



(image: Chris Brown)

The All Wales Creative Conversation: What we heard

September 2018

Introduction

To help us plan for the future, we've been finding out what people think are the key issues that we need to tackle. Earlier this year we met with approximately 435 people in 12 sessions, across the length and breadth of Wales. We also sought views online. We want to thank everyone who contributed so generously their time and energy.

Some of those who we talked to are familiar with our work. However, we also involved those who don't regularly have contact with the Arts Council, especially young people and those from culturally diverse backgrounds and communities.

We listened carefully to the rich and invigorating conversation. And we were impressed by the energy and commitment that we witnessed. People value the arts, but feel that not enough is yet being done to make them available to the widest possible audience. Their challenge to us is to make it happen.

Most of what we heard could be grouped around six key messages:

1. How can we talk about the arts?
2. Improving our approach to Reach, Diversity and Equalities
3. Inspiring and engaging young people
4. Encouraging networks and making connections
5. Creating Pathways
6. Renewal and reinvigoration – a new sense of openness

In the pages that follow we expand on each of these six headings. Of course, it would be impractical to include every comment made, however, we hope you will recognise what follows as a reasonable summary of the conversation that you were part of.

We've used the results from these workshops, as well as other consultation work, to help us make decisions about our work in the future. In the pages that follow we include, in unedited form, many of the things that we heard. We've laid out what people can expect from us as a developer and funder of the arts in a new Corporate Plan – *For the Benefit of All*.

David Alston
Director, Arts
Arts Council of Wales

1. How can we talk about the arts?

Many people recognise what the value of the arts and what they can bring to our everyday lives. But that's not shared by all. We heard that we should be doing more to "spread the word" – being more persuasive in the ways that we explain the benefits of enjoying and taking part in the arts.

There is clearly a role for the Arts Council here, but also more broadly for those working in or involved in the arts. It's not just about advocacy – banging the drum and competing for funds – it's about spreading the experience and enabling more people to engage actively with the arts.

The focus in a number of our discussions was "how can the arts do this better?"

What people were saying "..."

We found a good understanding of the Welsh Government's well-being legislation and the **opportunities for the arts if we reflect the well-being goals:**

"Health and Wellbeing Act is real agent for change."

"Healthy society, healthy community – art everyday life – even if it's not art for them first."

"Proven arts good for you, creativity well being improved. Paid for by arts and social care. Proven that arts funding saves money especially mental health."

If well-being was integrated into future activities, people felt that **the intrinsic experience of enjoying and taking part in the arts was important:**

"Experience the creative process - focus on helping people with this experience as well as the end result. If people are directly involved in it it's their direct experience."

And if we believe these intrinsic values to be important, **we need to value people's experience of the arts:**

"Look at shifting to qualitative rather than quantitative data to recognise what people experience from creating art."

But we were also challenged to **be bold and take risks** if we aspire to support the best of the arts:

"Without an element of risk in the funding programmes, we aren't going to know what's good in the future."

"Having a funder who will "go with us" on a creative journey and not predicting our outcomes is very important. True creativity cannot be pre determined."

The importance of the arts was consistently mentioned. But many people saw the big challenge as **bringing the arts more centrally into people's everyday lives** in ways that they can engage with and understand. Talking about the arts can still be perceived as marginal and difficult:

"It's about mainstreaming the arts."

"Value of art as art not as a vehicle for the delivery of other things"

"There's a perception that the arts is a barrier to the...arts."

"Normalise talking about art - short clips/coverage on BBC – bite-size as an introduction for audiences to find out more"

"The poppies in the Tower of London – no questions about "is this art?" It resonates with audiences."

"It's important that we safeguard the language and Welsh language work needs to tour to other places. ... But we have to make it accessible for non-Welsh speakers."

We detected some frustrations that on occasions **the arts seemed to be more invisible in public life than they should be**. There was a sense that projects, plans and developments were unfolding without a cultural element being part of the thinking:

“No reference to culture in Valleys Task Force remit – need to lobby.”

“Arts Community from Cardiff and the valleys to lobby politicians with a collective voice – we are fighting the same cause!”

“Arts affect all aspects of life but how do we get people to realise this?”

“Can we champion each other to create and build the sector and encourage others from outside the sector to be a part of events, shows, openings as audience members and participants.”

If the arts are to become more commonplace, we need to **involve others in pressing the case, in many cases by evidencing more of what is going on:**

“How do we get all the right voices around the table, and how do they then get around the Government table?”

“The arts and their value to us as human beings needs a massive marketing push”

“Can we support work happening by emerging artists as well as national companies by tweeting, encouraging others to ‘go see’”

“Universities can be partnership organisations to increase evidence base and lobby government.”

“Broadcast media and platforms – how can they be better used?”

Some thoughtful arguments were advanced for more radical change, suggesting that **the traditional systems and structures needed to evolve and develop:**

“Should we attempt to create some level of regional organisation of culture to match increasing regionalisation of education, transport, housing, planning?”

"I think we are still considering old models. We (despite being creative) are having difficulty describing what the new models might look like. All very well to say 'we need to change the discourse' but that feels a deficit model."

"OK, start a new discourse rather than complaining about the old one. But perhaps we can't visualise/describe the new way of working until we start doing it. We can only set up the conditions such as bringing different voices together (cross disciplinary, science, different ages,). And then the new ways will emerge. It would be helpful, perhaps, to go and look at other places, other countries, who are doing things differently."

"How can all Valleys arts and culture opportunities be joined up and presented/broadcasted to the communities so that people know the opportunities available in their locality?"

"Delivering art to people where they are, in environments where they are comfortable"

"Positive examples of community activism and grass roots creativity should be celebrated and used as examples of best practice."

"Maybe it's about creating and working with different and unfamiliar structures. Reach – transport, childcare, food and ability to offer free activities/places to get deeper reach – community work needs this wider level of support."

"The more deprived the area the less you see people stepping up and taking responsibility to organise events."

"There's an ethos of stepping up in some areas - through brass bands, choirs, rugby clubs but again these indicate that structures however informal need to be right."

2. Improving our approach to Reach, Diversity and Equalities

This is a major priority for the Council, now and into the future.

Talk in our conversations has ranged across the key issues of who is involved in the arts and what the barriers are to engagement. There was an overwhelming sense that Council's priority was endorsed, but there was a strong interest in understanding how a wider, deeper involvement in the arts could be made possible.

What people were saying: "..."

For some, there were some basic questions about **who were in positions of power, and how decisions were made:**

"Is there diversity within your own organisation?"

Good art is inclusive. Come on !

"Ensure that decision making bodies are more diverse and gender balanced."

"Are we engaging with immigrants and minorities as sources of inspiration?"

"Need to diversify staff/boards of organisations."

"Community must be involved in a dialogue for what they want their communities to be."

"We need more representation of working class arts organisations and people in decision making positions."

"What are the barriers? National Theatre Wales have included class in their Diversity policy. Permission for working class people to be involved in and make art."

As we answer these questions we're also being urged to **find ways of talking directly to communities themselves** about their hopes and expectations:

"We need to listen to what communities want and feel they need to enhance the culture of their region, and not just impose ideas/projects upon them. Art should not be parachuted into a community rather be designed by a community. Connections with partners across all business or service in order to reach."

