

Senedd Cymru / Welsh Parliament

Pwyllgor Diwylliant, y Gymraeg a Chyfathrebu / Culture, Welsh Language and Communications Committee

Ymchwiliad i'r achosion o COVID-19 ac effaith y feirws ar ddiwylliant, y diwydiannau creadigol, treftadaeth, cyfathrebu a chwaraeon / Inquiry into the COVID-19 outbreak and its impact on culture, creative industries, heritage, communications and sport

CWLC COV67

Ymateb gan Amgueddfa Cymru / Response from National Museum Wales

July 2020

## **Amgueddfa Cymru – National Museum Wales**

### **Response to COVID-19**

All National Museums were closed to the public on 16 March in response to the escalation of COVID-19. All public programmes have been suspended until end of August 2020 and all venue hire and commercial activity also suspended. These dates continue to be reviewed, according to guidance from Welsh Government.

All staff with underlying health conditions were asked to work from home from 18 March and on 19 March, we reduced the staffing of the seven national museums and the collections centre to a minimum level that ensured the security of the museums and the national collections, whilst maintaining core functions.

We completed a rapid review of essential functions and appropriate systems were implemented. This ensured that all key functions were able to continue remotely (e.g. HR payroll, finance), with IT completing a roll out of laptops for essential staff to allow full remote access for home working by 20 March.

We moved to a tighter lockdown position by close of play 24 March. HR disseminated guidelines to managers to support e.g. remote working and staff wellbeing. All Heads of Department are responsible for implementing with managers and teams to ensure regular contact is retained and staff are supported.

Since the lockdown, we have continued to monitor the situation closely and a team of staff have developed detailed plans on how best to reopen the museums safely, when the time is right for us to do so. We have also worked with Welsh Government and the Federation of Museums and Galleries in Wales to develop guidelines for the sector.

St Fagans National Museum of History will be the first of our museums to re-open. Dependent of Welsh Government advice, the Museum's outdoor grounds will be opened for a limited number of days each week and for a limited number of visitors from the beginning of August. The visitor experience will be different as the historic houses and play areas will remain closed due to current restrictions, as well as the galleries and our cafes and shops. Though we will remain free to visit, visitors will be asked to pre-book a slot so that we can manage the numbers of visitors safely. Our six other national museums will open in late August/ early September, with exact dates yet to be finalised. We are incurring costs of at least £400k to prepare for re-opening. This includes new signage, PPE, Perspex screens etc.

### **Our work during lockdown**

In addition to a core team of staff working on site to maintain the security of the

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national museums and the national collection, we have focused our efforts on how best we can continue to support the communities we serve during this time,

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developing programmes and content digitally. We launched a research project, Collecting Covid, asking people to respond about their experiences during this time. We have already received nearly 1000 responses. These will become part of the national memory at St Fagans National Museum of History, ensuring that future generations will be able to learn about life in Wales during this extraordinary time. More information can be found here: <https://museum.wales/collecting-covid/>

We have seen a significant shift in the audiences that we are reaching online. Our trends show that there's interest from different market segments, with more local communities engaging with us on the website. Our collections online, articles and blogs are popular on our website – a reflection of our programmes to provide relevant content and learning resources.

We are also seeing continued growth in our social media accounts, as well as utilising some additional channels and making the most of rich content, such as video, which is boosting engagement.

It is people local to the museums who are engaging most with us; we will strive to continue this relationship with our new audiences over the longer term. We are achieving this by working with our partners, volunteers, colleagues and other audiences to share information on how our communities are changing and how Amgueddfa Cymru can support them.

We have adopted #TakeoverTuesday to give others a voice through our social media channels.

A suite of online programmes has also been developed for delivery during this period. The main themes for these programmes include wellbeing; the effect on people's mental health now and in the future; creativity through our communications, learning opportunities and programming; collecting – creating a national memory; and nature on your doorstep.

We have continued to work with schools, developing new resources with Hwb and the Consortia for the new National Curriculum for Wales; and also the Minecraft your Museum competition

We have continued to collaborate with Llamau, Barnardo's, Children in Wales to provide creative programmes for young people who face the greatest disadvantages - these experiences are produced by our Young Heritage Leaders.

### **Impact of closure**

In recent years, Amgueddfa Cymru has been very successful in increasing its income generation and fundraising efforts. One of the most immediate impacts has therefore been the loss of income, which at present is circa £400k per month.

As has been previously communicated both to the Committee and Welsh Government, despite the successes with income generation, the Museum is reliant on Welsh Government funding to support free entry as well as the maintenance of all the national museums, the national collection, and the majority of staff costs.

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We have also had to cancel or postpone venue hire bookings including the European Museum of the Year Conference and Awards Ceremony, that was due to take place for the first time in Wales from 29 April-2 May. Many international partnerships and projects are also now on hold, because of the uncertainty across the globe. However, major museums in Asia and the Antipodes are actively negotiating to take touring exhibitions from us from 2022 onwards.

