

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 COV68

Ymateb gan Ffederasiwn Amgueddfeydd ac Oriolau Celf Cymru / Response from Federation of Museums and Art Galleries of Wales



Federation of Museums
and Art Galleries of Wales

Ffederasiwn Amgueddfeydd
ac Oriolau Celf Cymru

The Federation of Museums and Art Galleries of Wales is the independent strategic body for museums and art galleries in Wales (registered charity no.11022). We advocate for the highest standards of museum provision throughout Wales.

There are over 100 Accredited museums in Wales and our membership comprises organisations from across the country – from the smallest voluntary-run museums, the independent, local authority, military, university sectors and Amgueddfa Cymru National Museum Wales. Our key messages are:

- Welsh Museums empower people through learning, participation and inspiration
- Welsh Museums and their collections strengthen community identity and well-being
- Welsh Museums make a significant economic contribution through tourism and regeneration

The following response to the Culture, Welsh Language and Communications Committee has been informed by our knowledge of the sector and from consultation with our membership and key stakeholders. We understand that Amgueddfa Cymru has submitted a separate response and has been called to give evidence. We will therefore focus on providing examples from other museums within the sector in this response.

What has been the immediate impact of Covid-19 on the museum sector?

Museums across Wales closed their doors as a result of the pandemic from mid-March. This has created a situation which has impacted on Welsh museums in the following ways:

All museums are experiencing a loss of income, in terms of a reduction in admission fees, café and retail secondary spend, events, room/corporate hire and donations. While clearly this is most keenly felt by those independent museums solely reliant on income generation (we estimate the independent museums in Wales have lost around £820,000 of income in the first quarter of lockdown), it is an issue for all museums in Wales. Following over 10 years of austerity, all museums are required to income generate to subsidize their services, off-setting cuts to their budgets.

In terms of staffing, most independent museums have furloughed considerable proportions of their staff, while local authority museums have seen many of their staff being redeployed to help deliver key council services. Staff from local authority museums and the National Museum have also been furloughed during the later phases of the scheme.

We have been informed by several of our members that their insurance companies are not paying claims against their business interruption insurance, which exacerbates the issues around loss of income and financial sustainability.

Closed buildings also create potential risks to collections in terms of security breaches and issues with environmental monitoring to ensure no harm is done to the nation's portable heritage. While we have not been made aware of any break-ins in Wales, staff are required

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to visit sites regularly and/or monitor alarm systems remotely.

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The pandemic has meant that planned exhibitions and capital developments/improvements have not taken place. The diversion of key funding streams such as National Lottery Heritage Fund to funding the Covid-19 emergency has resulted in capital improvements and community engagement projects being cancelled or postponed indefinitely.

The closure of local museums has meant an adverse social impact on local communities. The effects of people not being able to come to the museum for their regular volunteering sessions, to attend dementia friendly activities or family-fun sessions on which they rely have wider impacts for Wales in terms of social isolation, loneliness and wellbeing. We know several of our members are regularly telephoning their older and lonely volunteers, and working with third sector organisations to create activities for their vulnerable participants to undertake during lockdown. Examples include several of our members working with refugee agencies, disability groups, organisations working with older people and early years providers.

Closure of local museums also contribute to the adverse economic impacts on local communities. Museums are a key economic driver in rural and smaller urban communities, especially in terms of tourism or supporting local suppliers. For example:

- Anglesey's Oriol Ynys Môn supports 14 Anglesey-based suppliers, 16 Welsh suppliers and 18 UK-based suppliers through their shop. For every £1 of public money spent on the museum, £11.87 is brought into the local economy.

However, during lockdown museums across the country have continued to support their communities and demonstrated how they are key to continuing delivery of the Wellbeing of Future Generations Act despite their sites being closed. The goal of accessing vibrant culture and Welsh language, in addition to those related to health and wellbeing, learning and education are being delivered by museums of all shapes and sizes across the country. Just a handful of examples include:

Resources for home-schooling

- Storiol Museum in Bangor have a series of education sheets for key stage two and above, all based on their collections – from the Celts to Second World War_ <https://www.storiol.cymru/learn/>
- Firing Line Museum have made activities available that are all themed around the museum and its collections <http://www.cardiffcastlemuseum.org.uk/home-schooling-suggestions-49.php>
- Wrexham Museum is using their collections to create daily quizzes for their Facebook visitors – using mystery objects, puzzle places to identify old buildings in their historic photographs and a 'beginners guide to the history of Wrexham' feature_ <https://www.facebook.com/WrexhamMuseums>

