town, and has been divisive at times. There have been campaigns to bring the building into public ownership, but to date it continues to be managed by Merthyr Tydfil Leisure Trust. Issues around the management of Redhouse Cymru as a leisure outlet, rather than an arts venue, have been raised in the past and throughout this study. Through Creu Cyffro, Redhouse Cymru has established itself within the events sector and has brought new people to the area as well as bringing a range of bands and performers to the town. The future of Redhouse Cymru may lie in the events sector, but there are also ambitions for it to be more of a community space, perhaps mirroring some aspects of The Talking Shop, so that it may better serve the people of Merthyr Tydfil and the creative industries sector. It is acknowledged that the running costs of the building are a prohibitive factor in this. However, there are examples where this has happened to certain degrees, such as [Chapter Arts](#) in Cardiff, and [Tŷ Pawb](#)²⁹ in Wrexham. Both venues have a diverse offer to the communities they serve, including gallery space, venue hire, learning spaces, multiple arts spaces, food court, community gardens and opportunities for artist development. It was suggested by one respondent that the programme could have offered more opportunities for local artists to contribute. Whilst this is a space issue as Merthyr College occupies much of Redhouse Cymru's space, this model could be a way of harnessing and developing the contribution of freelancers to the

²⁸ Murphy, Y (2022) Every town should have a Talking Shop, in *The Welsh Agenda*, 69, pp.50-55.

²⁹ Tŷ Pawb was one of five finalists for the 2022 Art Fund Museum of the Year, the world's largest museum and gallery prize.

development of creative opportunities locally and for their own career development. There is no reason why Redhouse Cymru could not consider a similar model.

8.4. Programme planning and management

The challenges in managing a programme as broad in scope and ambitious as Creu Cyffro in such a short space of time were considerable. There were undoubtedly issues facing the team that were insurmountable, however there are some key messages and recommendations to future programme leads that can be taken from the evaluation:

- In programmes where multiple partners are delivering community-based activities, ensure thorough involvement in the development of aims and objectives at the application stage. This will foster a sense of shared ownership of the programme, rather than individual elements;
- Establish a strategic lead for the programme and identify the support roles that are needed to operationalise any future programme. These roles need to be clearly defined and achievable in terms of job specification and skills;
- Have one member of the central programme team dedicated to participant recruitment and community engagement across the programme, so that opportunities to participate are visible across the communities;
- Diarise regular programme meetings with all partners from the outset;
- Consider establishing a digital, interactive calendar of activities that delivery partners can add to an amend as the programme progresses, and identify any areas of overlap and possible collaboration;
- Similar to the above, a centralised bookings system for venues and spaces across an entire locality, with a single point of contact within the programme management team, would reduce the likelihood of errors in venue bookings and associated reputational damage.
- Again, similar to the above, establish and develop a brand which can communicate creative industry events and opportunities. This would also have the effect of ensuring that organisations do not have to rely on their own networks and are able to extend their reach.

8.5. Other sector involvement

Creu Cyffro engaged a diverse range of partners and organisations, and as we have seen, established or deepened relationships between some of these organisations. For instance the Open University was able, through the co-production of the Celebrating Gurnos event, to establish strong connections to Merthyr Valleys Homes which could be developed into the future. However, the opportunity to establish Creu Cyffro in a strategic position within wider sectors was missed. Admittedly, the lack of lead-in time and

short-term nature of the funding hindered this, however we believe that some lessons can be learned for similar programmes going forward.

8.5.1. Education

A key sector for Creu Cyffro was Education. Screen Alliance Wales, Into Film, Open University, First Campus and Puppet Soup all intended to involve teachers, pupils, students and other educators in their activities. Some activities were successful, such as training for careers advisers. Others did not succeed as fully as was intended. It was difficult even for the programme manager, who was incredibly well connected, to secure buy-in from some schools, so there is a need for more strategic engagement with this sector for future projects. We heard from those within the education sector that the timescales schools and universities work to are key in being able to engage with external projects. Schools often plan their entire academic year in September, so opportunities for staff training or other activities to take place in schools can rarely be slotted in at short notice.

Other features of the academic year, such as examination periods and holidays, also need to be factored into project plans. Strategic planning was evident at certain points, for example Screen Alliance Wales and Into Film had a conversation at the start of the programme to ensure their activities did not overlap. A more deliberate, programme-level approach to education could have made links to the new curriculum and embedded Creu Cyffro at a deeper level within the education sector in Merthyr Tydfil. The creative industries have clear benefits to the new curriculum for Wales, and is a priority area for the Welsh Government. The [Creative Skills Action Plan 2022-2025](#) states that one of its aims is to “*ensure the priority sectors are integrated into the classroom at an early age, making the sector a realistic and viable career choice for young people*”³⁰. The missed potential for Creu Cyffro to speak to these national agendas is clear.

