

Agenda – Culture, Welsh Language and Communications Committee

Meeting Venue:

Committee Room 2 – Senedd

Meeting date: 28 November 2018

Meeting time: 09.30

For further information contact:

Steve George

Committee Clerk

0300 200 6565

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- 1 Introductions, apologies, substitutions and declarations of interest**

- 2 Supporting and promoting the Welsh language: An inquiry into the legislative, policy and wider context: Evidence session 7**
(09:30 – 10:30) (Pages 1 – 20)
David Blaney, Chief Executive, Higher Education Funding Council for Wales
Celia Hunt, Director of Strategic Development, Higher Education Funding Council for Wales
Sian Tomos, Director Enterprise and Regeneration, Arts Council of Wales
Owen Watkin, Chair, Local Democracy and Boundary Commission for Wales

- 3 Papers to note**
 - 3.1 Letter from the Chair to the Arts Council of Wales: National Theatre Wales**
(Pages 21 – 25)

- 4 Motion under Standing Order 17.42 to resolve to exclude the public from the meeting for the following business:**

- 5 Private debrief**
(10:30 – 10:50)



- 6 Short inquiry into the implications of Brexit on areas within the Committee's remit: Consideration of draft report**
(10:50 – 11:10) (Pages 26 – 48)
- 7 Inquiry into the teaching of Welsh history, culture and heritage: Consideration of scoping paper**
(11:10 – 11:30) (Pages 49 – 63)

Agenda Item 2

Document is Restricted

Supporting and Promoting the Welsh Language: An inquiry into the legislative, policy and wider context

September 2018



Noddir gan
Lywodraeth Cymru
Sponsored by
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Introduction

1. The Higher Education Funding Council for Wales (HEFCW) supports the Welsh Government's vision of 1 million Welsh speakers by 2050 in accordance with 'Cymraeg 2050'. We recognise the Cymraeg 2050: Welsh Language strategy is a key goal of the Welsh Language Commissioner's work. We have responded positively to this agenda and welcome the role of higher education in supporting the attainment of this target.
2. [HEFCW's corporate strategy 2017-2020](#) advocates the Well-being of Future Generations goal of a Wales of vibrant culture and language. As an organisation we are committed to working with different stakeholders to maximise the delivery of provision in higher education through the medium of Welsh. However, we do not have a role in monitoring HE providers' adherence to the Welsh Language Standards. Accordingly, it will be for them to determine their individual responses to this consultation.

Quality Assurance

3. As part of our statutory responsibilities under the Higher Education (Wales) Act 2015 we work with the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) in Wales which is also subject to the Welsh Language Standards and has an appreciation of Welsh language requirements. Our requirements for external quality assurance take into account the Welsh language and likewise QAA are contracted by Universities Wales to deliver quality assurance services, including Welsh medium requirements. In June 2018, we launched the [Quality Assessment Framework](#) for Wales which embedded Welsh language as part of the [baseline regulatory requirements](#). These requirements take into account the Welsh Language Standards when reviewing the quality of education at regulated institutions.

Coleg Cymraeg Cenedlaethol

4. Our remit letter for 2017-18 from Welsh Government acknowledged our partnership work with the Coleg Cymraeg Cenedlaethol (the Coleg) and, despite funding changes, set out expectations for us to continue to support achievement of the Coleg's strategic objectives. Similarly our remit letter for 2018-19 reiterated the need for a close working relationship with the Coleg. We retain an observer role on the Coleg's board of directors and the Chief Executive of the Coleg is a Member of HEFCW's Student Opportunity and Achievement Committee. We also hold regular liaison meetings and an annual Chief Executive meeting. Data is shared with the Coleg through a Memorandum of Understanding that facilitates monitoring of the use of the Welsh language in higher education.
5. We have engaged regularly with the [Coleg](#) to determine whether Welsh medium targets submitted by HE providers in the Fee and Access Plans are sufficiently

ambitious. We have encouraged the broad availability of courses through the medium of Welsh across all higher education, and regulated further education institutions in Wales. As seen below, our approach has been successful, as there has been a year on year increase up to 2015/16 in the number of 5+ and 40+ credits being undertaken through the medium of Welsh. Despite the drop in figures for 2016/17, which may impact the data in the short term, the pattern of progress does show an increase of students studying both 5+ and 40+ credits through the medium of Welsh.