Engaging communities to collect their experiences of the pandemic

Many local museums are working with their communities to collect experiences of the pandemic, including in innovative ways:

- Ceredigion Museum in Aberystwyth will add a real quilt and a digital one to its collection to commemorate the community's experience of the pandemic and lockdown. It is asking people to send in videos, sound pieces, pictures, poetry, fabric or songs to be added to the quilts._ <http://www.ceredigion.gov.uk/resident/news/ceredigion-museum-get-creative-for-quarantine-quilts/>

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- Museum of Cardiff is working with Cardiff Council's Cardiff Commitment team on a new project *Diff Diaries* for the city's children and young people to record their experiences of Covid-19 and lockdown through film, photography, written and art work to then enter the museum's collection.
https://www.cardiffnewsroom.co.uk/releases/c25/23718.html?utm_source=Twitter&utm_medium=social&utm_campaign=SocialSignIn&utm_content=COVID-19
- Tenby Museum's Museum of Memories project asks residents to write a letter to themselves, create scrapbooks of their time in lockdown and keep photographic and written diaries.
<https://www.facebook.com/tenbymuseumandartgallery/photos/a.287299278012554/2840026279406495/?type=3&theater>

Using digital to engage in new ways

- Cyfarthfa Castle in Merthyr Tydfil has begun a new series of Merthyr's Hidden Past podcasts <https://soundcloud.com/christopher-parry-303388935>
- The Egypt Centre at Swansea University has initiated an online lecture and talks series on YouTube and zoom <https://www.egypt.swan.ac.uk/annual-conference-2020-via-zoom/>
- Y Gaer in Brecon teamed up with The Guardian to create a quiz using their collections <https://www.theguardian.com/culture/2020/apr/22/great-british-art-quiz-y-gaer-museum-art-gallery-and-library-brecon-wales>

Online exhibitions and social media collections tours

- Cynon Valley Museum in Aberdare have created a new section on their website, collaborating with local artists to create an online gallery of their work, providing an opportunity to promote their work and engage with visitors while they are at home.
<http://cynonvalleymuseum.wales/exhibitions-at-home-by-cynon-valley-museum/>
- Monmouthshire Museums and Llandudno Museum are just two museum services using Twitter and social media to increase access to their collections, posting daily tweets @Mon_Heritage @LlandudnoMuseum

How effectively has the support provided by the Welsh Government, the UK Government and arms-length bodies addressed the sector's needs?

Towards the beginning of lockdown, the Federation applied for, and received £300,000 from Welsh Government's Culture and Sport Division to administer a Covid-19 resilience grant scheme for the independent museum sector. To date £158,417 has been awarded to 18 museums. Grants have been requested to cover salary costs of non-furloughed staff, improvements to security and environmental monitoring systems, equipment to enable homeworking, and to cover loss of income to prevent closure.

The museum sector is also eligible for funding from National Lottery Heritage Fund and from Welsh Government's £1million Cultural Resilience Fund, administered by Culture and Sport Division. We know several of our members, including local authority museums, have applied to these funding streams to aid their resilience at this time.

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Many independent and local authority museums, and the National museum have taken advantage of the Government's furlough scheme to aid their financial sustainability during the pandemic. The Federation has also signposted our membership to, and supported many in making claims to Government's business support schemes. For example, we know our members have secured at least £560,000 from the funding linked to their rateable values. In some instances (for smaller voluntary-run museums) this has given them the funding needed to completely weather the Covid-19 crisis, and are anticipating staying closed until next summer.

Non-financial support has also been made available to Welsh museums:

The Federation has commissioned the Association of Leading Visitor Attractions (ALVA) to report on the public perceptions of returning to cultural venues. This has ensured Welsh museums have robust data to understand their communities' views and requirements of returning to their sites and to plan their reopening accordingly.

We have also funded the Association of Independent Museums (AIM) to make their Coronavirus support, training and coaching available to museums in Wales. Both have been made possible via our funding from Welsh Government.

We have initiated a project with Peoples Collection Wales (PCW) to support our membership to increase online access to their collections, especially key when many do not have their own collections websites.

