

National Theatre Wales Policy for New Writing, New Work and Artist Development.

Note: This policy is accompanied by a set of guidelines for artists who would like to introduce themselves and their work to NTW.

Introduction

While National Theatre Wales is particularly focussed on the production of extraordinary theatre works reaching the widest possible audience, one of the key elements of the company's mission is to 'Focus on the identification and nurturing of talent'. With limited resources, the company hopes in its first years of operation, to establish innovative models for artist development, while also ensuring a spirit of openness and accessibility.

In researching NTW's policy for new work, the following questions emerged as important areas for the policy to address:

- Submission Process: How do artists let NTW know about their work, and what is the most productive way for NTW to assess and respond to the work of artists who are introducing themselves to the company?
- Submission Criteria: Does NTW have any limits on whose work it will assess: for example is it interested in Welsh artists, Wales-based artists, artists writing or producing work about Wales, all artists? Is the process different for emerging and more established artists?
- Origination of Ideas and Commissioning: Will NTW produce existing ideas (e.g. completed scripts that are submitted to the company)? If it is commissioning new projects, what is the decision-making process for giving a commission?
- Aesthetic Criteria: Does NTW have a particular kind or kinds of work that it is interested in? Are there particular artform developments that it is keen to encourage?
- Development versus Production: Is the company specifically interested in developing ideas that might lead to new productions, or does it have a wider goal of artist development? What role might courses, training, mentoring, placements, etc, play in this?

During a productive period of consultation a range of ideas and models were discussed by NTW staff, by its online community of artists and writers, and with potential partner organisations. Models which have been assessed include:

- A script-reading model, possibly expanded to include other art forms. Under this model, seen in Wales at Sherman Cymru, and predominant in London new writing culture at theatres such as the Royal Court, Soho, the Bush, etc, anyone can send in a completed script which will be read by a script reader employed by the company. All scripts get a readers' report and promising writers may be invited to take part in workshops, given a period of development, such as a script-in-hand reading, given some kind of attachment or seed commission, or, in exceptional cases, have the play that they have submitted produced by the theatre.
- A lab model. Space and time are provided for artists in whom the company is interested to try out ideas, work with new people, or explore new ways of working. The largest-scale example of this is the National Theatre Studio in London, but other independent examples include Lanternhouse in Cumbria and, arguably, venues such as Battersea Arts Centre where development is the primary focus of the organisation. Companies such as Victoria in Belgium have set up intensive longer-term labs where artists can spend months or years developing new ideas.
- A programme model. Many organisations run specific developmental programmes which artists and companies can apply to be part of – e.g. residencies for a certain number of artists chosen through an open application process. This is probably the most common model; it allows a clear and above-board process of application and selection, but with the limitation of being relatively inflexible.
- A 'freemarket' model. Where a larger company simply selects artists and companies to develop or commission from the range of work being produced independently and by other companies. While this might seem a very 'hands off', and even irresponsible, approach, it has the advantage that, in relying on the wider sector for talent, it potentially encourages independent new initiatives, and avoids the perception of an 'elite of insiders'.

Of course most theatres operate a combination of elements of these models.

In consultations with artists about the above models, the initial reaction has often been, understandably, to want 'all of the above' from Wales's new National Theatre. However, with a very modest core start up grant for NTW, and high production expectations, there will be a need for very clear and specific choices in the first years of the company's operation.

NTW has also identified from its earliest days that it wants to avoid 'departmentalisation' of areas of work such as education, outreach and artist development, dealing with these areas at the heart of its producing activity. As a bold initial statement of this principle, the company has used its core staffing budget to create two Creative Associate posts for its first two years, which, through an open application process, have provided two emerging theatre artists with developmental roles at the core of the company.

NTW has also emphasised its goal of complementing rather than duplicating existing structures in the Welsh theatre sector, and of focussing on innovative new models in all its work. Its new work and artist development policies are developed in the context of existing provision, including Sherman Cymru's work with new writing, initiatives at arts centres (ranging from Wales Millennium Centre to Aberystwyth Arts Centre) providing development opportunities to a range of theatre artists, and an increasingly vibrant independent theatre scene in a number of Welsh towns and cities.

In addition, the NTW has made significant initial strides in its online offering, with a vibrant community of artists engaging in forums, writing blogs, posting samples of work, and even initiating independent online creative projects via the NTW site.

So, in its New Work/Artist Development activity for 2010-11 and 2011-12, NTW will trial the following approaches:

Digital Introductions. As a company with a strong digital focus and a wide geographical remit, it makes sense for artists to register with NTW through its online community. Any artist wanting to bring their work to NTW's attention will be encouraged to register with NTW's online network, create a basic profile, and join an appropriate online group (currently writers, actors or creatives). Having registered, the artist will then be able to submit a work sample in any digital form (including a link) to NTW. NTW will guarantee to assess a selection of work up to one full-length script (or equivalent samples) or half an hour of video or sound material. NTW will acknowledge the sample and give a response to the work, though not a traditional 'script report' (i.e. the response will focus on future potential for the artist at NTW rather than general notes on the work). All newly submitted work will be discussed at a monthly NTW artistic meeting. Comments on submissions will be kept on a separate company database, not linked to the social network. Assessment will be done by NTW staff or by artists/qualified individuals working with NTW (e.g. a writer on commission with NTW may be paid a fee to read and assess a batch of scripts). NTW will honour artist confidentiality at all times, and the online registration process will not involve any artist having to share work publicly if they don't want to. We will accept submissions from artists and writers internationally, but will always be clear about our focus on Welsh theatre and Wales-based theatre practitioners.

