



Music Venue Trust Welsh Venues Meeting Notes – May 2016

To summarise key point raised/discussed in Cardiff we have compiled notes from listening to the recording of the meeting. These notes are now being shared for feedback and to inform the content of Venues Day 2016.

(Note: GMV = Grassroots Music Venue, MVT = Music Venue Trust, MVA = Music Venues Alliance, TAMVA = Trade Association of the Music Venues Alliance, ACW = Arts Council of Wales, ACE = Arts Council England)

The Scene in Wales - An Open Discussion for Moving Forward

1. PRS for Music

- Considered to be one of the biggest problems for Welsh venues; they are already paying the band to play and then need to find c.£40 on top to pay PRS.
- This is particularly an issue when a venue is trying to work with a new promoter. They understand the fee for venue use but not why there's a further charge on top for PRS.
- 'For the minimum charge to be the 3% it is supposed to represent, ticket take would need to be £1000.' This means that for small venues the minimum charge is far higher than 3%.
- There is also inconsistency in how the venues are charged. Both PRS and PPL need to be more transparent/clear about how they work.
- The recent consultation period allowed MVT and other supportive voices in the industry to feed back to PRS that the minimum charge is tantamount to a tax on the grassroots of the music industry. Discussions between MVT and PRS are ongoing. We will feed back on any advances.
- GMVs can request that MVT get involved in their PRS negotiations if they are trade association (TAMVA) members.

2. Pop-ups or non-dedicated music venues

- The Live Music Act has led to audiences questioning why they have to pay to attend a gig in a GMV when they don't in a pub or other space. They don't understand the investment in the quality of the experience on offer in a GMV.
- MVT understands this frustration and is working on the issue of cultural parity, ie. repositioning the perception of GMVs so that their 'competitors' would be arts centres, theatres and others cultural spaces rather than pubs and clubs.
- The Live Music Act was intended to increase music opportunities for audiences. Politically it is accepted that this good intention created problems for GMVs and work is now being done to try and redress that in partnership with UK Music and MVT.
- We are very open to suggestions of how else this imbalance could be addressed.

3. Public Funding

- Feeling that funding support for culture in Wales largely goes to high arts. There are rock bands developing now who are the festival headliners of the future but they receive nothing.

- When venues have sought financial and practical help they have felt that the emphasis was on them doing new things (or pretending to do new things) in order to qualify.
 - MVT is keen to give GMVs the tools to demonstrate that they are already doing important work. The dialogue is starting to change, evidenced by this meeting supported by ACW (and the ones in England supported by ACE), and the fact that staff within those organisations genuinely understand the issues and are explaining them to colleagues. See Panel 2 for more about how to quantify what GMVs do.
 - The point was made that it would be helpful if what funders require could be stated more clearly.
- 4. Programming / Defining a GMV**
- In a small town like Carmarthen, how many live gigs can you expect to be successful – 1 a week, 1 a month? For live music experiences to be offered outside of big cities support is needed. And all venues need to do other things in addition to live music.
 - Clwb Ifor Bach's programme is 60-70% live music but that contributes only 5% to the venue's income. Club nights pay for the live programme. This is not how the venue wants to run but how they have to.
 - Buffalo Bar asked about the definition of a GMV. They put on club nights, comedy and food during the day. Live music is what they want to do but they are programming less and less of it.
 - MVT considers that self-determination is a key factor in whether a venue is a GMV; do you think you are a music venue? Is putting music on the thing you want to do the most? The recent case in Derby was raised where The Hairy Dog had to fight to be classed as a music venue 'because it made most of its money from selling beer'. This argument was countered in court with the Derby Playhouse, a theatre which makes its money from a bar, café, restaurant, workshops and grants but is still accepted as a theatre.
- 5. Audiences**
- Decline in student audiences is a problem.
 - Clwb have good under 18 audiences but the bar take is very low from these gigs.
 - Fuel Rock Club have a policy of booking young bands but there are difficulties around audience age limits and curfews.
 - The challenges of booking for young audiences and funding this is something we would like to discuss at Venues Day 2016.
 - Interestingly Sin City (Swansea) have a good 16-20 age audience but older age groups are going elsewhere.
- 6. National promoters**
- As in all the English meetings, the fact that GMVs develop artists only to have them 'poached' by a national promoter when they reach a certain level of success was discussed. Even Orchard Entertainment, the biggest promoter in Wales, experiences this. See Panel 3 for more info.

