

Text of presentation by Rebecca Davies, at the Morlan Centre 9th Aug on the future of the Arts Centre.

Thanks to the joint chairs for this is an opportunity that has not been available for us all to focus on the future of the Arts Centre.

As you can understand our hands have been somewhat tied therefore I am grateful for this chance to meet with you.

I'd like to just touch briefly on the University in general & then I will focus on the Arts Centre.

The establishment of Aberystwyth University is one of the great romantic, indeed heroic, stories of modern Welsh history. It was the work of a small group of individuals who raised money by public and private subscription.

It was almost an impossible ambition – and ambition remains part of our DNA. In 1872, the University was opened in a half-finished hotel building with 26 ill-prepared students and a teaching staff of three.

Looking forward in the University overarching strategic plan over 600 members of staff and students set out the ambitions and challenges for the next five years. Our University community committed the university to work to;

Create opportunities, deliver excellent research and inspirational teaching, engage with the world, work in partnership and invest in our future.

Success in these areas will help us to achieve our aim of becoming a leading interdisciplinary institution, making an impact in Wales, in the UK and globally.

Like other multimillion pound organisations we are operating within tough and turbulent times, change is essential not only to survive but to thrive and we recognise that this might be relished by some and uncomfortable for others.

Part of our investment for the future is represented in the £5 million pounds which the University has invested in the Arts Centre over the past 5 years, and we continue to commit to funding the Arts Centre.

But why? How can we explain to our students who pay £9k fees that we continue to commit to our Arts Centre – well the Arts Centre matters for the following reasons:

- for community – and our students are part of the community in Ceredigion - for education,
- as the arts inspire, excite, challenge

& if anything is in the Welsh DNA it's an appreciation of the arts.

We take particular pride that the Arts Centre is part of the University and what it represents for the town, the region, the university & world.

People have speculated about the reasons for the new institutes

The intent is to liberate Institutes - devolving budgets and decision making to the experts.

And, yes the Arts Centre is now part of the ILLCA – Institute for Literature, Language and the Creative Arts – and this is a vibrant and diverse community, and the new Director will report to the institute Director rather than the Registrar or PVC. We are delighted that the Arts Centre staff, Advisory Board and the Arts Council for Wales are such an integral part in the recruitment process which is being advertised widely.

This means that our excellent staff will be able to collaborate further, enhancing the provision to the public, to teaching and indeed to research – as we are committed to research that matters – and this means opportunities for individuals, for growth, for development and investment for all.

However Arts centre is special because it is more than the University

That's why the University Council set up the Advisory Board in the summer of 2012, who report directly into our most senior strategic committee and then into Council - the Advisory Board have representatives from the Arts Council of Wales, Ceredigion County Council, the BBC Trust, a leading Arts Centre in the UK and the University.

I would like to pay particular tribute to the work of the Arts Centre Management Team and the Arts Council of Wales for the Arts Centre Strategic Plan 2013-2016. The plan supports the strategic importance of the arts in both languages and sets out an exciting, vibrant future for the Arts Centre and in particular to the Welsh language.

The plan is based on the firmest of foundations, as the Arts Centre is Wales' largest and most dynamic arts centre and is recognised as a 'national flagship for the arts'.

This excellent plan, produced by the staff, with comment and contribution from the Advisory Board was presented to Council in March 2013 who approved the plan, without amendment – and this commits the University to helping the achievement of the fantastic future ahead.

The Arts Centre plan recognises the importance of the community and magnifies what the arts centre does for our town, our region, our country and our University.

The plan helps us see how staff want to build on it's vibrancy, to do more, to reach wider, and the living evidence is in the draft Programme Louise and team have brought,

This has wonderful, challenging and beautiful events with storytelling, music, dance, comedy, visual arts and more, bringing the world to Aberystwyth, and Aberystwyth to the world.

I do not want anyone to doubt the commitment of the University - the University Council has signed up to the future plans as set out in the strategic plan - and in these difficult times our past contribution of 5 million pounds and our continued financial commitment is testament to our passion for a thriving Arts Centre.

Our commitment is not just in terms of cash it's in the energy and innovation of our staff, and is part of our commitment to the town, and to realise the ambitions in their plan we need the commitment of the town.

the university is founded by and for the community, and this is both a local and global community as Aberystwyth is an international town – with the a vibrant and diverse Arts Centre at its heart.

Many of the recent noises have drowned out the positive, and we regret that in the criticism and negative comments some have chosen to attack individuals, it's been hard to hear the strong, on-going and commitment of the University when rumours undermine the work of the Arts Centre staff, and the Advisory Board who described their vision for our Arts Centre as follows:

“We believe in the power of the arts to transform society and to change and enrich lives, to envisage new ways of thinking and being, to share and show our potential as human beings. We believe the arts opens to everyone, from young to old, opportunities to create: with minds, hands, voices and bodies; offering an infinite future of possibilities.”

I cannot comment on individuals or processes which may be in train, but want you leave you with the resounding commitment of the University to the Arts Centre.

Thank you