

Trustee Profile

Alun Saunders | Marketing Executive



- **Eisteddfod & Arts board member - Urdd Gobaith Cymru**
- **Parent Governor - Ysgol Gyfun Plasmawr**

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

As somebody who grew up participating in the Urdd Eisteddfod activities, enjoying the whole culture which it feeds and thrives upon, I was instantly intrigued upon hearing that the Urdd were looking for new members of the Eisteddfod & Arts board in 2021. With a career of over 20 years in the Arts, I knew that I'd have something valuable to contribute to a movement so intrinsic to Welsh-language culture. I applied, was (successfully) interviewed and have been a board member for almost 4 years.

I am also a Parent Governor at Ysgol Gyfun Plasmawr. With two children at the school, I wanted to contribute meaningfully to the governance of such a dynamic and diverse school. I was nominated and subsequently voted in as a member of the governors and have been contributing for around 4-5 years.

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

Urdd Gobaith Cymru is a National Voluntary Youth Organisation with over 55,000 members between the ages of 8 – 25 yrs old. Since 1922, they have provided opportunities through the medium of Welsh for children and young people in Wales to enable them to make positive contributions to their communities. www.urdd.cymru

The Urdd National Eisteddfod is one of Europe's largest youth touring festivals that attracts around 90,000 visitors each year. It is a competitive festival with over 15,000 children and young people under the age of 25 competing in various competitions such as singing, dancing and performing. They are the elite few from around 40,000 competitors across Wales who have won their place following local and regional rounds.

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

As somebody who has worked as a freelancer in the industry for two decades, I believe that my role is to offer insight into the value of investing in young people's talents and interest in the Arts, and how it can bear fruit. Having grown up in a working class family, I like to be the voice of those less privileged, who may not always feel able to enjoy the benefits of activities without a second thought, and I'm very proud that the Urdd continues to develop its awareness and its offering in this area.

As an LGBTQ+ person I am a fervent campaigner for equality and diversity. I believe in doing as much as possible to welcome all communities, and ensure that they are able to participate in all activities. I feel comfortable to voice ideas or concerns in order to strengthen our offering and ensure that the both the Urdd and school's ethos and day-to-day life are open and inclusive.

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

As with many organisations, in the current financial climate, a huge issue is **funding**. My fellow board members are excellent at scrutinising budgets and spending, and ensuring that all funds reach as many people as possible, but we are also working within strict limits.

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

Balancing voluntary commitments with work life can be very challenging as a freelancer. There are times where you can decide when and where you work, but there are other times when the work hours are very much set, and if you can't be there for those hours or in that place then you're not going to get paid. I've found over the past few years that I simply have to prioritise my main commitments before I can give back through voluntary positions.

Family commitments can also prove a challenge to carrying out voluntary work and responsibilities - again, I must prioritise my family and so carrying out additional duties are an additional task which I love to do and feel passionately about, yet I mustn't allow them to 'take over'. It's a careful balance and something I'm still learning how to manage well, so I'll just say that it's a learning process, and one which we all must navigate in the best way for ourselves and our unique set of circumstances.

What lessons have you learned along the way?

1

Balance. I believe - as mentioned above - that I'm getting better at finding the balance between giving my time and expertise wherever possible, with stepping back and focussing on my own personal commitments and needs. There's a level of guilt felt, of 'not doing enough' and I believe we have to remind ourselves that we're all just trying our best. Giving something is better than doing nothing.

2

Always learning. Being on two different boards, each with its own diverse mix of members, means that you're hearing others' thoughts and questions on various situations and concerns. It's a very positive experience to consider such things - on which one may think of oneself an 'expert' - from others' points of view, and to take others' thoughts and concerns seriously; to take a moment and never dismiss others' questions. I hope that, whatever age I am, I'll remember that I'm always learning from others.

What advice would you give a new trustee?

Similar advice to that which some of my colleagues have written - be confident from the beginning. If you are on a board to offer your own unique perspective, point of view or expertise, then we must feel empowered to do so. You're there for a good reason and your thoughts will be valued.

There are times to sit back and listen. As I've said, it's important to remember that we're always learning, either about the organisation or body, or about the way the board operates. Listening to other so that we can best navigate that is very important. It's just as important to find the appropriate time (and way) to healthily challenge the status quo. There are some boards/bodies which may have operated in a particular way for a long time, and bringing about change or a change of culture can be such a healthy thing. This is how organisations and bodies develop, grow and stay relevant.

Don't be afraid to own your place there.

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

In the past few years - and particularly since 2020 - I've seen Eisteddfod yr Urdd become a more fun and inclusive event. I hope that this develops so that we continue to celebrate the incredible talent in our rich culture, whilst finding new ways to include others and diversify our participants.

As I help to find ways for the Urdd to thrive I also hope to be able to help Ysgol Plasmawr face the continuing challenges of diminishing budgets and increasing challenges as teachers' roles become more like social workers. Let's keep our education system fit for purpose and in touch with what's really happening.