One positive lesson, which could mitigate some of the barriers to engaging schools, is the use of hub schools to host creative industry activities for young people. This avoids some of the problems around travel costs and safeguarding processes that are associated with holding training in, for instance, community venues. In terms of CPD, and in recognition of the problems with supply cover, it is worth pointing out opportunities to deliver training during twilight sessions to teachers after schools. This does not replace the opportunities that whole inset days offer but nonetheless provide a route into school settings.

8.5.2. Sporting heritage

During 2022 there were preliminary discussions between [Sporting Heritage CIC](#) and the Creu Cyffro programme lead about the potential development of cultural activity in the programme related to Merthyr Tydfil’s rich sporting heritage.

³⁰ Welsh Government (2022) <https://www.gov.wales/new-plan-help-develop-wales-creative-talent>.

Sporting Heritage CIC is a not-for-profit community interest company working to support the collection, preservation, access, and research of sporting heritage in the UK and wider. During the pandemic it facilitated the development of a [draft strategic framework](#) for sporting heritage for Wales which was subsequently consulted upon and published early 2022.

Unfortunately, due to existing commitments and competing timescales little could be taken forward as part of Creu Cyffro. However, at the time of writing further engagement work is being undertaken on the framework, with an emphasis on reaching beyond the professional heritage sector and into sports governing bodies, grassroots clubs and communities, to put the strategic framework on a longer-term footing.

As a venue with a rich heritage strand of its own, with both immense local and national value, and interpretation related to sporting heritage within its existing interior displays, Redhouse Cymru is ideally placed to perform a local facilitative role to pull together the town's different sports and place Merthyr's voice front and centre of Welsh sporting heritage.



8.5.3. Health and Wellbeing

Underpinning many of the activities was the belief that creative activities have a potential to impact positively on health and wellbeing, both directly (as therapeutic interventions) and indirectly (through, for instance, confidence building). The value of the arts and creativity on health was indeed recognised in the Memorandum of Understanding between the NHS confederation and Art Council Wales signed in

2017³¹ and there is a clear case for arts and creative activities to contribute to a healthier Wales (one of the wellbeing goals in the Wellbeing of Future Generations Act).³²

There is a clear opportunity to involve health service and public health partners in considering future activities, as well as highlighting and evaluating the impact on local health. A cultural network could be a mechanism to engage with the health sector (as also suggested in Straeon's previous report) and as a way of demonstrating the contribution to health through the [Cym Taf Public Service Board](#). Learning from the programme also identified that creative activities can also be used as a way of engaging people and could contribute to the development mechanisms to engage local people in the development of local wellbeing plans.

8.5.4. Employment routes into the TV and film industry

We are aware at the time of writing of research in neighbouring Rhondda Cynon Taf (RCT) on behalf of the Communities For Work (C4W) and Communities For Work Plus employability programmes. Although its focus is on TV and filmmaking rather than the CI more generally, there are clearly elements of the research that are complementary to the aims of Creu Cyffro.

For example, the awareness of cultural and structural barriers that inhibit the extent to which residents in RCT think employment in TV and filmmaking is an opportunity for them. Alongside and informed by the research will be a campaign aimed at residents and jobseekers to help raise awareness of such opportunities. Given the barriers are not peculiar to RCT and exist in other Valleys authorities, we suggest there is scope for the RCT work to be monitored by those involved with Creu Cyffro with a view to identifying future collaborations and sharing of lessons.

8.5.5. And finally...

There were undoubted problems in delivering the Creu Cyffro in the way that the programme organisers in Merthyr Tydfil wanted, largely as direct and indirect consequences of the funding structure and timeframe. However, the evaluation also demonstrated a clear willingness, and indeed passion, for the ideas unpinning the programme to work locally. As a pilot it has demonstrated ways in which an ongoing programme, branded as Creu Cyffro could work and this evaluation report highlighted where developments should focus.