"There should be an extensive artsweb of opportunities across Wales promoting collaborations between all sorts of community agencies, organisations, schools, artists."

There also needs to be a **better understanding of the diversity of individuals and communities who potentially represent an audience for the arts:**

"How do we engage the audiences better? How do we find out what activity they want?"

"Change the organisational mind-set about who our audiences are – change where power lies."

"Community champions programme. Continuing professional development. We should feel comfortable with being uncomfortable, and that is through exposure to our audiences and them challenging us."

An important aspect of this could be **ensuring that arts organisations are more representative of the communities they seek to serve:**

"Encourage organisations to become more like the communities we serve – boards, management, entry level artists / creatives."

"How like our communities are we as organisations / artists? Engage with art that reflects their own experiences."

"Art at its best, enables us to understand / get insight into other peoples lives and experience – people who's identity and lives are very different to our own, so avoid plans which are too segmented."

But we were also warned about **the dangers in adopting too simplistic a view of Diversity:**

“The profile of the people we work with doesn't necessarily fit protected characteristics. Difference in diversity. What does diversity look like in different areas?”

Shifting the existing patterns of funding came up quite a bit:

“Equality of opportunity comes from equality of funding – we need more discussion about this.”

“Cardiff - big attractions, buildings, capital city - audience development...What about regeneration & arts in less populous communities?”

“End of Communities first areas is really problematic.”

“Could individuals applying for money feel comfortable applying? Unlikely. The barrier is that it seems overly complicated.”

“Measuring worth. How to get parity across different cases for the arts and creative industries? What is the connection between these sectors, how do we define it?”

And there was a strong push for **members of the Arts Portfolio Wales – especially national companies – to take a lead:**

“Participation is a requirement of APWs - how can we broker relationships between APWs and communities to create projects. Can this be a requirement of APW funding? That would force us to do something difficult and not reverting to easy. Audiences and participants need to know they are able to challenge the venues.”

“Take the National companies out of Cardiff where possible and rehouse them in the City Region unless they are venue specific.”

“How can the Nationals work with community arts, so that both partners support the necessary agency?”

“Large Cardiff centric organisations should support ‘local’ organisations in the valleys.. But not set-up their own outposts – they should work with pre-existing organisations doing good work, rather than spending money on new organisations, infrastructures etc.”

It was also suggested that **some theatres and arts centres could be engaged with their audiences** around programme planning and marketing:

“Receiving houses need to be less passive receptacles but listen to audiences What do the people who want when It needs to be wider, broader, not talking to silos of audiences.”

“Use spaces beyond venues and other partners beyond the sector- - already trusted by the community.”

“People with barriers to participation. Could more useful to think about Marketing... Is it a waste of time if the same people are coming all the time and they'd probably come anyway? Spend money on getting people who aren't engaged.”

Many people suggested that sustainable community development demands a willingness to be **in it for the long haul**:

“Short term interventions are not effective.”

“Long term projects and longer term measurement of outcomes.”

And everyone stressed the **importance of developing appropriate skills to work in community settings**:

“Need training to work in a community.”

3. Inspiring and engaging young people

Two years ago the Arts Council embarked on a major collaboration with the Welsh Government – our Creative Learning through the Arts programme. Unsurprisingly, this has meant that a lot of talk in our Creative Conversations has been about encouraging, building and fostering the creativity of young people.

Supporting the creativity of young people has been an enduring commitment from our Council, but we feel it's important to tap into young people's views on the future of the arts in their lives.

The young people proved to be enthusiastic and insightful contributors to our debate.

What people were saying: "..."

We were reminded that **young people themselves are endlessly diverse** in their backgrounds, interests and hopes for the future:

"Young people do not live in closed communities. They also belong to multiple communities – need to be aware of this and not make assumptions based on our experience and knowledge."

"Could working class parents be the best advocates for the arts. Nobody gets it more. My kids are educating me through the arts. Mothers tend to be more engaged in the arts. Long term. Generational change. Transformational for parents and communities. Wanting, expecting things for their children. Aspiration."

"With a lot of students having a formation in creative disciplines, how can we create quality pathways beyond education."

This implies that **new ways need to be found to communicate with and engage young people:**

"Platforms for reaching young people? Example, Labour Party reaching and communicating with young people. How can the arts develop a platform to reach and communicate?"

"Children are often dissuaded from experiencing arts by their parents/families Deliver at a suitable level / conditions which they can relate to, not just a bourgeois thing in a gallery Art isn't the immediate issue for those less fortunate. Art is about social change. Belonging"
"Appeal to the YouTubers!"

"Young people or community members at the core of planning?"

"Have arts organisations / ACW at careers nights"

However, perhaps the strongest theme to emerge from the conversations was the importance of **ensuring that young people have an authentic and high quality experience of the arts**, but this was balanced by a sense that **much of mainstream arts lacked an appeal or didn't resonate with young people** and the forms and approaches they particularly valued or wanted to get involved in:

"Creative Learning through the Arts programme, starting blocks, children learning creativity through an arts approach."

"Not lessening the Art, dumbing down, but finding the 'place' the 'space' to reach and engage."

"Participation has been used elsewhere to engineer social change. But this loses the arts for arts sake - you lose experienced artists and do audiences still have the primary art experience? Creative Schools programme shifts young people's appreciation of arts to give them an appetite for the primary art experience."

"Make the arts embedded within education."

"The arts currently do not take risks."

"A lot of theatre sticks to what they know, but it's not just theatre. "

There was some discussion about **geographical disparities across Wales**:

"There's a north / south divide in Wales (and something of a west / east divide). This is partly the dominance of Cardiff in terms of resources. Young people in different parts of Wales want to work together more closely."

"Young people's limited access to transport is a big problem – this exacerbates what seems to be funding being focused in certain places or certain organisations (and not youth ones)."

There was a lot of discussion of **Welsh language and bilingual work**, particularly theatre, but also literature, with a wide range of views:

"I'd like more bilingual stuff. Not everyone speaks Welsh; It's important that we safeguard the language."

"Welsh language work needs to tour to other places."

"More companies should be able to use the translation apps."

Getting the first step on the ladder was seen as a big issue:

"There is a big step between graduating and becoming a working artist. The first steps are very hard. Even when support is there, young people find it intimidating to ask for it."

"It's really difficult going from amateur to professional."

"It's important that new people have a chance, not just established artists."

Often it seems to come down to **personal initiative**:

"We need more of a link between people with no experience and professionals. I'd like to see how people work in the arts before making a decision to go into it; I was given an opportunity with xxx."

"I found it very difficult to go from the Eisteddfod background into theatre."

"Through my own initiative I made the opportunities to work with independent [film] companies. You've got to go in as an individual."

"You have to push yourself."

There was a passionate desire to **keep the conversations going, to keep looking for opportunities:**

"Whose responsibility is it to make this happen? It's ours. It's up to us to organise ourselves."

"We all need to take ownership."

"Events like this [the Creative Conversation] help."

4. Encouraging Networking and Making Connections

We heard a lot that this was seen as something needing to be encouraged in the future. More is needed.

Artists work in isolation. Wales has challenges as well as advantages in its physical make-up as a country. But it was felt that if there were more possibilities to learn together, share best practice and to use networks, this would strengthen the arts.

What people were saying: "..."