Like all other national museums across the nations of the United Kingdom, Amgueddfa Cymru has used the furlough scheme to recover some of the lost income so that we do all that we can to protect jobs for the future.

To date and over different periods, circa 40% of our staff have been furloughed for at least a period of three weeks. This was with the support of Welsh Government and Illective agreement with our recognised Trade Unions.

Through this scheme HMRC is reimbursing Amgueddfa Cymru 80% of furloughed staff wage costs (but only 2% of pension costs), up to a cap of £2,500 per month. Amgueddfa Cymru is topping up salaries and therefore anyone furloughed is being paid 100% of their normal salary, which includes pension contributions.

We are doing all that we can to support staff whilst they are on furlough and are looking forward to a time when we can all be together once more, working at the national museums and welcoming visitors.

## **Beyond Covid**

Earlier this year, we began developing a new ten-year strategy for Amgueddfa Cymru, and reviewing our brand. Building on the success of St Fagans National Museum of History being awarded Art Fund Museum of the Year 2019, our ambition is to further develop this new way of working across Wales.

We had planned an extensive public consultation programme across Wales over the course of this year, to better understand what matters to communities, and how best we can add value. We remain committed to working with others to develop the strategy over the coming months and have revised plans, so that consultation still takes place.

Of immediate concern is our financial position as outlined above. We remain in dialogue with Welsh Government over this, providing regular updates. The full financial impact will be unknown until operations are able to resume.

## **Black Lives Matter**

In this time of extreme distress to black people across the world, we stand with black communities in Wales, our visitors, partners, staff and volunteers in the fight against racial injustice and inequality, declaring that Black Lives Matter.

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Museum collections are often rooted in colonialism and racism. Amgueddfa Cymru –

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National Museum Wales is no different.

We support all efforts to build a museum sector that stands up for human rights and anti-racism. We have a role to play in driving change, working with the communities of Wales to be actively anti-racist in all that we do.

We have a long way to go, but together with our community partners, including Race Council Cymru, and Youth Heritage Leaders, we are diversifying our collections, increasing representation, and contributing to conversations that highlight decolonisation, inequality and racism.

Our commitment will continue beyond the current situation, as understanding the challenges faced in the past can empower people to confront today's issues together. It will be a key part of our new ten-year strategy, and is now prominently featured on our website so that people can follow how we are putting this statement into action.

## **Art in hospitals**

The field hospitals built by Public Health Wales to double NHS capacity are in repurposed or temporary spaces, and have one thing in common - the walls are bare. Amgueddfa Cymru was approached, and asked to transform some of these spaces into art galleries.

By working in partnership with Arts Council Wales, and with the support from the Welsh Government, we devised Celf ar y Cyd, a series of ambitious visual art projects which challenge us to share the art collection across Wales during the crisis. In this first initiative, working with Health Boards across Wales, our brief was to make people feel at home, and to act quickly so that the spaces would be ready to receive their first patients. Starting with Hwyl Dda Health Board in West Wales, we selected landscapes of the west coast and rural life in the area. The reproduction prints were sealed in an antimicrobial plastic and hung using industrial-strength velcro which allow them to be removed every day, cleaned front and back, and pressed back onto the wall.

Our first introduction to the Bridgend field hospital, run by Cwm Taf Morgannwg was an iPad tour of a huge disused factory, led by the medical team. Designed as a recovery space, this is where patients emerging from treatment in ICU (in a catchment area covering Bridgend, RCT and Merthyr) start their long journey back to health. Working with medics and the Arts in Health team, we have had to learn quickly how best to use artworks and interpretation as part of a physical recovery programme. The images in the ward describe the extraordinary richness of ordinary life in the Valleys, from Kevin Sinnott's street scene, *Running Away with the Hairdresser*, to a winter landscape transformed by snow in Ernest Zobole's painting *Some Trees and Snow*. They are used to encourage mobility, develop incentives for movement between the work, and build in rewards to encourage patients to make further discoveries and reconnect with the familiar people and places depicted in the paintings.

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In a dedicated rehabilitation space for those preparing to return home, an exhibition of David Hurn's photographs from the area, made between the 1960s and 1980s, provide tools for staff to help more senior patients recall memories including the much-loved *Monday wash day*, *Rhondda Valley*, a celebration of the familiar routines of home.

As the number of patients admitted to hospital with COVID-19 begins to fall in Wales, we are holding conversations with the Health Boards across Wales to find new approaches to ensure that the art collection can be used by NHS teams and patients in a way that works for them, both online and in the workplace. We want to develop the partnership further and at the same time, explore how the national collection is seen through different eyes. It's also a fantastic way to be able to thank the NHS.