6 The number of students studying higher education courses at higher education institutions and further education institutions in Wales undertaking at least 5 credits of their course through the medium of Welsh, per annum, will rise from 4,335 in 2011/12 to 5,600 in 2016/17, including a rise from 2,269 to 3,030 in the number of those studying at least 40 credits per annum						
	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17
5+ credits	4,335	4,882	4,832	5,399	6,784	5,767
40+ credits	2,269	2,360	2,445	2,633	2,860	2,284
NB there have been manual amendments to previous years' data on this strategy measure						

Post legislative scrutiny of the Welsh Language (Wales) Measure 2011 - to assess the perceived successes and limitations of the legislation, and the impact and effectiveness of Welsh Language standards in improving and increasing access to Welsh language services.

6. We have successfully implemented the set of Welsh Language Standards (the Standards) that apply to HEFCW by reviewing and amending our [implementation plan](#) and through discussions with the Office of the Welsh Language Commissioner. Awareness of the Standards in HEFCW was promoted through discussion sessions with staff in preparation for their implementation. In our annual staff Welsh language survey in 2016/17 only two members of staff were not aware of the Standards six months prior to implementation.
7. We have annually prepared a report on our use of the Welsh language for the Welsh Language Board and more recently the Welsh Language Commissioner. Our annual reports noted the documentation and reports that have been published bilingually and the volume of Welsh language correspondence and telephone calls from the public. In 2017/18 we received 21 emails and fewer than 10 phone calls initiated in Welsh. We have also ensured that bilingual presentations have been available at public meetings, and attendees have been encouraged to use the language of their choice at such events.
8. We have found the set of Standards for higher education institutions, although different to HEFCW, to be useful when focusing on the bigger picture of Cymraeg 2050. As a public organisation working to facilitate the use of the Welsh language we have acknowledged the requirements on higher education institutions. We have been able to assist with providing bilingual guidance and

have made Welsh language Fee and Access plan templates available, helping with the promotion of the Welsh language in the sector. A proactive approach will enable all institutions to respond to the Fee and Access plan process in either Welsh or English, using resources made available to them, without the requirement of translation.

Successes

9. The benchmark for HEFCW's Welsh language attainment prior to the introduction of the Standards was noted in our [Welsh language scheme 2010 report](#). Reviewing the report provided an opportunity to evaluate the current Welsh language position in HEFCW and address the requirements for moving forwards towards the implementation of the Standards. Our Impact Assessment procedures for new policies was amended to reflect these requirements and to reflect our explicit commitment to the Welsh language.
10. A greater understanding of the Welsh language has been developed following the implementation of the Standards. In advance of the introduction of the standards on 1 April 2018, all staff were trained to answer the phone with a bilingual greeting. Welsh speaking staff have also been encouraged to wear 'Cymraeg' and 'Dysgwr' lanyards and badges as appropriate, to advise that they can provide a service in Welsh and to promote the speaking of Welsh with external stakeholders, as well as within HEFCW. We also ran a number of briefing sessions to allay any staff queries concerning the implementation of the Standards. We continue to provide updates with regards to the Standards and follow up sessions when requested and with new staff during inductions. As an organisation subject to the Standards we welcome correspondence in both Welsh and English.
11. The [compliance notice](#) of Section 44 Welsh Language (Wales) Measure 2011 was helpful when drafting an implementation plan to adhere to the Standards. Following the implementation of the Standards we identified where further progress to encourage and facilitate the Welsh language could be made. Our website has always been bilingual for members of the public. Our 'mysite' (intranet) system that includes policies and online forms relating to human resources is in the process of being made bilingual by 2019-20. We have also made a number of amendments to our procurement system to encourage bilingual bids. We have continued to publish all press releases bilingually despite this not being a requirement under the Standards.
12. Overall, the process of implementing the Standards has had a positive effect on the Welsh language in HEFCW. It has broadened its profile and created a more welcoming environment to engage in Welsh in the workplace. In 2017-18 previously only a fifth of the organisation answered the phone bilingually and now under the Standards this applies to all staff. Overall, it has encouraged speaking Welsh in the workplace. In our recent Welsh language survey a third of the organisation was interested in undertaking Welsh language training during

