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MICKELODEON

Simon Hoggart's toilet buddy

Arts with a capital F

It's no secret that politicians love a good acronym. Without DEFRA and MI5, Quangos and the DFI, some politicians wouldn't be able to get out of bed in the morning.

But none hold a torch to the total alphabet soup that is arts management in Wales. There are documented cases of people actually going mad when having to go from the ACW to the NAW, and from the BBC NOW to the WNO.

The Assembly Government has in the past year started a fundamental reorganisation of the whole stinking pile of them. As an idea, it seems great - cut through the post-devolution mess of dozens of institutions that manage arts for a population of just 2.9 million people.

Some of the changes are the standard sort of institutional rearrangements that you'd expect from a government that likes to look busy.

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But some of the decisions are truly damaging. Currently, the 'Big Six' art institutions in Wales, including the National Opera and literary agency Academi, are funded through the Arts Council Wales.

The Assembly Government has put in plans to fund them directly. The popular Arts Council chair, Geraint Talfan Davies, was opposed to the decision. And when his reappointment in the post was due, Alan Pugh decided to replace him, to the opposition of absolutely everyone else involved.

From the opposition parties in the Assembly itself who have defeated a Government motion on the issue, to every member of Arts Council Wales - many of whom are reportedly on the verge of resigning - the Government is standing alone on pushing forward with the changes.

What may seem like a minor institutional change could make major changes in future. If any government decided that, for example, a book being supported by Academi was controversial, then the Government could prevent it from going ahead, as they would now directly hold the purse-strings for the body. The end result of this aspect of the Government's 'Bonfire of the Quangos' is potential censorship in the arts.

Beyond the Arts Council Wales fiasco, there are other bodies where similar strange things have been afoot. The Welsh film body Sgrin, despite



SPARTSTIC: Alan Pugh (left), Geraint Talfan Davies (right) and the Millennium Centre

an excellent record, was replaced with new set-up Ffilm. At the time of handover a month ago, no-one at The Hub - yet another body that was put in charge of the handover - could even say why Sgrin needed replacing.

Many rumours came out of Sgrin in its dying days at the end of March that people were not happy with the situation. But considering their staff were interested in getting into the new Ffilm, and out of fear that the same thing would happen to them that happened to Geraint Talfan Davies, nothing was ever confirmed.

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So what are we to make of everything that's gone on? There's little to doubt that Alan Pugh's decision was out of a concern to help the arts. But whilst he may be making decisions to help get the arts into working-class areas - as he has claimed - there is no guarantee that future culture ministers would be so restrained.

Whatever his perspective on what is going on, there's no excuse for refusing to reappoint Mr Davies. That alone smacks of an abuse of power that raises serious questions over whether Mr Pugh should remain in his job.

Wales is still stuck with a complicated set up that wastes instead of invests money in the arts. This latest affair has done nothing to improve that.

Gummy mares

Our blessed letters page only has so much space to take in the writings of madmen, so I'd like to go into the GUM clinic comments of the 'election candidates' a little deeper.

Not wanting to rake over the elections too much, the letter claims that Student Council is addressing the need for an on-campus GUM clinic.

That in itself is completely true. In a completely coincidental piece of timing right before the election, the Kates Monaghan and Dobbs decided to put forward before Council a motion to campaign for a GUM clinic to be set up on the university site.

But perhaps they would like to do their research properly. The motion was hidden amongst several separate points, meaning it couldn't be properly discussed in Council. Just as they didn't bother consulting many of the relevant bodies in the Union before drafting the motion, many of the potential problems with the project were not flagged up at an early stage.

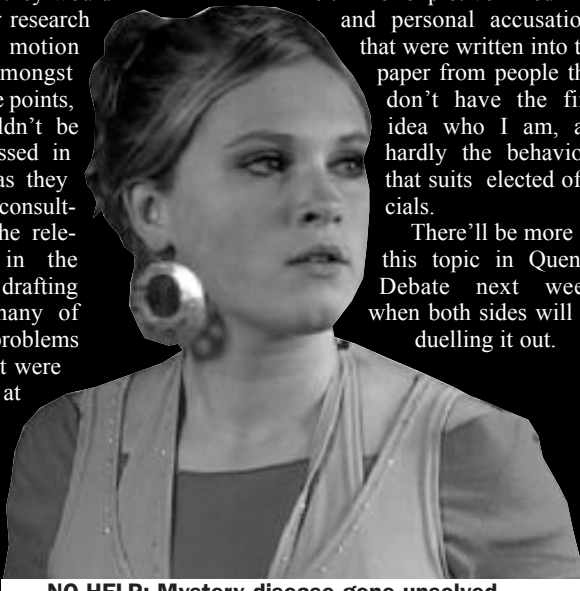
The nearest GUM clinic already has a six and eight week waiting list for men

and women respectively. Considering how underfunded the field is, there is not going to be any money from the government to finance a university project without taking it away from the community.

So what is the end result of this? As a result of not having bothered to do their research in a piece of pre-election motion-writing, the long-term prospects of the whole project are now completely undermined.

And in relation to the casual accusations slung throughout the letter: I can promise both Officers that I've done more for students in this university than the two of them put together. The expletive-filled lies and personal accusations that were written into the paper from people that don't have the first idea who I am, are hardly the behaviour that suits elected officials.

There'll be more on this topic in Quench Debate next week, when both sides will be duelling it out.



NO HELP: Mystery disease gone unsolved

Q&A

NHS Deficits

With Patricia Hewitt

Q: Is the NHS in serious financial trouble?

A: Ha ha, no! You crazy! Hear my laugh at how foolish a question you ask: a hahahahaha!

Q: But what about the hospitals that are laying off staff because their deficits are so deep?

A: They're only running a bit of a deficit, which is effectively like not running one at all. Apart from the ones that are in quite a bit of deficit, but they're only in quite a bit of deficit because we've given them lots of money.

Q: Wouldn't these problems never have developed if you properly managed how you put money into the NHS in the first place?

A: Look, this government has put more money into the NHS than anyone else. Now what do you want, us or the Tories? Hmmm? Why, just last week David Cameron said he wanted to boil babies.



PATRICIA HEWITT: cares

Q: David Cameron wants to boil babies?

A: You've heard that too? Then it's true! Plus, my car is greener than his.

Q: Those nurses over there - are they booing you?

A: No, they're booing the Tories, who stood on nurses faces and raped doctors for 18 years.

Q: That's not really true, is it?

A: Look, the important thing is waiting lists are shorter than under those baby-boiling, face-standing Tories. Now what's more important, truth or waiting lists?

Q: Well, truth...

A: Nevermind that, look over there! Charles Clarke is setting free people who are drug dealers AND immigrants! And John Prescott is sleeping with people! Now if you'll excuse me, I've got an appointment to get off scot-free from all my mismanagement.