On a final note, although the national funding was focused on industry development and economic regeneration, the palpable and immediate impacts were on participants themselves. Respondents talked about the joy of engaging with something creatively and the social connections that are made in collective creative environments. As one participant said, *"Not only are you learning skills, talking to other people, getting out and about: it's a really calming, lovely environment."*

³¹ [Welsh NHS Confederation | Wales Arts Health & Well-being Network \(wahwn.cymru\)](#)

³² [Wales's arts and health organisations call for arts to play leading role in 'A Healthier Wales' | NHS Confederation](#)

It is worth remembering that the Creu Cyffro name and branding is about creating excitement, and this was certainly felt by most of the delivery partners who would often report that what they enjoyed was lighting a creative passion:

There is nothing better than seeing someone in a corner come to life. I want to do that sort of stuff; do you know what I mean?

Appendix 1: Activities delivered

At the time of writing, this is what delivery partners told us they had delivered as part of Creu Cyffro:

Partner	Activities Delivered
Open University	16 x VR workshops with The College Merthyr students 11 x Music community workshops 10 x Creative writing community workshops 1 x Co-designed event – Celebrating Our Gurnos, consisting of 46 activities / workshops throughout the event X 17 partner organisations / artists involved in event Engaging 500 participants (approx. 150 adults, 350 children) 2 x Introducing VR practitioner training sessions
Beacons Bees	38 x visual art workshops in: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fused Glass • Silversmithing • Watercolour • Acrylic • Flower arranging • Willow weaving • Calligraphy 8 x Creative hub sessions 2 x artist-led Plein Air events 1 x Art exhibition
Puppet Soup	1 x ‘Puppetry in Education’ Teacher Training and Conference day for 123 teachers and teaching staff 1 x Half Term ‘Puppetry Theatre School’ for Children Engaged every school in Merthyr and gave them the opportunity to take part in our ‘Digital Create’ Puppetry Festival with specialist Teacher Training opportunities from around the world.
IntoFilm	6 x Film Literacy Teacher Training workshops 3 x Filmmaking Teacher Training workshops 8 x Skills development and work experience workshops for 14-19 year olds
Anthony Bunko	25 x creative writing (film scripts) sessions One-to-one mentoring with 12-15 participants
Screen Alliance Wales	2-day training course for Careers Wales Advisers about potential careers in the TV and Film Industry.

GTFM Radio	<p>Identification and training of volunteer broadcasters.</p> <p>Detailed technical planning discussions with media regulator OFCOM.</p>
Community Music Wales	<p>2 x training courses for musicians and community works</p> <p>5 x Continued Professional Development Sessions for musicians and those working in community settings.</p> <p>1 x Schools taster day</p> <p>1 x Improvisation for music project (5 sessions) for students at Merthyr College</p> <p>4 x Family music events in Cyfarthfa Park</p> <p>Weekly Ukulele sessions between Jan-Nov 2022</p> <p>4 x Soundwalk & animation sessions in Cyfarthfa Park</p> <p>2 x Rock School projects for young people in English and Welsh</p>
Wales Millennium Centre	<p>2 x Radio Platform training weekends</p> <p>272 Community tickets for WMC shows</p> <p>5 x Apprenticeships</p> <p>7 x Volunteers</p> <p>8 x Cooking sessions</p> <p>2 x 6hr breakdancing sessions</p> <p>36 x Pop-up activities including knit n natter, craft, arts, circus etc.</p> <p>22 x Artist fund creative workshops</p> <p>2 x Rehearsed readings</p> <p>R&D productions – ongoing</p> <p>Mentoring – ongoing</p> <p>Talking Shop – open since 8th October</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 33 studio bookings - 214 participatory events - 7 art exhibitions - 3182 visitors - 31 freelance roles created - 26 volunteer roles created
First Campus	<p>6 week music therapy course</p> <p>6 week dance and movement course</p> <p>6 week drama therapy course</p> <p>1 x introduction to jamming workshop</p> <p>1 x how dance and movement helps workshop</p> <p>1 x selfface through movement workshop</p> <p>1 x how visual art helps workshop</p> <p>1 x sculpture workshop</p> <p>1 x dilemma and resolution workshop</p>