2018-19. This is an increase on the 10 members of staff previously interested in 2017-18. We have encouraged and financially supported members of staff on Welsh language courses, including residential options, and will work together with Welsh Government when reviewing future training arrangements. We have liaised with the National Centre for Learning Welsh and also taken advantage of the 'Learn Work Welsh' courses run by Welsh Government.

13. HEFCW has also published a number of reports and documents bilingually, including our annual report, responses to Welsh Government consultations and our Equality Annual Report. This has reflected our views on the importance of promoting and facilitating the progression of the Welsh language.
14. We have actively encouraged the delivery of additional HE courses through the medium of Welsh in partnership with the Coleg and supported Welsh medium provision in initial teacher education, which increases access to Welsh medium education overall. We recognise the importance of providing opportunities in higher education through the Welsh language and its ability to allow more individuals to engage with the language in different environments.

Limitations

15. We have faced a number of limitations with regard to the progress concerning the Welsh language. As a small organisation, providing expertise through the medium of Welsh can be challenging. Not all policy areas include fluent Welsh speakers, which means that as an organisation we cannot always provide detailed policy advice to external stakeholders in Welsh. However, we follow distinct procedures in accordance with the relevant service delivery standards to maximize opportunities to use the Welsh language when engaging with the public.
16. We faced some issues in interpreting the Standards and the more rigid approach taken by the Welsh language Commissioner's office. As there are often questions around the interpretation of the Standards, we would welcome the availability of practical support and guidance from the Commission. We found some Standards to be disproportionately burdensome for a relatively small organisation such as HEFCW, and we covered these issues in our initial response to the original consultation.
17. Staff have noted that the Standards focus on compliance rather than enhancement of the language. If the work of the Commissioner's office included language enhancement in the workplace and made resources available or encouraged dialogue between organisations, further opportunities to improve use of the Welsh language could be identified. We also rely on the Welsh Government to address certain issues under their own obligations, given our position as a tenant in their building.

To assess whether the legislative framework supports or limits Welsh language promotion and its use.

