



Wales REACH

Residents Engaging in Arts, Culture, and Heritage

Evaluation report for the development phase
(April to October 2023)

Funded by the National Lottery Heritage Fund - with thanks to National Lottery players



The Open University
Y Brifysgol Agored

Wales Cymru



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Executive summary

Spanning 1 April to 31 October 2023, the development phase for Wales REACH included 26 events and attracted 183 adult participants (52 of whom attended more than one event), with 51 children also attending four family-themed events. The main function the development phase was a co-design exercise, which will underpin the delivery phase. Feedback from participants and project partners, whilst generally informal for reasons explained below, has been almost entirely positive. The development phase has fulfilled all six of its agreed purposes. Whilst it is the delivery phase that will fulfil the eight National Lottery Heritage Fund outcomes, the development phase has already made significant progress against several of them. Over and above the co-design exercise, the project team has gleaned some key learning points through the development phase activities. These relate primarily to how best to garner engagement, build relationships, and gain trust in marginalised communities that can be wary of large institutions like universities and national museums.

Overview of project

Wales REACH seeks to engage disadvantaged or peripheralised people with the heritage that matters to them. The project uses a variety of creative techniques to enable participants from five marginalised communities to learn about, experience, and reflect on the cultural and natural heritage around them. It will use the creative materials produced by participants to showcase the heritage of those communities through the talents of the people who live there. In this way, the project aims to reach peripheralised groups, boost participant skills and wellbeing, enhance community cohesion and pride, amplify marginalised voices, and enrich public understandings of Wales's story. The five communities REACH is working with are:

- Butetown, Cardiff: older residents from ethnically minoritised backgrounds in a socio-economically disadvantaged neighbourhood;
- Sandfields, Port Talbot (a National Lottery Heritage Fund area of focus in Wales): a post-industrial region where many have experience of insecure housing;
- Semi-rural areas across Pembrokeshire: a large proportion of older people with low incomes, many of whom are now isolated by poor transport links;
- Primarily Welsh-speaking communities from socio-economically disadvantaged areas of the Dyffryn Nantlle region of Gwynedd;
- People with learning disabilities in Rhondda Cynon Taff (a National Lottery Heritage Fund area of focus in Wales) and the Vale of Glamorgan.

The development phase of Wales REACH was funded with a grant of £27,925 from the National Lottery Heritage fund. This document provides an evaluation of its success against both the approved purposes of the grant and Heritage Fund outcomes.

List of partners and contacts

The Wales REACH development phase was led by The Open University and delivered with a consortium of partners. Those partners, along with the key contact for each, are as follows:

Amgueddfa Cymru

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Adult Learning Wales

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Arts Council of Wales

Diane Hebb, Director (Arts engagement), diane.hebb@arts.wales

ateb Group Limited

Mark Lewis, Executive Director for Customer, mark.lewis@atebgroup.co.uk

Federation of Museums and Galleries of Wales

Chris Delaney, Development Officer, lin.chris@btinternet.com

First Choice Housing Association Limited

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Innovate Trust

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Linc-Cymru Housing Association Limited

Karen Jeffreys, Community Engagement Manager, karen.jeffreys@linc-cymru.co.uk

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Public Health Wales

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Taff Housing Association Limited

Sarah Drury, Head of Support Services, sarah.drury@taffhousing.co.uk

Project changes

No major changes were made to the original plans for the development phase, as specified in the development phase bid. By and large our initial planning proved to be fit for purpose. That said, we sought to learn all we could from the development phase, and this enabled us to make adjustments and improvements as activities were delivered. In this way, we maximised impact in target communities and maximised value from the grant itself. That learning has also informed the design of the delivery phase. A list of changes follows:

- Rather than lead with launch events, we followed advice from community-based partners to begin with smaller scale activities which activities, intended to be less daunting to potential participants.
- The project spent less on venues and catering than anticipated. This is because venues tended to charge less than anticipated, and at many events only light catering (tea and cake) was deemed appropriate.
- The project spent less on activity facilitators than anticipated. That was because more events than expected could be run by in-house Open University and Amgueddfa Cymru staff at no cost to the project.

