

Welsh Parliament

Economy, Infrastructure and Skills Committee

Welcome to our committee update

This has been a strange and sad term. Mohammad Asghar, known by most of you as Oscar, passed away on 16 June. Thank you to everyone who contacted us to express your condolences. There is a short tribute to Oscar at the end of this newsletter.

As with the rest of the world the Committee has been facing the challenges of adapting to work safely under COVID. When we last wrote to you, remote Committee meetings were just getting underway. Although there have been some minor technical issues we are pleased to say remote meetings have proven an effective way of allowing the Committee to fulfil its role and hold the Government to account in these strange times.

This update of the Committee's recent activities is aimed at widening engagement in the Committee's work and helping you to provide information and expertise to officials and Members. It has been produced by the Clerking team which supports the Committee. The Committee, and everyone who support it, wishes all its stakeholders well as we all deal with the fallout from, and start to look at how we might recover from, the pandemic.

The Committee's twitter feed [@SeneddEIS](#) carries all our latest news, and details of inquiries and future committee meetings. It will help keep you informed of consultation deadlines and other developments and decisions taken in light of Covid-19.

Work undertaken – Summer 2020

Impact of Covid-19

The Committee resumed meeting on **30 April 2020**, with a session examining the impact of COVID-19 on the economy in Wales and the business and jobs support offered. The Committee took evidence from CBI Wales, FSB Wales, the Wales Tourism Alliance and the trade union sector. The committee identified gaps in the **business and employment support schemes**, finding that self-

employed workers, and sectors including tourism, hospitality and aerospace had been particularly hard hit. The Committee's **summary of initial findings** published on 4 June made 34 recommendations and Welsh Government **responded** on 17 July accepting 31 of these.

On **11 May**, the Committee held a scrutiny session with the Minister for Economy Transport and North Wales, again focused on **business support offered by Welsh Government. The Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme** was discussed, along with ongoing gaps

in support. While welcoming the speed of initial response, Members also sought assurances about protecting further investment of public funds from potential fraud.

On **1 June**, the Committee examined the effects of COVID-19 on **the skills sector**. Concerns were raised over the **health and well-being of apprentices, and the likely spike in youth unemployment**. Professor Ewart Keep, from the Department for Education at Oxford University told the Committee that a significant rise in youth unemployment was “almost inevitable”. **The Committee’s early findings on skills** were published on 19 June and made 8 recommendations. Welsh Government responded on **28 July** accepting all the recommendations.

On **18 June**, the Committee examined the **impact of the pandemic on public transport**. Taxi drivers were at the forefront of the discussions, along with the bus and rail industries. Members questioned witnesses on safety measures for the staff and the public. Evidence was taken from bus operators, trade unions and Cardiff Airport.

On **2 July**, the Committee took evidence from the Chief Executive of Transport for Wales on increasing capacity and encouraging use of public transport and active travel – following the 95% reduction in services in March 2020. The Committee followed up with a letter to the Minister on **23 June** on transport funding and policy issues.

Given the catastrophic impact of COVID-19 on the **hospitality and tourism sectors**, on 2 July the Committee also

discussed the ongoing challenges with UK Hospitality and the Wales Tourism Alliance.

A plenary debate on the Committee’s early reports was held on **1 July**.

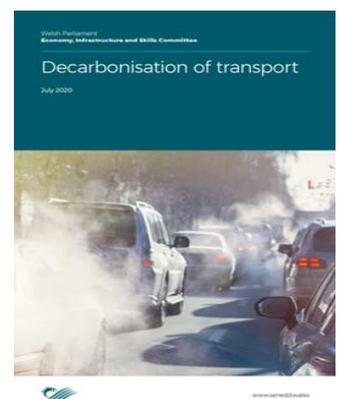
On **16 July**, the Committee held a **scrutiny session with the Minister for Economy, Transport and North Wales and the Deputy Minister**. In this final meeting of the summer term, the Committee questioned Ministers on plans to help the economy recover from the impact of COVID-19. The Minister said that the Job Retention Scheme should be maintained for the most vulnerable sectors.

Open Call for Evidence

The Committee is currently holding an open-ended **consultation** to examine the effects of COVID-19 on all areas within its remit. You can submit your views by emailing: SeneddEIS@senedd.wales.