Idea Proposals. Where writers, directors or other theatre artists have a specific idea that they want to propose to NTW for development, they should also register online if they have not already done so. They should then send a message attaching an outline of the idea. The artistic director will designate one of NTW's staff or artists to review it. If the idea is one which NTW may want to pursue an initial meeting (real or virtual) will be arranged, followed by R and D, etc if appropriate. If the idea is not one that NTW wishes to pursue, it will nonetheless be brought to the monthly artistic meeting and included in the artists' database. Artists may submit as many ideas as they want, although there may be times when NTW asks for a time gap between proposals.

Research Opportunities. Where there is an idea that NTW wants to explore further, or an artist that NTW wants to suggest a project to, an initial meeting will be set up with the Artistic Director or relevant staff member, with the goal of identifying an appropriate exploratory stage. This may involve a period of practical research, some initial writing (a seed commission), or some 'studio time' (at any appropriate location). Where possible such work will be 'blogged' or otherwise shared online, keeping the R and D process as open and public as possible and benefiting from wider community input. At the end of the R and D process, NTW will decide whether to take the project to the next stage.

Commissions: A commission may come from an idea submitted to NTW by an artist, or by an idea suggested to an artist by NTW. It will often be preceded by a period of research or a seed commission. A commission will usually be contracted in a series of stages (e.g. for writers signing, first draft, rehearsal draft) and contracts will clearly state at which points decisions to proceed to the next stage will be made. Commissions for theatre practitioners other than playwrights will necessarily be more individual than script commissions, and may involve a range of practical developmental stages (e.g. a series of workshops for a physical theatre piece). Decisions to produce will be made in line with NTW's seasonal production-planning schedule. Where possible we will ask commissioned artists to share their ideas and processes online in a form that suits them, in order to support and stimulate the wider community of artists.

Developmental Opportunities: There will inevitably be a number of artists who NTW finds interesting, but is not yet ready to commission. The company may want to learn more about an artist's work, may feel that the artist needs to develop before a commission is offered, or may want to encourage an established artist to try new things. To this end, NTW will offer periodic developmental opportunities, independently or in partnership with other appropriate organisations, to specific groups of artists. The nature of these opportunities will vary according to the needs identified. In 2010-11 the following approaches will be tried out:

- Intensive lab for early to mid career writers. Offered in partnership with the BBC

- Emerging director programme tied in with Year 1 shows.
- Student Placement scheme for designers, offered in collaboration with RWCMD and other higher education institutions.
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These opportunities are deliberately offered at differing levels and in differing art forms in order to explore a range of needs and models.

‘Go See’ commitment: NTW has expressed a strong commitment to the development of the independent theatre sector as an element of the overall theatre movement in Wales. Rather than encouraging theatre artists to wait for commissions and development at NTW, the company wants to encourage independent productions and initiatives. To support this position, NTW will make a ‘Go See’ commitment to all independent professional-level productions (i.e. by companies who do not receive regular revenue funding, but are working with professional-level artists). NTW will send a staff member or associated artist to see all independent professional-level work of which it is notified at least a month in advance, and will discuss this work at its monthly artistic meetings. In order to achieve this commitment, NTW may on occasion engage experienced artists or producers who are not part of its current team to visit shows and report back.

Longer-term explorations: A lot of enthusiasm was expressed during consultations for a space where artists could explore ideas and take risks in a safe environment. As a non-building based company, there is a limit to the ways in which NTW can respond to this demand. However, over the years 2010-11 and 2011-12, the company intends to explore the pros and cons of a ‘Creation Centre’ model – the development of a space for R and D. Questions that will be central to this exploration include the relationship between an R and D space and NTW’s long-term commitment to rehearsing its shows ‘on location’, plus the relationship of NTW’s ‘digital space’ to any physical creation space.

Creative Associates: The Creative Associates initiative is already a unique characteristic of NTW, putting input by emerging artists at the heart of the company’s work. NTW will assess the first two years of this programme, and explore possible changes to the model in response to evaluation, but will continue its commitment to place the employment of emerging Creative Associates at the company’s core.

