

Written Response by the Welsh Government to the report of the Culture, Welsh Language and Communications Committee: Impact of the COVID-19 Outbreak on Heritage, Museums and Archives

The Welsh Government welcomes the findings of the report and offers the following response to the seven recommendations:

Recommendation 1. The Welsh Government should commit to spending all of the £59 million additional funding from the UK Government on supporting individuals and organisations in the cultural, arts and heritage sector.

Response: Accept

On 30 July 2020, the Welsh Government announced a £53m Cultural Recovery Fund to help support and sustain the sector due to the ongoing challenges resulting from the Covid-19 pandemic. The Fund will provide essential support to theatres, music venues, heritage sites, museums, galleries, archives, libraries, events and festivals, independent cinemas who have all seen a dramatic loss of revenue due to the pandemic. Funding will support both organisations and individuals in the sector.

The support has three complementary elements; funding, to protect sustainable organisations and as many jobs in the culture sector as possible, a cultural contract, to use the funding to drive transformational change and support new ways of working and a roadmap to re-opening, to ensure support is aligned to safe reopening at the earliest opportunity.

Taken alongside the £18m portfolio funding package announced in early April to support the emergency response, the Welsh Government's funding to the culture sector this year has gone beyond the consequential received. Further support has also been provided across the sector through the Economic Resilience Fund.

Financial implications: None.

Recommendation 2. The Welsh Government should urge the UK Government to continue the Job Retention Scheme beyond October 2020 for heritage organisations, museums and archives not able to fully reopen this year.

Response: Accept

The Welsh Government, through the Minister for Finance and Trefnydd and the Minister for the Economy, Transport and North Wales, has regularly made representations to the Chancellor of the Exchequer urging the UK Government to extend the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme and Self-Employed Income Support Scheme. These representations resulted in the £1.57bn culture package announced by the UK Government in July.

Financial implications: None

Recommendation 3. The Welsh Government should ensure that museums, archives and heritage sites are adequately resourced, in terms of expertise and infrastructure, to provide digital access to, and online engagement with, their collections.

Response: Accept

The recently launched Cultural Recovery Fund provides access to funding for digital initiatives to increase online access and engagement with collections. The Welsh Government is working closely with sector bodies to review priorities for digital developments, and support the sectors to access the necessary expertise and training.

The Welsh Government's Culture and Sport Division is responsible for administering the Museum and Archive Service Accreditation schemes in Wales. Digital access and online engagement is recognised as an integral part of service provision.

Cadw is continually developing new online digital resources to encourage people to engage with Welsh heritage. It is working in partnership with the National Museum Wales, National Library of Wales and the Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Wales on digital resources, sharing knowledge, collections, sites and expertise, for example, the Age of The Princes resource which is on the [Hwb website](#). Cadw is also collaborating with partners to create new opportunities to access and engage with heritage such as remote volunteering, discovering heritage within 15 minutes of you doorstep, and heritage Minecraft.

Cadw is replacing the physical Open Doors event this year with an online festival. During September people will be able to access online interactive site tours, panorama experiences and virtual, 3D model site excursions to ten of Cadw's most spectacular historic monuments — including Castell Coch and Harlech Castle.

The Welsh Museums Festival, held for a week during the October half-term school holidays and supported by the Welsh Government, is being developed this year as a mainly digital festival. This is particularly important this year as it provides an opportunity to highlight that the museums are still there and very much a part of their local community, even when the doors of some might be physically closed.

Financial implications: None.

Recommendation 4. The Welsh Government should draw up a strategy for increasing digital access to our collections which is:

- **planned, properly funded and visionary;**
- **developed alongside education providers to deliver the National Curriculum; and**
- **Recognises the benefits to mental and physical health and seeks to deliver outcomes for the National Health Service.**

Response: Accept

Later this year, the Welsh Government will publish our 'cultural and sporting priorities' setting out agreed priorities and direction for culture and sport through next year and beyond. An associated delivery plan, developed collaboratively, will agree actions and commitments from major partners and stakeholders. This will also include digital developments.

The Welsh Government allocates a revenue grant to the National Library of Wales to maintain and develop the National Digital Library Service. This service provides free online remote access to a wide range of content that many individuals would normally be unable to access electronic resources due to cost.

The Welsh Government provided additional funding of £250,000 towards digital library resources which enabled public libraries to provide additional resources during the crisis and has led to libraries seeing a dramatic increase in the number of individuals accessing digital resources. In July 2019, there were 20,146 e-book downloads. In July 2020, this had increased to 46,333.

Cadw works collaboratively with Hwb and curriculum stakeholders to develop resources to fit the new curriculum and to support the need for new methods of teaching required by the coronavirus pandemic and the need to incorporate a blended learning approach for the foreseeable future.