18. We appreciate that the Welsh Government and Welsh Language Commissioner require robust arrangements to ensure that public bodies respond to their responsibilities in relation to supporting and promoting the Welsh language. We accept that, at present, the Welsh Language Commissioner should monitor how public bodies fulfil their Welsh language duties, which would include the Standards. However, we consider that there is a balance to be achieved between regulation, support and guidance. We would advocate a supportive rather than punitive approach towards non-compliance. Consequently, we would encourage an open approach whereby the Welsh Language Commissioner's office would work with public sector organisations, including Welsh Government, to ensure an effective use of the Welsh language. This could include reconvening a number of Welsh language support networks for sector groups. Our approach in response to the Standards is to build good practice and encourage bilingualism within higher education and regulated further education institutions to progress towards the Welsh Government's goal.
19. Promoting and facilitating the use of the Welsh language should also focus on the wider Welsh society, beyond public service organisations. Higher education institutions have assisted us with our work to facilitate a thriving Welsh language through a number of projects, as is demonstrated in our [Higher Education for Future Generations document](#). For example, Aberystwyth University has a partnership with Urdd Gobaith Cymru which has provided opportunities to promote the use of the Welsh language in sport. Cardiff Metropolitan University has provided Welsh language classes for staff, while Bangor University has encouraged guest speakers to conduct activities bilingually at the institution.
20. Our [Innovation Nation: on Common Ground](#) publication recognised the breadth of work being undertaken by higher education institutions which included promoting the Welsh language in the local community. For example, the Open University provides OpenLearn Cymru as a free online learning bilingual resource for learners to increase skills and encourage pathways to higher education. Bangor University has aimed to promote the Welsh language through its Language Technologies Unit with the health, education, social policy and digital technology sectors. In these publications we have recognised the importance of the above projects along with our continued support in bringing the local communities together to promote the Welsh Government's ambition of Cymraeg 2050. In future, we suggest that greater priority should be given to these types of activities encouraging and facilitating the Welsh language in the wider context, as opposed to the further development of regulation.
21. As a result of the Standards we believe the profile of Welsh medium provision in higher education has increased. Awareness of further opportunities in education and the workplace following a bilingual education have been recognised and widely promoted. This action has the ability to directly strengthen the use of

Welsh language within the workforce in future and in working towards Cymraeg 2050.

22. Overall as an organisation we have successfully amended our practice to reflect our requirements subject to the Standards. We already adhered to a number of the requirements prior to its implementation, such as an annual assessment of our staff's Welsh language skills, and we will continue to go beyond what is expected of us as an organisation where we are able, for example by publishing bilingual press releases. Organisations which support this agenda will continue to promote it, and a standards compliance approach may not help in that context. We consider that we have welcomed these changes and continue to work towards enhancing our practice in furthering Welsh Government's initiative Cymraeg 2050.

Post legislative scrutiny of the Welsh Language (Wales) Measure 2011 - to assess the perceived successes and limitations of the legislation, and the impact and effectiveness of Welsh Language standards in improving and increasing access to Welsh language services.

The Arts Council of Wales was established by Royal Charter and has the Welsh language firmly embedded within its constitution. Supporting the use of Welsh as a creative living language and ensuring an environment where artists can pursue their career in the language of their choice is at the heart of our corporate plan. We are positive, willing and, we believe, successful champions of the language.

The Welsh Language (Wales) Measure 2011 legislation required us, in law, to do much of what we were already doing in practice. However, having a legal framework has stretched us to do even more – in particular it has increased bilingualism in the internal operations of the Arts Council of Wales. This means, for instance, that our staff now has access to all HR functions in Welsh and we are working towards a fully bilingual intranet. It has also made us focus on the quality of our Welsh language services in order to maximise the use of them. We are sending our key writers on a Cymraeg Clir course and extending Welsh language learning opportunities. We have also recruited Welsh speaking staff into our HR and IT teams to support the use of the Welsh language internally. We are committed to achieving high quality translations.

Since the introduction of the legislation the visibility of the Welsh language within the Arts Council of Wales has increased. Bilingualism is now established as the norm when communicating with all staff and there has been a significant increase in bilingual training and facilitation.

Working in Partnership

The Arts Portfolio Wales (APW) – the major organisations who we fund regularly – are our main partners in delivering the arts and arts development in Wales. We require them all to have Welsh language plans outlining how they will work towards meeting the legislation. This is a condition of our funding.

It is one of our corporate goals to see all the venues that we support providing a welcoming and inclusive environment. This means places where communities and visitors can expect to be able to ask for their tickets, order their drink at the bar and to enjoy their entertainment through the medium of Welsh. We also aspire to be able to offer participatory activities in the language of choice for participants.

Capacity and resource issues sometimes limit our ability to deliver all that we would wish. But the potential is there. We believe very strongly that we should make a positive contribution to the profiling of Welsh as a living language by making it a key priority of our work across all areas of the arts.