Panel: Localism, Community & Funding

1. Arts Council Wales (ACW)

- Historically in Wales there has been support for 'high' arts and the commercial sector has fended for itself. Now it is recognised that there is a huge grey area in between.
- Research shows that music tends to be the first contact for audiences in Wales. As ACW's priority is supporting opportunities for audiences this puts music in a strong position.

- ACW has a Music Industry Development Fund – this is the grant programme that funded the Welsh Venues Meeting. Applications have to be for activity that is not for profit because it's public funding. The emphasis is on public benefit rather than genre. The team love music and want to help.
- In the audience 2 venues had applied to ACW, 1 was successful.

2. Welsh Government (WG)

- Have a Creative Industries Sector team (CIS) whose job is to look at/support culture from an economic point of view: job creation, sustainable business. The team have their own budget. Focus to date has been on the film and TV industry but music is eligible for support.
- WG team deals with funding for ACW, media and cultural industries. Need to approach them to start a dialogue.
- There is a lot of support (financial and non) available through Business Wales for SMEs – which GMVs are – including capital funding, marketing/business planning, introductions to potential investors etc. It is labyrinthine but the CIS team can help navigate, you just need to ask.
- The accessibility of GMVs is an important consideration for WG as they could be considered more accessible than many arts centres.
- Many venues did have business rate relief last year from WG. Most have never asked WG for anything else. (Continued in points 3-6 below)

3. Terminology

- Using the right language to talk about what GMVs do is key when addressing potential supporters/funders.
- For WG jobs are important – creating or sustaining, increasing turnover, talent development (something GMVs do naturally)
- For ACW the emphasis is on audiences and the quality of what you offer them: what will the audience experience be, how can you make it accessible to as many people as possible, how can you reach new audiences? Welsh language offer is also a consideration. The other key area is talent development /supporting artists.
- At present there is a gap between the fact that GMVs nurture talent development and explaining that in a way that leads to funding.

4. Planning & Licensing Issues

- The way that venues self-define/are viewed also affects the way planning and licensing issues impact on them. It was suggested that some sort of standardised response for planning applications, noise complaints etc. could help how GMVs are treated and assist with negotiating soundproofing with developers, rather than waiting for problems.

5. Sustainability

- A major problem for venues is sustainability. It would be really helpful if money could be ring-fenced to sustain and improve GMVs because of the benefits they bring. At the moment that issue doesn't seem to fit the funding criteria.
- WG responded that structural issues are very important and they are already looking at whether Welsh Planning legislation could be changed in line with the recent improvement in England.
- But even more important to WG are Welsh-specific issues. If capital investment is needed to sustain Welsh venues, then a consortium/network of venues should approach WG to request it – maintaining their businesses is of benefit to the people of Wales. GMVs are recognised as being important to the Welsh Music Industry so the economic benefit of investing in them needs to be expressed.
- If venues are made better the audience experience improves and they want to return. There is a need to address the gap between young people's expectations of what the live experience should be and what GMVs can offer.

6. Proactive not reactive

- MVT is working on initiatives to encourage venues to be proactive rather than waiting until a problem arises and starting a petition in a panic. With new ministers coming in to WG this is a good time to approach WG as a group and tell them what GMVs need. It is easier to influence WG than Westminster.
- Invite ministers and councillors to shows to demonstrate what you do – many are music fans.
- GMVs' problems straddle lots of different departments of gov. so it would be helpful to approach ministers to explain how they sit across these issues. The fact that Wales is a small country makes proactive lobbying much easier.
- Suggestion that using the online Event Impact Calculator to quantify how much money GMVs generate for Wales' economy was made. Lea said this works well for multi-venue events (like Focus Wales) but may not be the most effective tool for ongoing activity.
- Thought needs to go into what venues need from WG and then work out with the CIS team how to make the formal approach for assistance.
- This meeting evidences the need for support and collective working. It should be viewed as the start of a process that should be built on. MVT will help co-ordinate the next step to look at working with both ACW and WG.