National Theatre Wales Guidelines for Artists

National Theatre Wales considers the nurturing and development of theatre artists in Wales to be one of its core goals, both as a means to achieve extraordinary new theatre productions, and for the sake of the wider development of Welsh theatre. We want to make it as easy as possible for all artists to establish contact with us and let us know about their work and ideas. We want to focus our resources on activity that will have the most profound impact on theatre making. We want to be equally accessible to artists throughout Wales. And we want to work in a way that supports and encourages other theatre organisations, particularly small and independent initiatives. With these goals in mind, we have developed the following guidelines for artists:

1. Letting us Know About Your Work:

Our online community is at the heart of our communication with artists. To let us know about your work, you should register at nationaltheatrewales.org and create a profile for yourself. Try to create a profile that will help us learn about you and what you do, though we understand that some artists are shy and will accept a profile with name and basic details. Please also join a group on the network corresponding to your interests, e.g. Writers, Creatives (including directors and designers); this will help us to keep in touch with you with about relevant opportunities. If you are happy for your work to be open to the public, we encourage you to attach or link samples to your profile. Then send a message to Catherine Paskell on the network, telling her that you have joined. If you have attached work to your profile, let her know; if you prefer to keep your work confidential, she can give you an email address where you can send samples. If you have a particular idea that you want to suggest to us, please make this clear in your initial message. We accept submissions from all artists, but we ask you to let us know about your reasons for submitting to National Theatre Wales, and your relationship to or interest in Wales. We will always acknowledge your submission, usually within a week.

2. What Happens Next:

One of our core staff, or one of the artists currently working with us will review the work you have sent and it will be discussed at one of our monthly artistic meetings. These meetings are an opportunity to review a range of ideas for new work at NTW, and are attended by core staff, artists working with NTW, and by sometimes board and key volunteers. Discussions at these meetings will always be confidential. We will review and discuss your work as quickly as possible and we will try our hardest always to get back to you within three months. Our response could be one of the following:

- The most likely response is that we will let you know we have reviewed your work, and that we will keep in touch to let you know of future opportunities. We will keep a record of our initial reactions to your work and thoughts on ways to support you. This will be a confidential record. We don't send 'script reports' on plays, but we can point you towards people who do if that's what you need.

- If we particularly like an idea you have suggested, or you seem like a good person to be involved in a project we are currently working on, we will invite you in for a meeting. We may also ask you to come and meet us if we want to know more about you.
- If we want to take an idea further we may offer you an initial seed commission or research fee. This fee will be to cover your time while developing the idea or pursuing your research.
- If the idea seems strong after the initial exploration, and fits with the National Theatre Wales programme, we may ask you to be part of the artistic team for one of our productions.
- Programming decisions are made on an ongoing basis so there is no annual deadline for submissions. Final programming decisions are made by the artistic director and approved by the board, but always involve a wide process of consultation with the wider NTW community.

3. What Happens in the Future:

If we don't offer you an immediate opportunity to work with us, we may well be able to offer you an opportunity in the future. This could happen in a number of ways:

- If a project arises that looks like it might suit your skills and interests, we will call you in for a meeting and the process outlined above may begin.
- If you have a new project or an idea, just get in touch through the online network. We will always try to look at new ideas, though in some cases we may ask you to wait for a period before submitting new samples of your work.
- We may have developmental opportunities such as residencies, workshops, courses, or jobs such as our Creative Associates. If these are targeted at a particular kind of artist, or artists at a particular stage of development, we will contact a selection of artists based on our records. If it is a more general opportunity we will use our online groups (e.g. Writers group, Creatives group) to let all relevant artists know about it. Such residencies, workshops, etc may well lead to a new opportunity to suggest an idea for production to us.
- Our programme focus and priorities are always under development; so different artists will be appropriate to our work at different times. News of the company's current interests and activity will be posted on the NTW website/social network.

4. What Happens if Your Work is Produced Somewhere Else:

We want to encourage as much production of new work in Wales as possible; particularly by independent and emerging companies and artists. So, if your work is being produced, let us know and we will try our best to come and see it. In fact, if it is being produced by an independent professional-level company (which could include a company that you have set up), it is taking place in Wales, and you let us know about it a month in advance, we promise to come and see it (barring unforeseen circumstances), or to send an artist we trust to see it on our behalf and report back. Productions we have seen will

always be discussed at our monthly artistic meetings. We consider this the best way to get to know you and your work. We also review and 'attend' online projects, particularly if you set them up, or publicise them, through our site. We consider online initiatives to be an important part of the wider theatre picture.

5. Who Reviews Your Work:

NTW is committed to expert review of your work. However, we consider the company to comprise of all the artists and production staff who are working with us, not just salaried staff, so your work may be reviewed by qualified staff, by artists and producers who are currently collaborating with us on project, by trusted artists and producers who have a record of work with us, or by qualified individuals such as NTW board members. All reports will be discussed at our monthly artistic meetings, with follow up and second opinions sought wherever appropriate. All discussions and records about your work will be kept confidential for your protection.

Everyone involved in reviewing or developing an artist's work at National Theatre Wales will be expected to work in line with our policies for Equal Opportunities, Protection of Children and Vulnerable Adults, and Dignity and Respect in the Workplace. These policies are available to you on request, and if you are ever treated in a way that falls below these professional standards by anyone involved with NTW, we ask you to let us know so that we can address the problem as quickly as possible.