Using our Influence

As the stewards of public funds we are aware that we have a gatekeeping role in terms of encouraging new development and monitoring the effectiveness of more well-established activity. We are both guide dog and guard dog. We have an explicit responsibility to exercise this role in relation to the Welsh language. We receive around 1,500 applications for funding each year. We take an active role in our scrutiny and assessment of applicants' plans in relation to language provision. And we require bilingual promotional material for everything that receives our funding. However, this is far more than a legalistic issue of compliance. We celebrate, promote and defend the Welsh language for cultural, social and creative reasons. So we try as best we can to see beyond the rules and regulations. Our advocacy of the Welsh language is as concerned with the spirit of the legislation as it is with the letter of the law. This is a principle that is applied across our work.

In our view, the Standards have had a number of practical benefits for us as a public body. But these have come at a cost (especially for the smaller organisation like us). Translation is expensive and, despite an increase in the number of staff able to work in Welsh, translation is not something we expect them to undertake in addition to their normal professional roles. Consequently there can be bottlenecks as documents are queued for translation. This could make us more circumspect about publishing as a result.

We also experience a number of smaller organisations and individuals relying on Google Translate for smaller sections of text, which often results largely incorrect or incomprehensible Welsh language marketing / web content. People are trying to operate in the spirit of the act and often turn to the availability of quick and cost effective tech based translation facilities to ensure public information in both languages but there are considerable problems with the quality of this at the moment. The use of Welsh by the tech giants should be a priority and is something we alone cannot address. In the interim there should be an increase in the awareness of the need for good translations that capture the essence of what is communicated in the original language and that Google translate cannot provide this at the current time.

But overall the Standards have raised the profile of the Language in a positive way and the imperative for public bodies to adhere to the Standards has resulted in a raising of the bar - especially in terms of increasing the use of the Welsh language in the workplace.

What is less clear is where the developmental impetus is coming from – the innovative programmes of work that are seeking imaginative ways of encouraging and incentivising people to use Welsh. At the moment it feels all about compliance. As we move forward from this point, it would be good to see the balance move more in favour of developing the use of the language in everyday situations and activities. Our own data demonstrates the standards have had arguably little or no impact on increasing and improving access to Welsh Language arts activities. The number of applications we receive in the Welsh language and/or for Welsh language activities or productions has decreased if anything. This is a corporate concern and has been picked up as something we want to address through our new corporate plan. We want to see more Welsh language events – particularly for young people who have learnt the language in Welsh medium education but then find themselves unable to use it as a living language in everyday life. It's important that we use any legislative frameworks and public partnerships to support and encourage the use of the language, not hinder it.

To assess whether the legislative framework supports or limits Welsh language promotion and its use.

Initially the legislation led to some challenging conversations. It exposed gaps in capability and capacity. But this is a hearts and minds game as much as anything else. Our portfolio of funded organisations is, on the whole, very supportive of the need to encourage and facilitate the use of the Welsh language in everyday life. In the participatory arts, there is an increasing demand for Welsh language practitioners to lead workshops and classes. There seems to be an appetite – particularly from those who work with young people – to grow the use of the Welsh language in a practical nonacademic way.

As we move beyond the initial compliance stage, it would be good to see more systems of support, advice, exemplars and mentors readily available to assist those who need them. The current legal framework of the Well-being of Future Generations Act might possibly provide a better means of integrating the work of public bodies in promoting the Welsh language and it would be good to see this used to its full capacity.

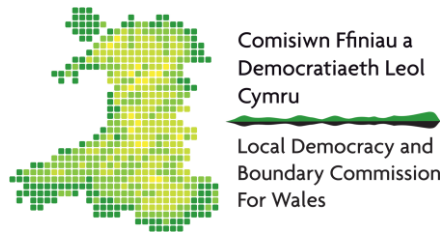
We are currently working on a partnership project with the Office of the Future Generations Commissioner – Art of the Possible – where one of our Portfolio Managers is seconded to advise on the goal of a Wales of vibrant culture and thriving Welsh language. It is hoped that this project will develop resources to more fully support Public Bodies to meet their duties in regard to the Act and to provide practical examples of how this can be more fully achieved in public life. It will be interesting to see how this progresses and how it may be able to dovetail with other legislative duties on the Welsh language.