People value **opportunities to connect and join up**:

"Power of networks to maintain sustainability - could you trigger a network or facilitate its development? People like to make connections Quite a lonely existence especially for individual artists."

"Communicating work in order to inspire other organisations. Sharing across sectors...Learning through evaluation and sharing. Sharing failure to inform other projects and organisations."

"Openness – share best practice."

"Networks are really important in systematically getting an audience perspective. Looking at previous projects, crowdfunding, any ways of testing audiences."

So the key issue wasn't the benefits of collaboration, but **working out how to connect more effectively** (a topic that seemed to raise more questions than answers):

"How to connect potential project 'collaborators'?"

"Lack of awareness of partners and organisations outside Cardiff."

"Use the opportunities of the development of the City Regions network to foster greater connectivity between national/ regional and local arts organisations."

"Why is community a separate word in the arts? If people we keep separating both community and professional are we creating a divide and under selling ourselves (local artists)."

"We can build networks as artists. We can do art in people's homes. Connect with each other."

"How to connect internally as commercial, subsidised and community/voluntary? And at scale with integration and visibility?"

The lack of firm proposals or ideas suggested that **networking and collaboration might be areas where the Arts Council could usefully take a lead:**

"Local authorities aren't fully grasping the opportunity represented by the arts – why? Ignorance or lack of aspiration generally?"

"How does the cultural sector lead the way in encouraging the collaborating / co-working of local authorities? It's a strong skill in the creative sector."

"Its important to capture and share knowledge – through networks and events and also new ways for ACW and others to work. Eg: give areas of your website over to other organisations every week for them to post / share case studies/ ideas etc"

"Create a culture of engagement and data awareness."

"Sharing models of the way people are working and inspiring others."

"How do we network more widely with UK and internationally?"

"Expanding reach needs bridges to other cultural blocks especially science and sports. Arts Council should take a lead on reaching out to these other blocks to promote more working together, sharing audiences. Creative skills are the key."

5. Creating Pathways

Where do we need to focus support particularly to artists in different disciplines? What is the role of our arts organisations in fostering capacity in the arts and helping to create an environment that can nurture artistic talent through different stages of career?

What people were saying: "..."

Developing the best and most innovative art depends on having **effective ways of identifying and nurturing talent**:

"Are we effective in effective in identifying and nurturing?"

"Be Talent scouts, out and about finding/identifying talent."

"Creative practitioners – regular classes – training – is this happening to create true creativity? – why is technique important?"

"More mentoring of young and mature working alongside each other and co mentoring."

"ACW to adopt the world wrestling entertainment model to support and nurture young talent, through pool of advisers / help – a development café providing guidance on what to think about to realise ambitions For emerging artists the role of producer is important. Producers should be more consolidated, less independent Is there a quality control process in place for nurturing, and what is that?"

A number of people suggested that **funded organisations could be doing more to support and nurture individual artists**:

"Need for training, mentoring, apprenticeships to be more rooted, core to Arts Portfolio Wales organisations."

"Getting an organisational grant should also come with an Obligation to mentor open up possibilities for others and prioritise equalities to make in roads here."

We were told repeatedly that **creative professionals need help to enable them to build financially sustainable careers:**

“Creating better careers advice around opportunities in the arts e.g. carpentry – all the jobs in TV not just producers, directors, actors.”

“Ensure that there are career paths, development opportunities.”

“It’s important that new people have a chance, not just established artists.”

“Business training for new freelancers.”

“Networking and information opportunities – digital? Online directories?”

“Something strategic has to happen - eg CAT scheme in England; offers opportunities and joined up thinking spot provide training at all levels to professional standard.”

“To have politically – engaged community work, poignant artwork, and effective creative sectors, we must think of the people working in it as deserving of proper incentives: salaries, unions, security, so they can stop worrying about the next freelance contract and get on with it.”

Allied to this was the equally strong plea that **funding policies and processes should encourage the creative professional, not impede them:**

“How do we change attitudes in terms of working across boundaries – maybe targeted funding for working collaborations.”

“Funding structures – too short term; relationships take time.”

“Funding system is geared up to the end product rather than the process – more tangible, easier to measure the end result.”

“Sometimes the end product is not why you do a project, it's the process. The other things that are happening. When you start a project you don't necessarily know what will happen. You need different pots of money for different types of projects.”

"ACW need more confidence to make decisions without sector endorsement (letters of support)."

"Possibility of small, simple grants for community groups to apply to. Sometimes artists and communities don't feel eligible to apply, official enough."

"Mentoring, supporting new graduates? Arts Council of Wales are ignoring the graduates. How many remain within the arts following university or college? How many do we lose along the way due to a lack of support?"

"Simplify process, different methods, Quality first, audiences, who for next. Not skill of application form filling. Need for consistency in information, advice, communication, feedback. If unsuccessful, clear, consistent feedback."

"Mentoring and training on how to apply, what makes a good application."

"You have to 'be in the know' how to get arts funding, the systems are difficult and opaque. What about

- Mentors / advocates between the Artists and Arts Council
- Information presented in a youth-centric way
- More targeted marketing

"Art that gets funded is seen as elitist. Arts Council of Wales doesn't understand the 'grass roots', urban arts.

"You need 'cultural fluency' to access arts activity. Why?"

"Nurturing opportunities, international working, residency opportunities to enhance, develop work, leading to more sustainable work."

"Funding targeted at emerging artists."

"Mid career artists, who's developing, where are the opportunities to show work, specifically visual arts. Need to ensure that there are career paths, development opportunities."

6. Renewal and reinvigoration – a new openness

There's a call for Arts Council, and more broadly our arts organisations, to take a look at just how really open they are. And at what might get in the way of that openness?

What can we consciously look at in small and big ways that would continuously improve this sense of the availability of the arts?

What people were saying: "..."

A wide-ranging and diverse variety of suggestions was offered reaffirming the sense that **people want the sector to look and behave differently:**

"What about a 'café' for 1st time applicants to Arts Council of Wales Identify the barriers / perception of.... "

"The threshold issue."

"Perception of institutions - how to make a building more welcoming."

"Audiences want to recognise themselves in art experiences."

"Front of house excellence."

"More transparency within the venues ie you can see into the offices."

"Trust is a massive issue - you need apparent openness, Audience to venue People believe in people, not in buildings You need to value creative expression in the arts first to want to go and engage."

"Adjusting our thinking -new models from Institutionalised models ..Inefficiencies."

"Investing time to work in partnershiponly for people to move due to funding."

"Building capacity imperative."

