

Trustee Profile

Rachel Ford-Evans | Partner



- Co-chair of Tŷ Cerdd
- Board member of Llamau

Describe your journey and what motivated you to take on these roles?

My journey began by chance in 2021. A colleague introduced me to Tŷ Cerdd, which was looking for a new trustee with legal or HR expertise. I was intrigued and met Tŷ Cerdd's wonderful director, who talked me through the charity's mission, values, and the unique perspectives that trustees bring to it. It resonated with me and offered something distinct from my day-to-day work as an employment lawyer, and felt like a meaningful way to contribute.

I'm also a board member of Llamau, with whom I first connected in November 2023 when Darwin Gray's CSR committee was looking at choosing the organisation as our charity of the year. I had an inspiring meeting with Llamau's Corporate Partnership Manager, learning more about the charity and its incredible work. When I then heard that Llamau was also seeking new trustees, I felt this could be a great opportunity to get more involved, and applied.

Can you describe the mission of your charity and its impact?

Tŷ Cerdd is dedicated to celebrating and promoting Welsh music, bringing it to audiences across Wales and promoting it worldwide. It supports Welsh music professionals, performers, and composers, aiming to give them the opportunity to make the music they love. It also helps to create access to opportunities for communities that might not normally have them. Its ethos is "If music is made in Wales, it's Welsh music". www.tyccerdd.org

Llamau is Wales's leading homelessness charity. Its mission is to end homelessness in Wales, with a specific emphasis on supporting vulnerable young people and women who have experience domestic violence, helping them to rebuild their lives and secure safe, stable futures. www.llamau.org.uk

What's your primary role and what skills or experiences do you bring to it?

As well as offering legal, HR and governance knowledge to the board as a trustee, I've recently been appointed Co-Chair of Tŷ Cerdd. This means an additional layer of responsibility, involving chairing some board meetings and providing additional oversight and support to the team. At Tŷ Cerdd, the team is close-knit, which lends itself to a unique format of board involvement. We meet formally every quarter, but also hold monthly "board short" sessions. These are more focused, informal meetings where specific issues or topics are discussed.

Llamau is a larger organisation, with hundreds of staff members across Wales. The board meets formally every 6 weeks, and also contains sub-committees. As well as my general role as a trustee/board member of Llamau, I'm also a member of Llamau's IAQA (Internal Audit and Quality Assurance) committee.

Are there any notable themes specifically which cause more issues than others?

One is **funding** - a huge challenge for the third sector currently. Budgets are under pressure and many funders - including the Welsh Government and local authorities - are unable to provide the amounts needed by charities which deliver crucial services. This means boards have to give careful consideration to funding constraints when considering strategic priorities and scrutinising the organisation's accounts. Sometimes this can mean that boards have to make really difficult decisions.

The second is **governance standards**. Best practice must be consistently applied across the charity sector to ensure organisations operate effectively and transparently. While Tŷ Cerdd and Llamau are very different and operate in distinct spheres, the governance skills needed by trustees are completely transferable between them.

How do you balance your trustee responsibilities with your professional and personal life?

Both organisations are great at scheduling board meetings in advance, giving the trustees plenty of time to plan ahead.

Llamau meetings typically take place outside of working hours, while Tŷ Cerdd meetings are usually at the end of the working day. This makes it easier to fit them around my other responsibilities.

The management teams are both also excellent at providing papers to the board, such as accounts, reports and draft policies, ahead of meetings – it's imperative to read all papers in advance to allow for meaningful discussions. I treat my board responsibilities just as importantly as I treat my day job, so it's crucial to always make time to prepare thoroughly.

What lessons have you learned along the way?

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A different perspective. I have gained an in-depth understanding of two organisations completely different to Darwin Gray. Being a trustee of a charity offers a unique perspective, and hearing directly from management teams and seeing how these organisations operate has been incredibly insightful.

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Governance knowledge. Since I sometimes advise boards as part of my day job, having an insider's perspective on governance procedures and the relationship between management teams and boards has been especially helpful. It's reinforced the importance of maintaining the line between strategic oversight and day-to-day management. This understanding has contributed to my ability to advise clients on good governance practices.

What advice would you give a new trustee?

Try to be more confident from the beginning. When I first joined a board, I was unsure of the value I could bring or what was expected of me. But you often can contribute more than you think you will. The key is to ask questions and get to know the organisation early on, gaining an understanding of its setup, priorities and values from the start.

I'd recommend participating in any meetings or conversations that are offered by fellow trustees and management, asking questions whenever you're unsure and diving into key documents from the get-go. Familiarising yourself with these early helps you build a strong foundation and contribute effectively. A crucial starting point is to read the organisation's constitution, outlining the core charitable purpose and serves as a guide for decision making.

Joining a sub-committee can also be a great way to gain deeper insights while focusing on specific areas where you can make an impact.

What are your hopes for the future of your charity? How do you see your role evolving?

For both organisations, I hope funding situations will improve, so they can fully deliver on their goals and continue to provide crucial services and opportunities.

As for my role, I hope to continue serving on both boards in the long term. I aim to contribute as much as I can over time, further developing my governance skills while learning from the people who work tirelessly to fulfil the organisations' missions. Both charities have exceptional teams and it's my goal to support them strategically as a trustee and play a part in helping them thrive in the years ahead.