Decarbonisation of Transport

A **report** (PDF 2,757KB) calling on Welsh Government to include decarbonisation targets in its post Covid-19 recovery plans was published on 14 June 2020, with a response expected by late September. The report looks at whether Welsh Government’s targets are overly ambitious or achievable, and highlights what



is missing from its current plans and what must be included in its new Wales Transport Strategy.

Public procurement in the foundational economy

On 5 February, the Committee published its **report** (PDF 1,080KB) which contained 4 recommendations. The Government has yet to respond and no date for plenary debate has been scheduled.

Valleys Taskforce

The Committee launched an **inquiry** into the Valleys Taskforce in February. The Taskforce was established by the Welsh Government in July 2016, and will operate for the duration of the Fifth Parliament until March 2021. It was set up as a catalyst for delivering regeneration and sustainable growth in the South Wales Valleys.

The Committee extended its consultation deadline to 9 April and has published **six responses**. The work of the Valleys Taskforce will now be considered as part of the Committee's scrutiny of Covid-19 recovery plans in the autumn.

Barriers facing small home building firms

Due to a move to prioritise Covid-19 work, the Committee decided to share its recommendations from this completed inquiry with the Government and stakeholders in the form of a draft report. The Committee has now **laid** the report with a formal Government response expected in the autumn.

Degree Apprenticeships

The Committee was unable to take evidence from the Minister for Economy, Transport and North Wales in March for its inquiry into the degree apprenticeships pilot programme in Wales, its future direction and potential. The Committee will now issue a draft report of its findings and take these into account in future work on post-Covid recovery for the skills sector.

Withdrawal of Bus Services (Wales) Bill

Welsh Government published the **Bus Services (Wales) Bill** on 16 March 2020 and the Minister for Economy and Transport, Member in Charge of the Bill, issued a **written statement**. On 1 April the First Minister issued a **written statement** on **the Government's approach to legislation in light of Covid-19**. The Bill was not prioritised for progression but remained under continual review. On 15 July 2020 the Minister for Economy, Transport and North Wales notified the Llywydd that the Bill was being **withdrawn** in accordance with Standing Order 26.79.in accordance with Standing Order 26.79.

Looking towards the Autumn Term

The Committee's work during the summer term has been reactive, examining urgent issues faced by sectors, and the support offered by Welsh Government for businesses, transport and skills providers to weather the initial storm.

Now that we are moving from the emergency response to recovery phase, the Committee's work will focus on an inquiry into how recovery should look

and how the Welsh Government can “build back better”. Members will monitor how different industries and sectors are affected and focus on issues such as recovery on the transport network and youth unemployment.

However, the Committee will be ready to undertake reactive work depending on unfolding events.

Please keep following us on [Twitter](#) or checking our [webpage](#) for updates.

Tribute to Oscar

On 17 June Members of the Senedd paid tribute to Oscar in plenary. Many a kind word was said, by MSs from across all parties, about his warmth and kindness and his contribution to the Senedd and political life in Wales.

Oscar was a committed MS who loved his role as a Member of the Senedd. On Committee visits this was particularly clear, he loved getting to know people and finding out what they did. Oscar is sorely missed, and our thoughts are still with his family and friends.



Mohammad Asghar
30 September 1945 – 16 June 2020

Membership changes

We would like to welcome [Suzy Davies](#) MS to the Committee. Suzy was elected to the Committee on 5 August and will fill the seat left vacant by Oscars passing.

Remit

The Committee was established on 28 June 2016 to examine legislation and hold the Welsh Government to account by scrutinising expenditure, administration and policy matters, encompassing (but not restricted to): economic development; transport; infrastructure; employment; skills; and research and development, including technology and science.

Contact details

You can email the Committee Clerking Team: SeneddEIS@senedd.wales

Phone us: **0300 200 6565**

Follow us on Twitter: [@SeneddEIS](https://twitter.com/SeneddEIS)

Website:
www.senedd.wales/SeneddEIS

Committee Members



Committee Chair:
Russell George MS
Welsh Conservatives



Suzy Davies MS
Welsh Conservatives



Hefin David MS
Welsh Labour



Vikki Howells MS
Welsh Labour



Joyce Watson MS
Welsh Labour



Helen Mary Jones MS
Plaid Cymru