Appendix 1

All Wales Creative Conversation – the schedule of meetings

Creative Agents and National Advisors

10 November 2017

55 attendees

Carmarthen - Creative Conversation

15 November 2017

31 attendees

Ebbw Vale - Creative Conversation

16 November 2017

30 attendees

Newport - Creative Conversation

17 November 2017

44 attendees

Caernarfon Creative Conversation

20 November 2017

21 attendees

What Next? Cardiff and the Valleys Creative Conversation

28 November 2017

36 attendees

Creative Conversation - Public Event Cardiff

8 February 2018

73 attendees

**All Wales Creative Conversation Wrexham - Creative Agents
and National Advisors**

15 February 2018

11 attendees

Young People - Creative Conversation, Cardiff

15 February 2018

28 attendees

Wrexham - Creative Conversation - Public Event

15 February 2018

49 attendees

Young People - Creative Conversation, Bangor

20 February 2018

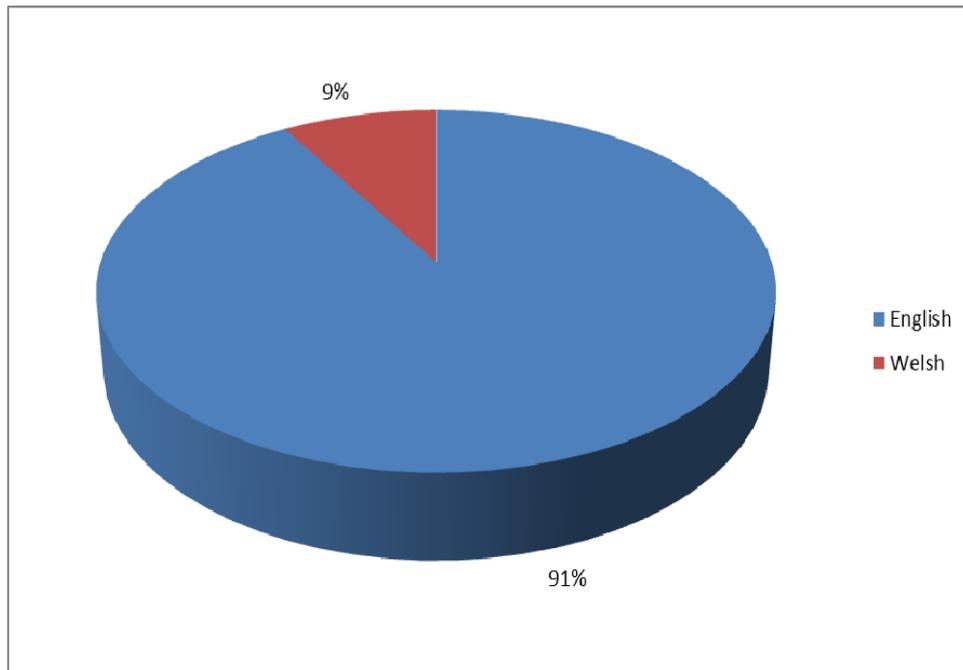
34 attendees

Total of 435 across 12 events

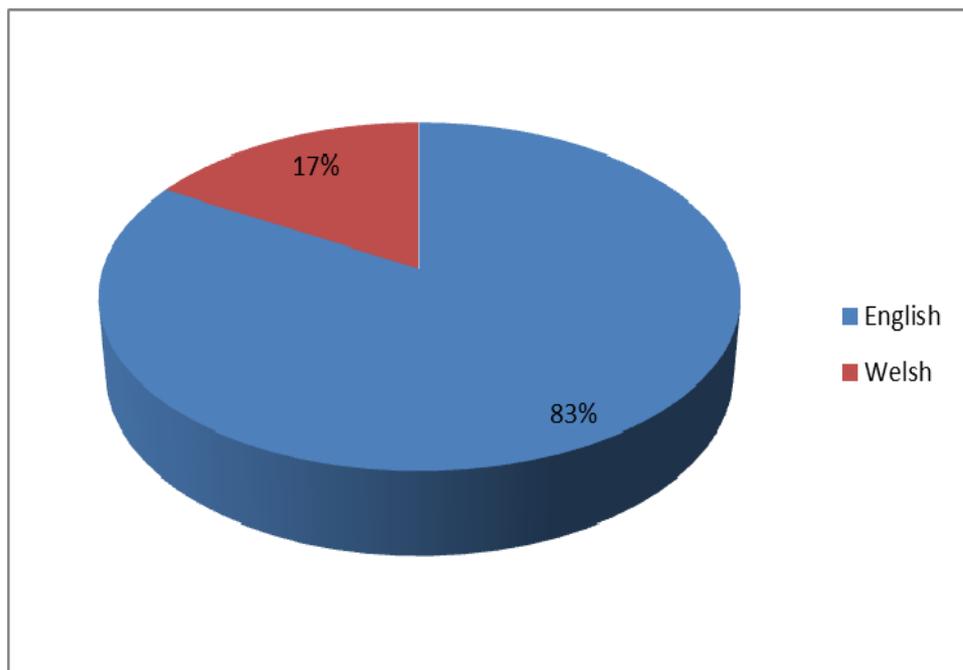
Appendix 2

Creative Conversations - Equality Monitoring

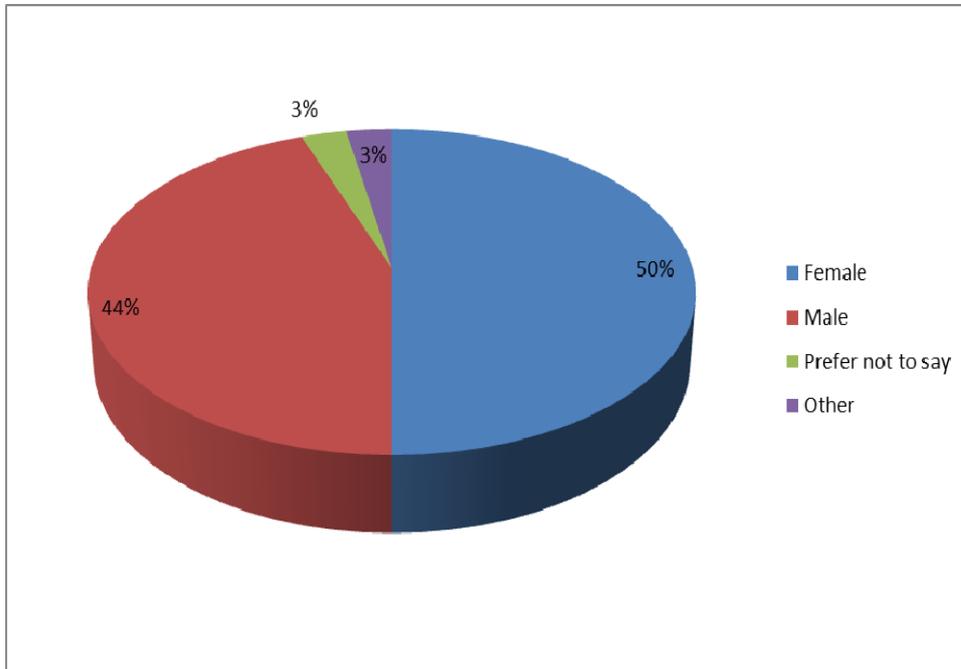
Language of Response – Events



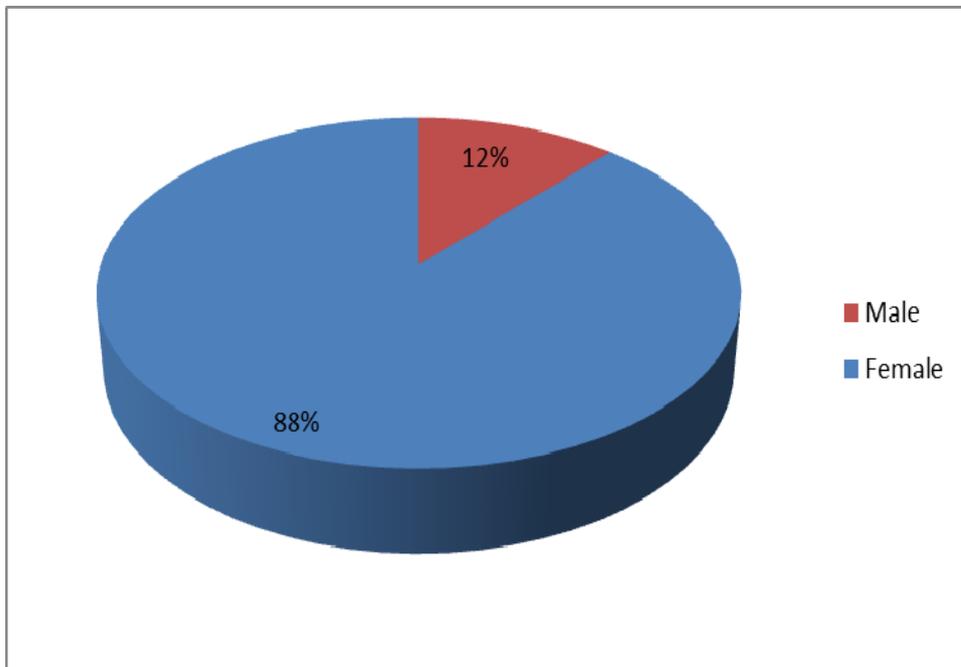
Language of Response – Online Survey



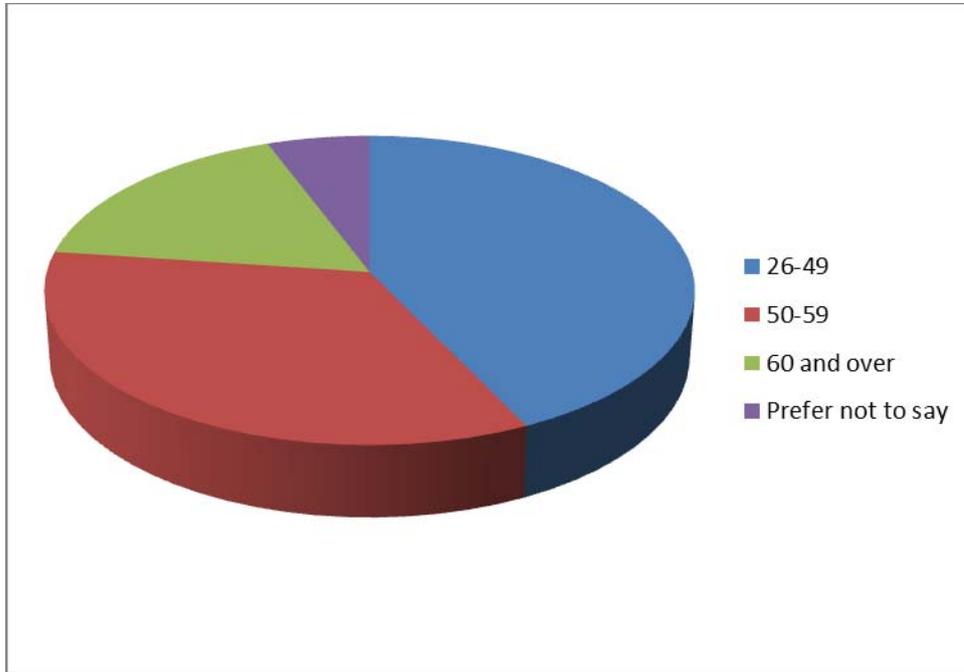
Gender - Events



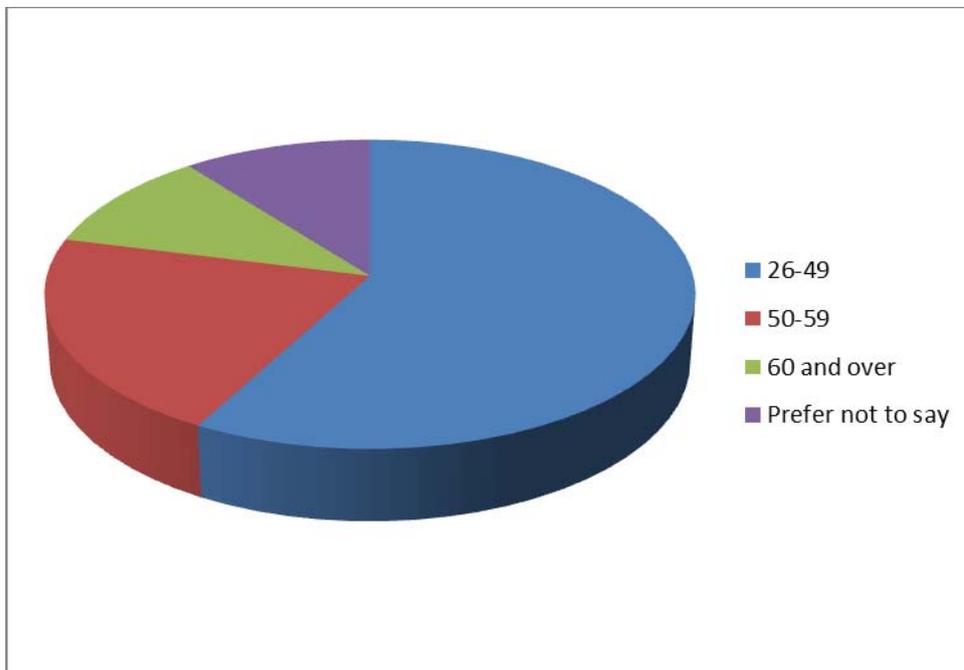