We have also facilitated a fortnightly virtual meeting for those leading Welsh museums across Wales to share concerns, pool expertise and build organisational and personal resilience. This again has been made possible from a previous Welsh Government Culture and Sport grant received by AIM for a partnership with the Federation. The success of this programme is demonstrated by the fact AIM invited the cohort to close their online UK conference in June, discussing how to build resilience and navigate through crisis.

We note the recently announced funding package from Westminster for the cultural sector, including £59million for Wales. The Federation would expect that museums and the heritage sector is supported via this package in addition to the arts sector.

What will the likely long-term impacts of Covid-19 be on the sector, and what support is needed to deal with those?

For all museums, issues around the economic viability of reopening will be key, with increased costs attached to enhanced cleaning, provision of PPE, additional staffing to ensure safety will coincide with vastly decreased income streams due to the diminished numbers of visitors allowed on site and consequential reduction in admission fees and secondary spend income. Therefore, continued financial support in terms of funding to cover staffing costs and the loss of income will be required by the whole museum sector during reopening and well into the recovery phase. This will include those museums able to open, and those who are unable to due to the vulnerability of their volunteers/staffing or their inability to ensure social distancing at their sites.

We would ask Visit Wales and Welsh Government ensure that the wider cultural sector, including local museums and attractions not funded directly by Welsh Government, are integral to any campaigns to encourage visitors and tourists back to the country. Support for marketing and communications will be key.

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So far, rightly so, the emphasis has been on emergency support for the independent sector to cover losses of income and staffing costs. We are concerned however that there will be a similar funding crisis in the medium- to long-term for the local authority and university museum sectors.

We know some of our members within these sectors are already being asked to model significant in-year savings and there is a real concern that the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on local government and university finances will lead to significant cuts to museum budgets. Following 10+ years of austerity, it would not be overstating the fact that further cuts would be catastrophic to the Welsh museum sector. Welsh Government and funders such as National Lottery Heritage Fund need to consider this in framing their support for the cultural sector.

The pandemic has highlighted fact a lack of investment in museum building stock over decades. Dated and poor-quality visitor facilities have clearly demonstrated challenges in visitor flow, toilet facilities and front of house offer, something emphasised in Welsh Government's Expert Review of Local Museum Provision in Wales report (2015), but now hampering museums' ability to reopen safely in terms of social distancing. Again, there is a real need for Welsh Government and key funders such as National Lottery Heritage Fund to continue to fund capital developments post-Covid.

How might the sector evolve after Covid-19, and how can the Welsh Government support such innovation to deal with future challenges?

We would argue that Covid-19 pandemic has strengthened the evidence of need for Welsh museums. Yet without continued support and core funding the impact of Covid-19 on local museum provision in Wales, following 10 years of austerity, is likely to be devastating.

As discussed above, their key role in supporting local communities in terms of contribution to local economies, sustaining local suppliers and craftspeople, and their social value in supporting vulnerable adults and children and helping to create cohesive communities has been brought into sharp focus during the pandemic.

The role that museums can play in tackling poverty and creating opportunities for those most at risk of socio-economic exclusion, as evidenced by their participation in the Fusion programme, is likely to become even more important as the effects of the pandemic on the country's economy begin to become clearer.

They will play a crucial role in green tourism and encouraging 'staycations', ensuring local areas have a varied visitor offer to attract tourists throughout the country. We would like Visit Wales to work closely with a wide range of museums to improve messaging around the heritage and cultural offer in Wales.

The work museums of all sizes have undertaken in terms of digital access to their collections and the nation's heritage during the pandemic has been impressive. Yet, this has been done with minimal investment. Welsh Government and other funders should consider investment in museums' innovative digital provision, as well as tackling digital poverty and ensuring all communities in the country have improved digital access and literacy.

Welsh Government's Expert Review into Local Museum Provision in Wales noted in 2015 that austerity was having a more significant impact on local museums in Wales because the

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sector had never received substantial investment. The museum sector in Wales achieves much, on extremely limited resources.

The Expert Review also recommended an innovative solution for the future of museums in Wales, suggesting a form of regional working to deliver services locally. The Federation would argue that the case in favour of this recommendation has become even stronger following the pandemic. As such we would certainly welcome the exploration of the establishment of a series of regional bodies to begin in earnest.

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