The resulting underspend was used as follows:

- To extend the project manager's contract by a month until end of October 2023, in order to arrange and deliver four additional events.
- To deliver those four additional events, intended to further widen participation for members of target communities. These events were also used to garner feedback from participants on the draft delivery phase activity plans.
- To fund an additional 5 days of capacity for the project's bid consultant to support revisions to the activity plans in response to feedback from participants, project partners, and the National Lottery Heritage Fund.

Evaluation methods

Evaluation of the development phase consisted of five elements:

- Recording and analysis of participant engagement patterns and demographics.
- Bilingual formal feedback forms (available both in hard copy and online) completed by participants.
- Informal feedback from participants on the activities they attended (gathered as part of the co-design exercise to inform the delivery phase activity plans).
- Commentary from activity facilitators and project partners on how they felt the project had gone.
- Informal reflections from the core OU project team, which helped to inform and frame this report.

Rather than focus on extensive formal feedback on participants' specific experiences for each event, the evaluation for the development phase was intentionally 'light touch'. This was in order to maintain a relaxed and positive atmosphere and to encourage participants to express their interests and wishes for the delivery phase. While we offered formal feedback forms in hard copy at events and online during the duration of the development phase, we deliberately avoided focusing on these forms and instead drew out suggestions and feedback through one-to-one and group conversations, as this was more conducive to the co-design process.

The brief timescale of the development phase and the deliberate framing of events to attract different participants for individual workshops meant that only initial steps towards trust and familiarity could be made. In the delivery phase, however, there will be time and opportunity to reassure participants who would otherwise be intimidated or put off by more formal and rigorous feedback gathering. Because of this, delivery phase evaluation will be more formally structured and robust.

Engagement and demographics

As noted above, the project has attracted 183 adult participants across 235 attendances (i.e. a substantial proportion of participants engaged with more than one activity). This number is well over the target of 100 participants given in the development phase bid. Below are participant numbers with additional explanatory notes for each of the participating communities.

- Pembrokeshire: 29 adult participants, mostly 40 to 60 year olds, all white Welsh with some of English origin, small number of bilingual attendees, initially high proportion of middle class attendees but more working class engagement with later events.
- Dyffryn Nantlle: 38 adult participants, mostly 60+ years, all white Welsh with some of English origin, almost exclusively first-language Welsh speakers, mainly retirees many of whom are struggling with financial hardship/cost of living.
- Sandfields: 30 adult participants, ranging from 30 to 70 years old, all white Welsh with some of English origin, mostly working-class retired or unemployed and in circumstances of financial hardship.
- Butetown: 17 adult participants, mainly 50+ years old, all from global majority ethnicities (west Africa, the Middle East, south Asia) with a mixture of first, second, and third generation, many living in subsidised living schemes, some speak only Somali or Arabic, others only English.
- RCT and Glamorgan: 47 adult participants, mainly 20 to 40 year olds, all white Welsh with some of English origin, all with learning disabilities.

Attendance by gender depended more on the type of activity than the community in question. More men came to the history and archaeology sessions, more women to creative writing and visual art. Natural history and visits to museums attracted both, but generally more women are engaging across the board. This reflects the gender splits amongst attendees that we observed in the pilot project, Blaenau Gwent REACH.

Please note that we deliberately avoided asking attendees to formally provide demographic information for fear of putting people off. Hence the notes above are based on the observations of the project team. It will, however, be possible to gather demographic information directly from participants for the delivery phase because the project now has recognition in the five communities involved.

Participant feedback

For reasons outlined above, feedback gathering mechanisms were relatively informal for the development phase. The comments received, both written on evaluation forms and spoken at sessions themselves, were overwhelmingly positive.

Participants highlighted the 'relaxed, fun' atmosphere of events, appreciated the 'encouragement to participate' and felt that the activities were 'well organised with lots of materials'. They also told us that they felt they had learnt new things about the history or natural heritage of their area, or alternatively had learnt new and stimulating creative skills. People were particularly pleased to know about 'what happened here'. They commented they were not taught this kind of history at school or found it difficult to locate or experience the heritage that REACH sessions focused on. Participants at creative writing and visual art sessions relayed they were surprised (and pleased) to have been given something new to have a go at. Often individuals mentioned friends or family members they wanted to share their new learning with, or who they thought would also benefit from the knowledge or skills imparted at project events.