Gender – Online Survey



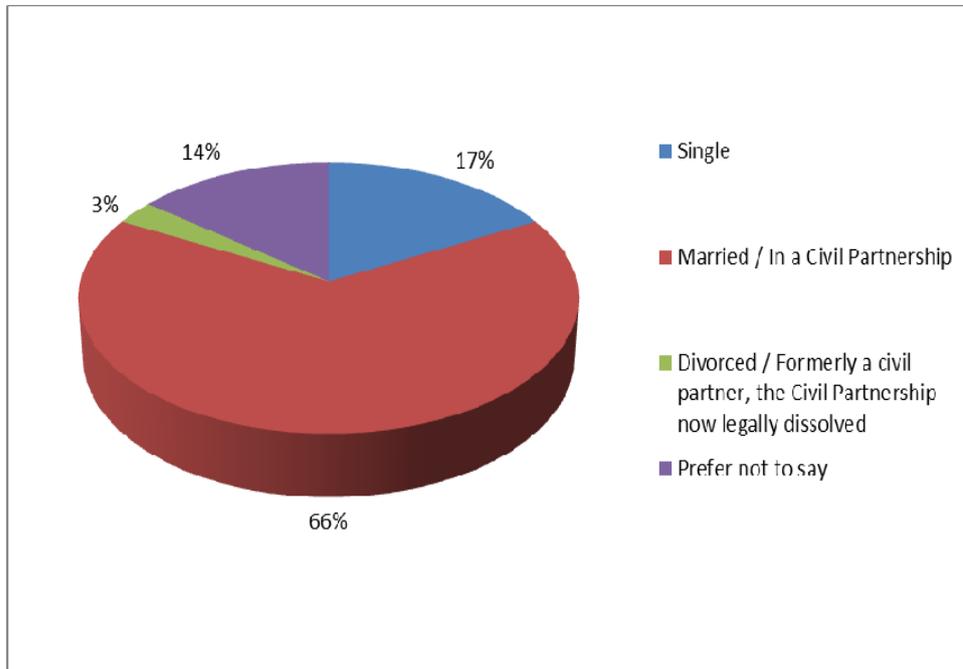
Age – Events



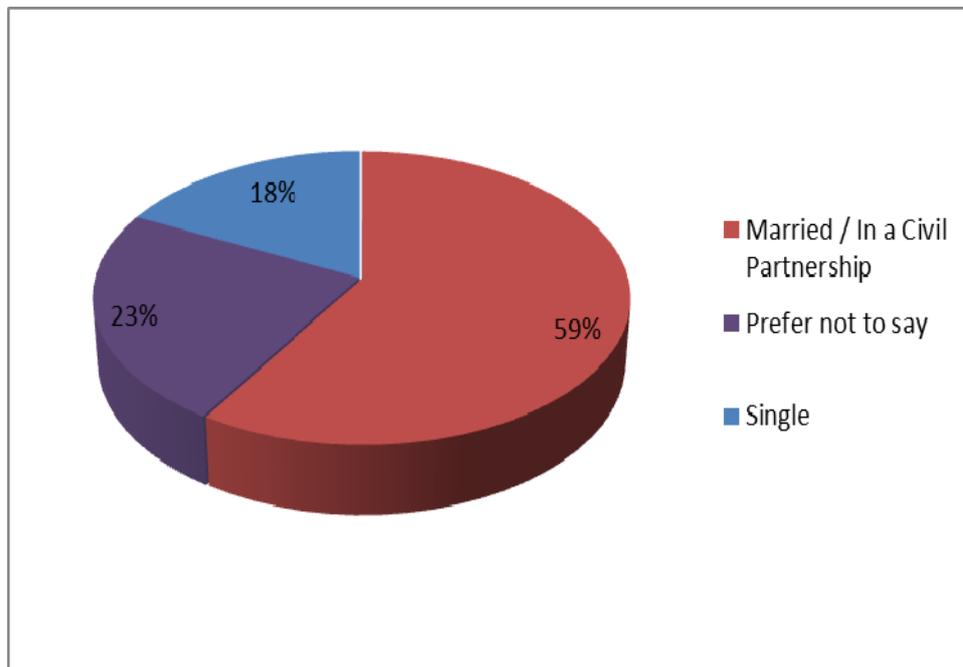
Age – Online Survey



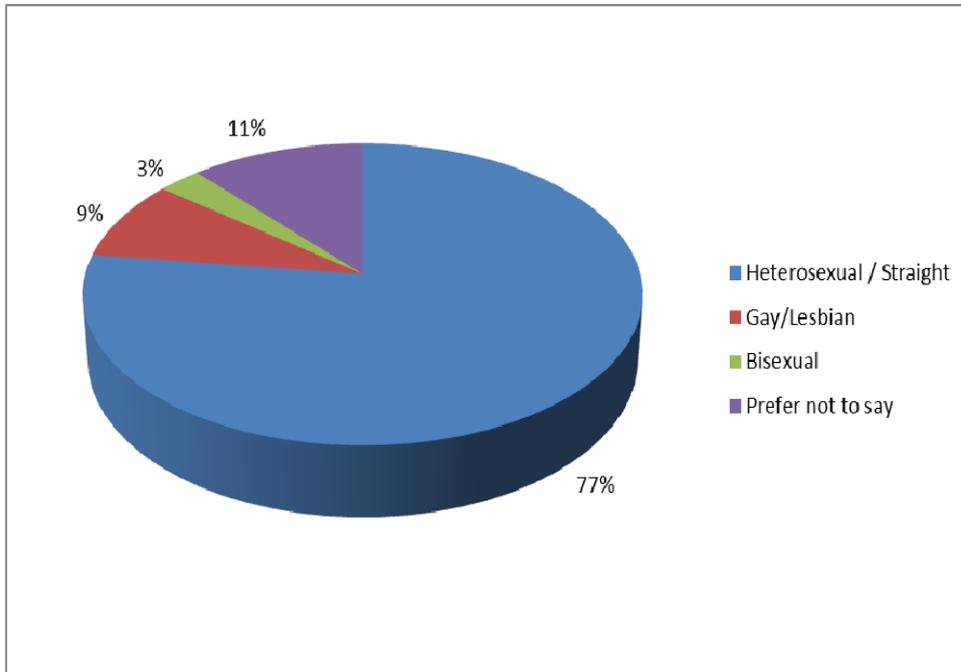
Relationship Status – Events



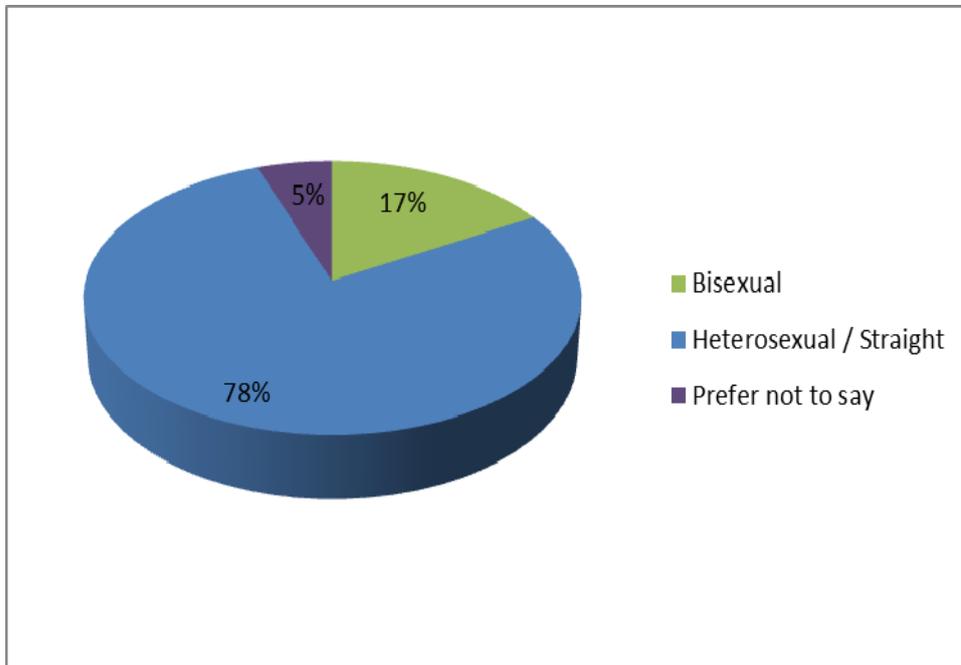
Relationship Status – Online Survey



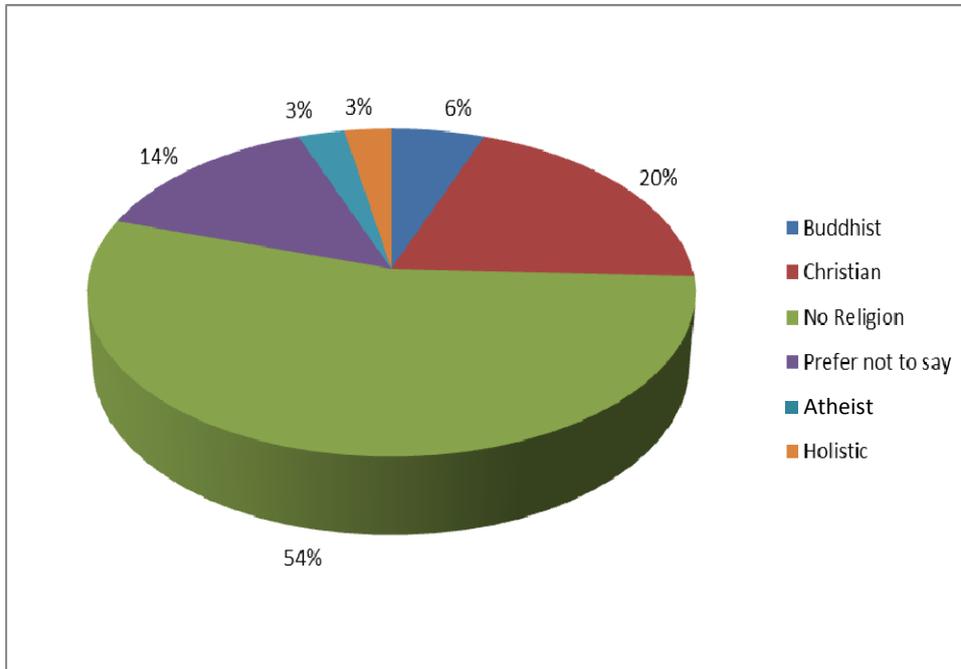
Sexual Orientation – Events



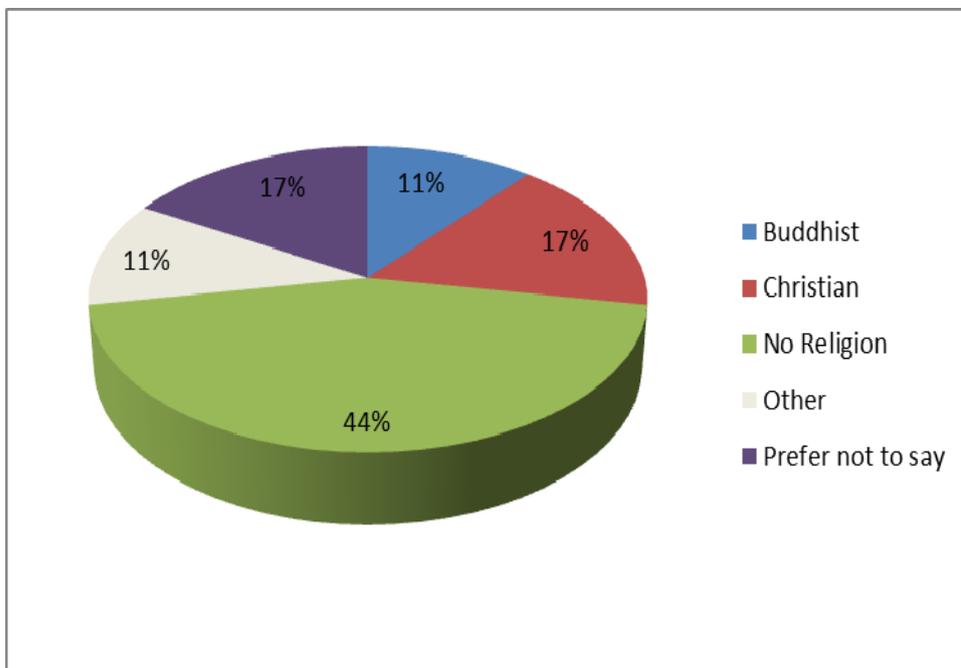
Sexual Orientation – Online Survey