Appendix 2 - Summary of Creu Cyffro podcast episodes

Episode		Contributors (Russell Todd hosted and participated in all episodes)	Organisation	Link to episode on Soundcloud
#	Title			
1	Introducing the Creu Cyffro programme	Lee Davies	Wellbeing Merthyr/Creu Cyffro	Link
		Rhys Bebb	Screen Alliance Cymru	
		Sarah Roberts	The Open University in Wales	
2	Evaluating Creu Cyffro	Eva Elliott Ellie Farmahan	Straeon Research Limited	Link
3	Evaluating media sentiments of Merthyr	Steph Bridgeman	Experienced Media Analysts	Link
4	Introducing more delivery partners	Alison Richards Robert Taylor	Artr Duo	Link
		Hannah Jenkins	Community Music Wales	
5	Creu Cyffro a Chanolfan Soar (<i>Welsh language episode</i>)	Lis McLean	Theatr Soar	Link
6	Community radio for Merthyr Tydfil	Terry Mann	GTFM	Link
7	Media sentiment: 'examination of the eyeballs'	Steph Bridgeman	Experienced Media Analysts	Link
8	Agor llygaid i yrfaoedd yn y	Rhys Bebb	Screen Alliance Cymru	Link

	byd teledu a ffilm (<i>Welsh language episode</i>)	Kate Harris	Careers Wales	
9	Completing the Media Sentiment Analysis	Steph Bridgeman	Experienced Media Analysts	Link
10	tbc	Eva Elliott Ellie Farmahan	Straeon Research Limited	tbc

Number of different participants: **12**

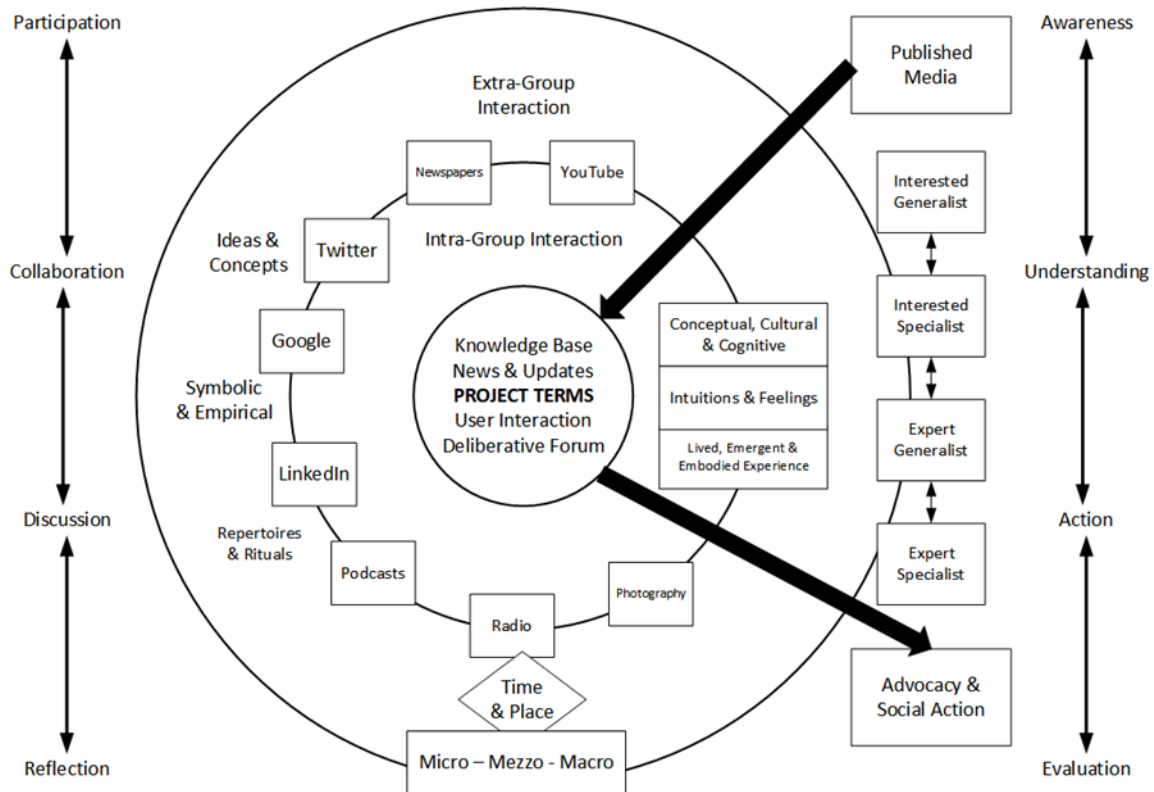
Number of different organisations: **10**

Appendix 3 – Media Sentiment Analysis

Please follow this link for the full report:

<https://straeon.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/Appendix-3-Merthyr-Tydfil-media-sentiment-analysis-1-Jan-to-6-Nov-2022.pdf>

Appendix 4: Model of Community Focused Communications



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