Panel: Music Industry Issues

1. Entry level touring

- The challenges of being able to afford to tour Wales for entry level bands were discussed. Travel is expensive, fees are low, they don't demand big riders so there is little room for negotiating any more favourable terms from GMVs, other than perhaps requesting that free accommodation is offered and that venues on a tour share publicity costs.
- From a venue's point of view, if entry level bands are not pulling an audience/selling tickets then why should a venue find the money to pay them/subsidise what they want to do? A small audience not only means low ticket income but also bar take, so a fee could potentially be coming out of the venue's pocket.
- This was accepted and it was suggested that schemes such as Off Axis could help more in Wales, partnering up bands to share audiences in different towns/cities. Few Welsh venues are part of Off Axis but they are MVA members so MVT could introduce if required.
- Dai Davies talked about how in the 1970s costs for musicians were relatively low and you could make a reasonable living. Bands were paid a similar fee then as they are now but the costs have rocketed. 'The problem now is that entry level is a place of great poverty whereas the top is a place of great wealth. Entry level is so difficult and damaging that it endangers the whole of the industry.' This is a problem for government because the creative economy becomes weaker as the acts of the future are not being generated/nurtured.
- WG's Cultural Industries Sector team had been focused on the film & TV industry but is now engaging with music. They understand that talent needs pathways to develop so that it can have a commercial future; to be an asset to the economy. The need to support talent development has been identified but not how to do that yet.

2. Academy Music Group (AMG)

- AMG recognise the vital role of GMVs; their whole model was based on having multi-scale venues in towns/cities to house artists as they develop. AMG have artists on their way up, then they're poached by national promoters, then they come back to AMG later/when they reform.

- AMG work in collaboration with GMVs in lots of cities so understand the problems and share a lot of them, eg. PRS fees, costs/losing money on shows etc. Appreciate that they have a cushion from the scale of operation but they still lose out to national promoters.
- 3. National Promoters**
- There was a call for loyalty from artists to keep their link with local promoters when they move up to working with a national promoter; co-promotion. If an artist says that they want to do this, then national promoters would have to agree. GMVs also need to stick up for themselves and say what they want – it's about relationships.
 - Orchard Entertainment did 263 small shows under 500 cap. in one year. They made no money on these shows; they were happy if they broke even because it was about investment in talent and their organisational development. They are now the biggest promoter in Wales and can promote at the Motorpoint Arena, but they still frequently lose out to Metropolis/SJM/Live Nation.
 - For a new venue it is really difficult to develop relationships with agents and national promoters. Sin City (Swansea) are booking 85-90% of their programme in-house but feel that bringing national promoters in can bring credibility to a venue.
- 4. Financial Support**
- Welsh venues and promoters don't have any real success in seeking sponsorship. If they talk to a company, they are always referred to London who then say 'It's only Wales'. Music need government support.
 - WG have spent money on music in the past but are aware that a meaningful impact could be made if they focus on grassroots. Through their work on film/TV they have learned about talent development so now the CIS team know to look at where to spend money on the talent pathway: rehearsal facilities and GMVs seem like a good place to start.
 - There is still work to be done on synchronising the support. An eg. was given of The Globe and its interaction with Cardiff City Council. One department was trying to shut it down following noise complaints while another was trying to give it money to market its activity. Communication is key.
 - The advantage with WG is that it is small and the teams have good access to ministers. They can be slow to act but they do understand the issues now.

Conclusions

- The key to improving the situation for GMVs in Wales is collaboration – every part of the continuum will need to put in work.
- There are lots of open doors, the timing is good and this meeting marks the start of a process.
- MVT is keen to be part of the next steps but at the same time others should feel empowered to come forward and take a lead. MVT only exists because we had an idea of something we wanted to do and we did it. There's room for other players to contribute to strategic development for Welsh venues.