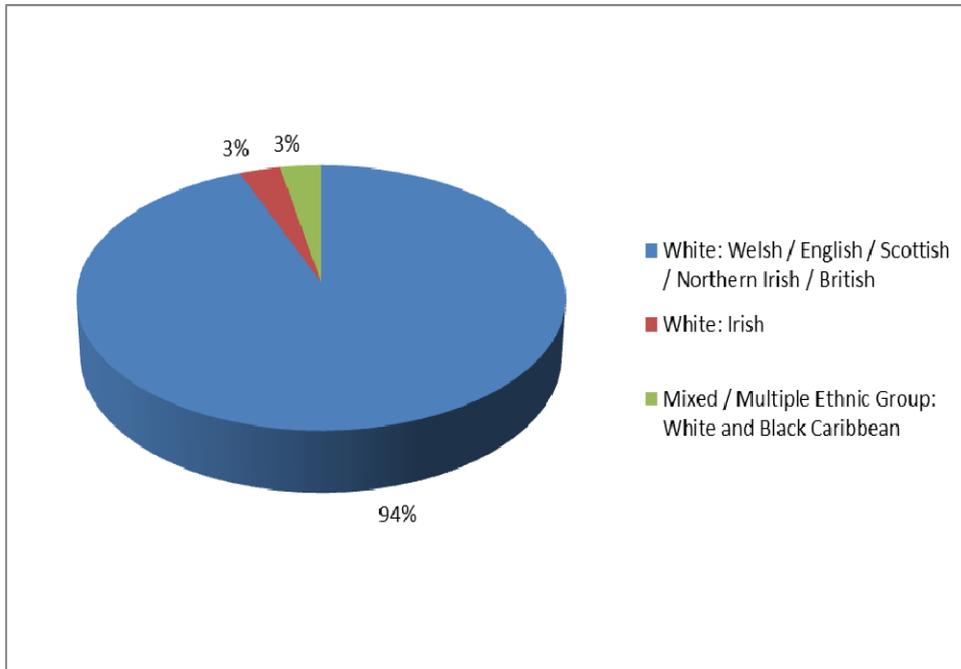
Religion / Belief – Events



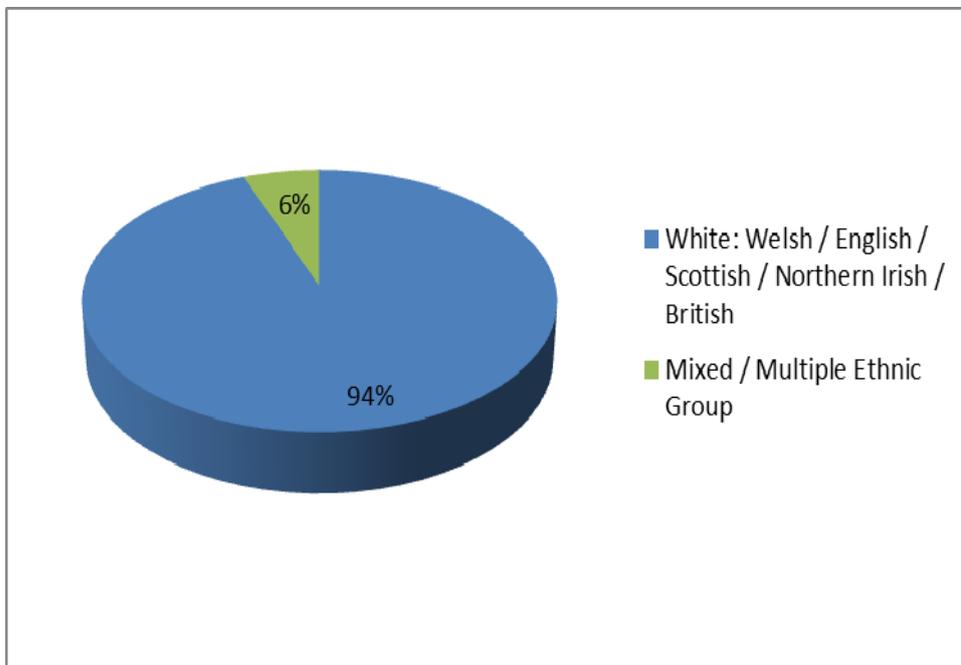
Religion / Belief – Online Survey



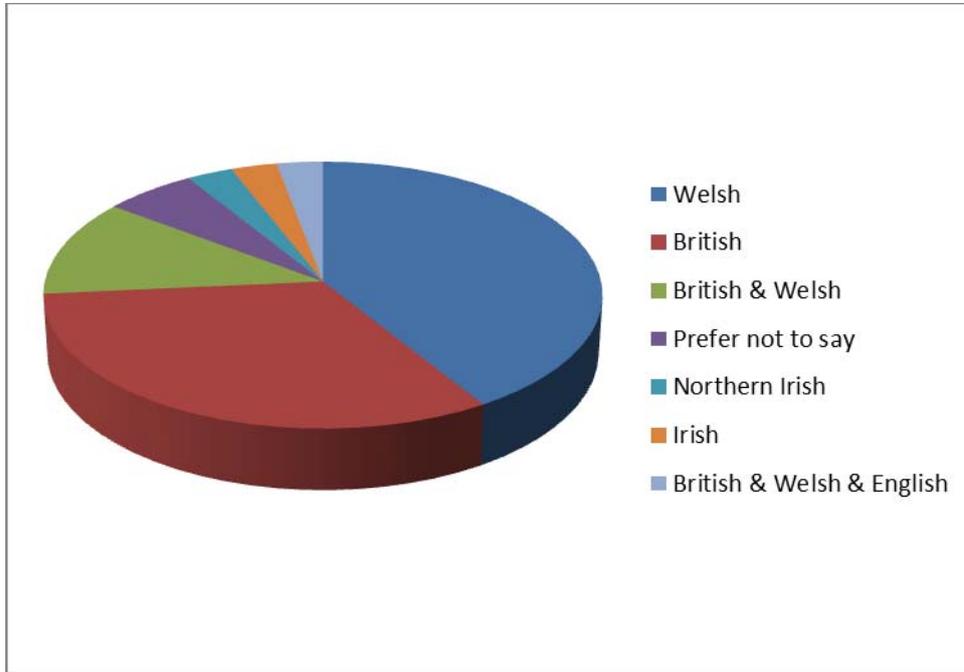
Ethnicity – Events



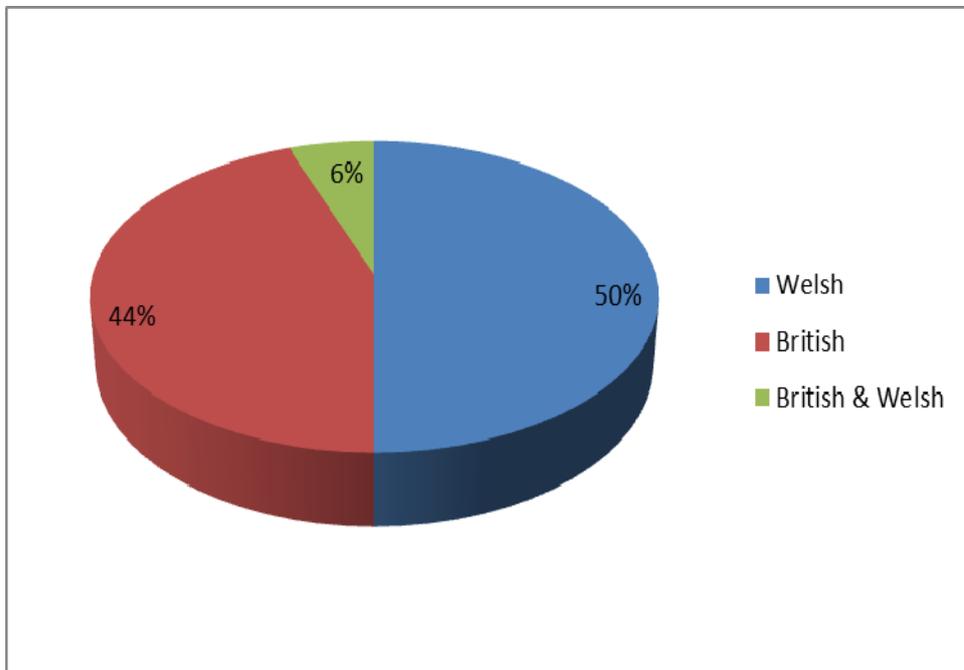
Ethnicity – Online Survey



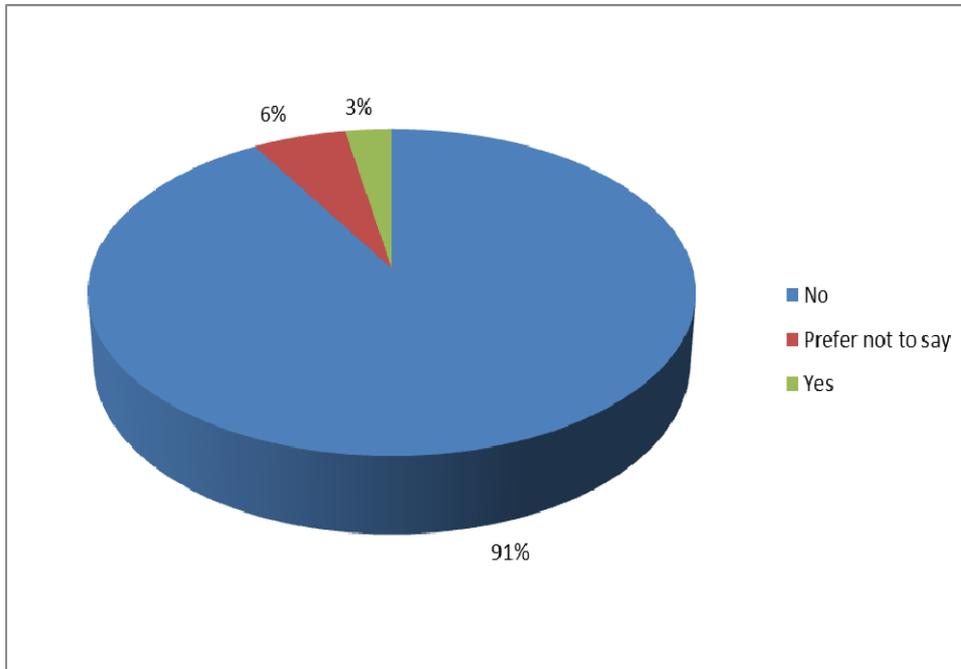
Nationality - Events



Nationality – Online Survey



Disability - Events



Disability – Online Survey