Cadw is supporting health through providing activities and quests for mental health alongside the development of remote volunteering, which could link to projects such as 15 Minute Heritage, drawing in volunteers who might otherwise be experiencing isolation.

Both national and local museums and cultural organisations have provided on-line resources, events and activities to support learning, education and enjoyment during the pandemic.

As part of the UK-wide Museum Accreditation scheme, which the Culture and Sport Division manage for Wales, engagement with the National Curriculum is an integral part. Museums provide a wide range of activities such as reminiscence boxes, mental health workshops etc. Many have undertaken training to become 'dementia-friendly'. Projects have been part-funded by the Welsh Government.

Financial implications: None.

Recommendation 5. The Welsh Government should revise the way in which funding is decided for museums, libraries and heritage sites to take into account increased digital delivery and compensate for reduced commercial income.

Response: Accept

The Cultural Recovery Fund includes provision for heritage bodies to apply for financial support to improve their digital capability, resources and services to compensate for reduced physical access to heritage.

The Welsh Government has been supporting the development of improved digital heritage services across the sector for many years. In 2019-20 this included support to the Royal Commission to create a new digital platform for their Coflein online resources. This is due to go live in 2021 and will pave the way for further improvements.

Wales is unique amongst the home nations for giving our Historic Environment Record statutory protection. The historic environment records in Wales are managed on behalf of Welsh Ministers by the four regional Welsh Archaeological Trusts. They have been created as a result of decades of research and investigation and are accessible to the public online through the Archwilio website. Welsh Government

provides funding to the Trusts to manage and enhance this vital historic environment resource.

Financial implications: None.

Recommendation 6. The Welsh Government should revise the key performance indicators for this sector to encourage:

- **greater collaboration within the sector; and**
- **the delivery of outcomes in health, education, tackling poverty and social exclusion.**

The Welsh Government should also ensure the sector is sufficiently resourced to deliver these objectives.

Response: Accept

The Culture and Sport Division work closely with sector bodies to support collaborative working across our museums, archive and library sectors, and deliver against the goals of the Wellbeing of Future Generations Act.

Wales benefits from considerable opportunities for active collaboration and partnership. One example is the Historic Environment Group (HEG) led by Cadw. This is a national forum combining public sector and voluntary bodies including National Trust, the Royal Commission, National Museum, Welsh Archaeological Trusts, National Parks and brings them together with bodies such as National Lottery, WCVA and Natural Environment Wales.

The group actively collaborates to share knowledge and experience and has achieved considerable success.

Another example of good collaboration across the sector is the annual 'Digital Past' conference which is hosted by the Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Wales. The 2021 conference will be held virtually with a combination of online papers and workshops to investigate the latest digital survey, data management, archiving and interpretation techniques and their practical application in heritage survey, interpretation, education and conservation.

Future budgets will be determined by the outcome of the Comprehensive Spending Review and this year's draft budget.

Financial implications: None.

Recommendation 7. The Welsh Government should set out how any additional funding for the cultural sector will be used to mitigate social exclusion and increase access to our heritage sites, libraries and museums.

Response: Accept

As part of the £53m Cultural Recovery Fund, we have introduced a 'Cultural Contract'. This will encourage recipients of the funding to ensure public investment is deployed with a social purpose. This will include areas such as:

- Fair Work

- Board diversity – gender, welsh language, BAME representation etc.
- Retained staff to support wider initiatives e.g. contact tracing to support Test, Trace, Protect
- Social prescribing
- Supporting health & arts initiatives

Cadw is working with Race Council Cymru to plan visits from BAME communities and is researching BAME historical characters who are linked to Cadw sites. Cadw will continue with schemes to promote access and free entry for disadvantaged groups to avoid making admission prices a barrier for Welsh residents and under-represented audiences. Admission to 102 of the 130 Cadw sites is free to everyone

Financial implications: None.

The report also considers the comments from stakeholders about the need to promote heritage venues and smaller museums at a time when people may be hesitant to enter smaller venues, and international visitors are staying away. Those who took part in the inquiry called for a concerted effort to develop domestic tourism based on our heritage and museums. Please can you tell the Committee about the ways in which this could be achieved?

Enhanced integration with Visit Wales marketing campaigns will focus on heritage such as the 'Good to Go' reassurance campaign.

Improved recognition by Visit Wales, that there is a real need, and advantage, to include smaller museums as part of their marketing campaigns. This would be beneficial to both the museums and to people visiting an area, as they are a key attraction in many small towns.

Use of videos on social media to show prospective visitors what to expect from a visit, now that social distancing measures are in place, e.g. a guided walk through showing floor marking and sanitising stations etc.

The Welsh Government will also support the Welsh Museums Festival during October, as outlined above.