An international perspective - gathering evidence on legislation to protect and promote minority language planning in other countries.

No specific comment.

A Welsh version of this document is available.

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Culture, Welsh Language and Communications Committee
National Assembly for Wales
Cardiff Bay
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CF99 1NA

9 November 2018

I am writing on behalf of the Local Democracy and Boundary Commission for Wales to contribute to the Committee's consultation to assist its inquiry into the legislative, policy and wider context of supporting and promoting the Welsh Language.

Since its initial creation under the Local Government (Wales) Act 1974, the Commission has supported the Welsh Language by ensuring that its public documents are published in both Welsh and English. Over the years the integration of the consideration of the Welsh Language into the work of the Commission has increased, particularly following the introduction of the Commission's first Welsh Language Scheme in 1998.

When the full list of Welsh Language Standards were published as a result of the Welsh Language (Wales) Measure 2011, the Commission raised concerns about the resource implications of applying all of the standards to the organisation. The Commission was therefore pleased that the particular standards the Welsh Language Commissioner applied to the Commission took account of the size and remit of the organisation. For example, the standards in respect of the promotion of the Welsh Language were not applied to the Commission.

The Commission was not in the first tranche of bodies to apply the standards and by learning from their experiences it enabled the Commission to have a better understanding of what would be required. That, and the historic ethos within the Commission in respect of the Welsh Language, meant that the Commission was in a much stronger position to meet the required standards than otherwise may have been the case.

Whilst there was a degree of additional work and cost required to establish the appropriate policies and procedures for the implementation of the standards were in place, the workload and costs were contained within the Commission's budget. The subsequent workload and costs as a result of maintaining the standards have so far been marginal.

The one area of difficulty that the Commission has experienced is in the appointment of sufficient numbers of staff within the Secretariat with Welsh Language capabilities. This is despite our best efforts to attract candidates with the appropriate skills and

making provision for Welsh Language training for existing members of staff. This dearth of Welsh Language skills within the office has proved a challenge at times and represents an ongoing risk in the Commission's efforts to meet its Welsh Language Standards.

In respect of judging how effective the legislation on the standards have been in improving and increasing access to Welsh Language services from the Commission's perspective it is difficult to quantify. The Commission has certainly made additional provisions as a result of applying the standards but how effective these have been are for our stakeholders and the Welsh Language Commissioner to pass judgement. Having clear standards to be assessed against does make it easier for stakeholders to hold the Commission to account and, if necessary make an appropriate complaint.

The Commission were initially concerned that the process of imposing fines for not meeting standards that was set in the legislation would result in a punitive regime that would not be beneficial to the promotion of the Welsh Language. In the experience of the Commission, however, this has not been the case as the Welsh Language Commissioner's Office has to date taken a reasonable, proportionate and co-operative approach to the application of the Standards. It is the Commission's view that such an approach is more conducive to the promotion of the Welsh Language than would be the case if an immediate 'name and shame' regime were in operation.

On behalf of the Commission I would like to thank the Committee for this opportunity to take part in this consultation.

Yours Sincerely

Steve Halsall
Chief Executive

Nick Capaldi
Chief Executive
Arts Council Wales

22 November 2018

Dear Nick,

National Theatre Wales

Thank you for your letter of 30 October and for providing the further information requested.

You will be aware of the open letter to Clive Jones, Chair of National Theatre Wales, signed by numerous signatories, expressing discontent at aspects of the theatre's performance.