When asked what content or activities they would like the delivery phase to deliver, many attendees were enthusiastic about the opportunity to continue learning about the cultural and natural history of their local areas. Several people who attended events where children were present commented positively on the 'range of ages' who engaged in activities. A few people fed back that they were unsure what to expect beforehand but on attending had immediately felt at ease and interested. Events where attendees were predominantly elderly commented on the benefits of having a positive reason to leave their homes and connect with people. Several attendees commented that they were glad to be able to participate in a new activity with their children or grandchildren.

There were a small number of negative comments at certain events about issues with hearing the facilitator, as well as technological issues with one of the online sessions. A minority of participants wished the events had been publicised more widely so that more people could have attended – a point which has informed plans to garner engagement more effectively in the delivery phase.

Partner feedback

Project partners were all heavily involved in the planning of events, from venue selection to session content. When Open University tutors and/or Amgueddfa Cymru staff were delivering sessions, online planning meetings were organised beforehand for housing association partners to meet the facilitators. This was welcomed by partners, especially as each activity had a different facilitator. Nevertheless, the large number of facilitators resulted in several of them reporting a feeling of disconnection from the wider project, and uncertainty about what was required of them. We considered this when designing the proposed staffing structure and approach to facilitation in the delivery phase. That said, Innovate Trust reported that facilitators did a good job of adapting their approach to delivery for participants with learning disabilities. They and our housing association partners have expressed confidence in The Open University and Amgueddfa Cymru's abilities to work effectively during the delivery phase with the various participant groups that the project targets.

Almost all facilitators confirmed that participants were doing and learning new things, and that the REACH events seemed to be a beneficial experience for them. In addition, discussion at Delivery Group meetings reiterated the virtues of combining heritage topics with creative arts approaches. Several housing associations partners were particularly enthusiastic about the potential of this approach to engage residents in new and valuable ways.

Assessment against approved purposes of the grant

Develop a Delivery Phase application including required supporting documents as per the National Lottery Grants for Heritage over £250,000 guidance.

- A delivery phase bid for Wales REACH was submitted to the National Lottery Heritage Fund in November 2023

Undertake a programme of consultation / co-design with target audiences and partners to develop and refine proposals, with specific focus on meeting the needs of specific target groups.

- 26 events were delivered. They attracted 183 individuals across 235 attendances. The first 20 events used heritage and creative arts activities to get people through the door, and once there employed a range of methods to gauge participants' interest in different heritage types and topics. Event facilitators and partner organisations were also canvassed for their thoughts on what participating communities might be interested in. The results were then used to inform the creation of the activity plans that form the basis of the delivery phase bid. The final four events were used to gather community feedback on those activity plans. A group of six participants also commented on the activity plans directly, and all project partners provided feedback on both the activity plans and the delivery phase bid as a whole.

Undertake evaluation of Development Phase activity in line with The Fund's requirements.

- This report addresses that requirement.

Ensure high visibility acknowledgement of the National Lottery Heritage Fund on site, online and in all activities.

- The Heritage Fund have been acknowledged and thanked in the opening remarks at every project event. The Heritage Fund logo is displayed prominently on all promotional materials, presentations, and handouts.
- The Heritage Fund is also recognised as the funder of The Open University's online announcements about Wales REACH, links below:
 - <https://www.open.ac.uk/research/impact/tackling-inequalities/what-does-it-mean-be-welsh>
 - <https://www5.open.ac.uk/wales/en/news/open-university-awarded-grant-national-lottery-heritage-fund-connect-welsh-communities-their>
 - <https://www5.open.ac.uk/wales/en/news/helping-welsh-communities-connect-their-heritage>.

The last of these announcements was publicised on social media as follows:

- <https://twitter.com/OUCymru/status/1719368712984105242?s=20> (X, formerly Twitter)
- <https://www.linkedin.com/feed/update/urn:li:activity:7125134763408916480> - LinkedIn
- <https://www.facebook.com/openuniversitywales/posts/pfbid02RGTacjumPCaGtmKSA1vp9SYZJ54hVyzp6o2o9KqNnPf5mefLPx7tS8WyEnHbg8TI> - Facebook

All announcements and posts were also released in Welsh.

Develop and deliver a plan for how you will use your project to thank National Lottery players for their support.

- The plan has been submitted as part of the delivery phase bid and will be delivered should funding be forthcoming for that phase.

Ensure environmental sustainability is incorporated into planned activities.