For information, I attach to this letter the correspondence I have received on this issue as Chair of the Culture, Welsh Language and Communications Committee – a letter from Adam Somerset of Theatre-Wales, and the resulting response from National Theatre Wales.

It is not the Committee's role to seek to influence the artistic decisions and direction of individual arts organisations in Wales. However, National Theatre Wales is a portfolio organisation of the Arts Council of Wales and I would be grateful for your views on the attached correspondence and any information on the background to the issues raised that would help the Committee gain a fuller understanding of those issues, including (but not limited to):

1. The amount of funding National Theatre Wales receives from the Arts Council of Wales; and
2. Information on the productions planned for the next 12 months.

Clearly, it is a concern that such a dispute is occurring within the public domain and that so many of those within the sector have expressed such negativity toward one of our premier arts institutions. It would be very helpful if you could also indicate what steps the ACW is taking to help bring the two sides of this dispute together.

In addition to this correspondence I would be more than happy to meet with you, should you wish to discuss the matter in person.

Thank you in advance for providing this information.

Your sincerely,

Bethan Sayed.

Bethan Sayed
Chair

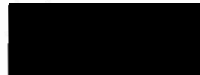
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Culture, Welsh Language and Communications Committee
National Assembly for Wales
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November 2nd 2018



Dear Ms Sayed



Subsidised Theatre in Wales

I am the author for Theatre Wales of 869 reviews and articles on theatre and performance. In December each year I write summary articles of our year in theatre. Next month these articles will include the "National Theatre of Wales."

I use inverted commas because these words have meaning and their meaning has been stretched so far as to cease to apply to this company. It stands awkwardly alongside National Opera, Theatr Genedlaethol and National Dance, all admirable and non-contentious representatives of Wales. The company's display across the media of the United Kingdom this season has brought Wales into discredit.

You will be aware of the state of relations between the company and every significant dramatist of Wales, endorsed by the Writers Guild and Equity. Their lack of confidence is principally focused on the programme. The company operates a unique import model among designated national theatres, whereby a large proportion of Wales' public funding is spent on companies, writers and actors from elsewhere.

The weight of protest has been met with silence from the Chair and Board, evasion and distraction the hallmark of other response. However, a second issue also prevails and has been downplayed. The view of the audience member is not that of professional practitioners. The net impact on the theatre ecology is to deprive audiences in Wales of theatre. No numbers are released in the public domain- the policy in Scotland is very different. The sum required to subsidise each audience member may be surmised as the world's highest. The company has now embarked on a sabbatical from theatre for a period known only to itself.

This has an opportunity cost for our theatre of £4000 a day. At the same time tours from companies of a good heritage, who wish to perform to Wales, are being turned down. I do not believe this to be the intended cultural policy of the Government of Wales. The companies who are being terminated have lost heart which gives this issue an immediacy.

I would request the Committee to undertake the actions that are called for. In my own view an open session with Chair and Chief Executive has an urgency to it.

Yours Sincerely

Adam Somerset

ADAM SOMERSET

Theatre-Wales

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Cofrestredig yng Nghymru a Lloegr / Registered in England and Wales

Tuesday, 13 November 2018

Bethan Sayed AM
Culture, Welsh Language and Communications Committee
National Assembly for Wales
Cardiff Bay
CF99 INA

Dear Ms Sayed,

We are aware of a letter sent to the Culture, Welsh Language and Communications Committee on 2 November by Mr Adam Somerset, raising concerns about National Theatre Wales' work, and that the Committee will discuss this letter at your next meeting tomorrow (14 November).

Before then, I'd like to take this opportunity to set the record straight on some of the allegations made in the letter:

"You will be aware of the state of relations between the company and every significant dramatist of Wales, endorsed by the Writers Guild and Equity"

Since the publication of the writers' letter, NTW and members of our board have met with the signatories twice and offers have been made to meet with other artists. Furthermore, NTW will host a series of meetings and creative exchanges as part of its next, three-year strategic review and ongoing dialogue with artists. The company will also seek the view of audiences as we continue to plan for 2020, our 10th birthday year. For the record, we have had many messages of support from other, equally significant Welsh writers. The signatories are not "every significant dramatist of Wales".

"The company operates a unique import model among designated national theatres, whereby a large proportion of Wales' public funding is spent on companies, writers and actors from elsewhere."

Every NTW show is bespoke. All of it is new and all of it is made in Wales. None are 'imported'. Since our inception, 79% of our lead artists have been Welsh or Wales-based. However, we believe that there's room for visiting artists to collaborate with us too, for example, our outdoor spectacular Roald Dahl's City of the Unexpected (the biggest arts event ever staged in Wales) wouldn't have happened without an international director experienced in staging Olympic-sized events. Finally, we have a Wales-first casting policy which, in the interests of transparency, can be found on our website. However, in seeking to reflect the rich cultural diversity of Wales and in accordance with its stated aims on diversity, the company maintains the right to cast further afield if necessary to fulfil its artistic ambition.

"The weight of protest has been met with silence from the Chair and Board."

This is demonstrably not true. Since the writers' open letter was published in September, the Chair, Board and Executive staff have organised and attended two meetings with the writers and invited actors to a similar meeting, posted two blog posts and several statements, given many media interviews and committed to staging an artistic event in Jan 2019 to open the conversation further.

"The net impact on the theatre ecology is to deprive audiences in Wales of theatre. No numbers are released in the public domain- the policy in Scotland is very different."

In its very first Strategic Plan, NTW's vision stated it would seek to 'connect with Welsh audiences and make world-class theatre more accessible, especially to those who currently do not attend mainstream theatre'. Engaging non-attenders who may not feel the theatre is for them comes with challenges, particularly when presenting work across the nation rather than building audiences in one location. However, we are immensely proud of the new audiences we attract and report these figures to the Arts Council of Wales on an annual basis. We balance work to attract specific audiences - for example the Asian community of South Wales with our production Sisters, with free large-scale events for all including The Passion and City of the Unexpected. We amplify the live experience to reach a wider audience via digital and broadcast opportunities and we balance the rural with the urban.

"The sum required to subsidise each audience member may be surmised as the world's highest."

This is an offensive exaggeration. The company's work is not solely centered on productions and its Collaboration and Creative Development activities connect with artists and communities year-round. NTW operates with a lean core staff in order to ensure that as much of its subsidy as possible results in benefit to the public it serves and this encapsulates a wide range of participants. The company's impact cannot be reduced to audience figures alone.

'The company has now embarked on a sabbatical from theatre for a period known only to itself.'

If Mr Somerset is referring to the writers' assertion that some of our recent work does not constitute theatre, we are very proud of our NHS70 Festival this year, a programme of work performed across all seven health boards, using seven artforms, including live comedy, song and original new plays. We believe passionately that there is no single definition of theatre - it evolves constantly, and we reserve the right to experiment with the form.

If, however, Mr Somerset is implying that we have 'gone dark', this is not true. We have publicly stated that we'll announce our next season later this month. In the meantime, we will be hosting many events including a Performance Party in Pembrokeshire and Wrexham as part of a four-year project of embedded community work in both locations.

We have created 15 productions in 2018. It is common for theatre companies to take a breath between one season and the next - National Theatre Scotland's next show isn't until April 2019, for example. And the pause we're taking now, after closing our 2018 season, is absolutely in keeping with our previous schedules.

I am aware that this is a far more complex conversation than can be well served by letter and I welcome any opportunity to discuss our work and its impact across Wales. So, should the Committee wish to invite me to answer any questions at your next meeting, please don't hesitate to ask - I will gladly do so.

Yours sincerely,

Kully Thiarai
Artistic Director & Chief Executive
National Theatre Wales

Agenda Item 6

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Agenda Item 7

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