- All activities have been delivered in or near the target communities, reducing travel requirements. Many event facilitators also live locally. In addition, all five community programmes of activity have included a session on natural history or similar, often in the form of a field trip. These serve to connect participants with the natural heritage of their area and emphasise the importance of environmental sustainability. Indeed, The Open University's own research suggests that people are more likely to protect what they understand and value when it comes to the natural world.

Assessment against the National Lottery Heritage Fund's outcomes

The funded organisation will be more resilient

- By working closely together on the project, the The Open University, Amgueddfa Cymru, and other project partners have developed a better understanding of how best to work with marginalised communities. The project's Housing Association partners and Innovate Trust, meanwhile, have learned about how heritage can be used to facilitate such work. This is knowledge exchange in action, with each partner bringing their own experience of community engagement work to the mix. That learning will continue in the delivery phase. In addition, the consortium of partners involved in delivering Wales REACH is already acting as a platform for discussion about other forms of collaboration in the future. Finally, The Open University is already learning more about how ideas about the past inform identities in the present, building on the research undertaken on this theme as part of the Blaenau Gwent REACH pilot project.

People will have greater wellbeing and have developed skills

- These outcomes are initially being supported by engagement in development phase activities currently underway. We will report on them formally in the development phase evaluation report. However, as noted in previous sections, initial feedback already suggests that taking part in project activities is having benefits for participants. The larger scale benefits in these areas will be realised by the delivery phase. Further detail can be found in section 4 of the delivery phase bid.

The local area will be a better place to live, work or visit

- This outcome will be mainly met through the dissemination and legacy stages of the delivery phase.

The local economy will be boosted

- We anticipate that this outcome will be met primarily through the dissemination and legacy stages of the delivery phase, towards the end of the project. Further detail can be found in section 4 of the delivery phase bid. That said, the project's use of local venues, vendors and freelancers will be having a modest but positive impact on local economies. Development phase spend in each participating community is as follows:
 - Pembrokeshire- £752.59
 - Butetown- £200.90
 - Dyffryn Nantle- £1883.49
 - Sandfields - £2566.68
 - RCT and Glamorgan- £1038.46

That impact will be greater in delivery phase, with a much larger number of activities delivered in each community.

Heritage will be in better condition

- The production and curation of digital heritage (creative reflections on the past, oral histories, and digitised material) will fulfil this outcome in the dissemination and legacy stages of the delivery phase. Further detail can be found in section 4 of the delivery phase bid. As noted above however, we are already finding that project activities are helping to foster local people's interest in these types of heritage, which we aim to grow into a willingness to create and then curate them.

Heritage will be identified and better explained, and people will have learned about heritage (leading to a change in ideas and actions)

- These outcomes have initially been supported by engagement in development phase activities currently underway. Initial feedback so far is that participants are enjoying learning new things about their own areas. The larger scale benefits in these areas will be realised by the delivery phase. Further detail can be found in section 4 of the delivery phase bid.

Learning for the delivery phase

As noted above, the entire development phase was a consultation and co-design exercise with participating communities, the results of which have been used to design the activity plans at the core of the project's delivery phase. Nonetheless, there has been considerable learning beyond that, based both on what worked well as well as what didn't. Key learning points are as follows:

- Word of mouth is key to getting engagement. Getting the support of community leaders can be a big help with that.
- Ensure that activities, even when introducing new topics or techniques, are anchored in some way to interests that already exist in the community.
- It is vital to pick the right venue to attract the right people. The local community centre or rugby club is often a better bet than a high-profile heritage site.
- It is more important that facilitators have good delivery skills and people skills than a high level of expertise in the subject of the activity.
- The project needs consistent faces in the communities and at events as a prerequisite for building relationships and trust with residents.
- Housing associations are a way into communities but connecting with grassroots groups and through them becoming part of the community 'scene' is crucial to engaging people.
- It is vital that potential attendees understand that activities are open to anyone, not just the tenants of the housing associations we are working with.
- Big launch events to gain initial visibility can put people off. Better to start small, networking, piggybacking onto existing events, plugging into the rhythms of the community.
- New opportunities and possibilities come from simply being consistently present and visible in participating communities.
- Some communities may suffer from 'intervention fatigue'. Putting novelty and fun into activities is a good way to mitigate this.

List of appendices

- Appendix 1: Development phase feedback form
- Appendix 2: Events delivered, demographics, and spend per community
- Appendix 3: Photographs from events

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