

**P-05-1137 Call for fair funding for the National Library of Wales by the Welsh Government, Correspondence – Petitioner to Committee, 01.02.21**

**SENEDD DEBATE**

**On behalf of the thousands who have signed this petition in little over a fortnight, we ask that the Welsh Government revisit its funding formula and ensure fair funding for the National Library of Wales. This would ensure that the people of Wales, and all that love our nation, may rest assured that its national treasures, National Archive, art collection and gallery, broadcasting and media collection, electronic storehouse, and much more are preserved for present and future generations, and that that they remain in Wales.**

**Does the Welsh Government, its main funder, realise or care what will be lost?**

**Longterm negligence, request for adequate and fair funding, revisiting the funding formula**

***‘Our national cultural institutions play a key role in Welsh life, in providing access to our heritage for everyone in Wales, and as an important part of our tourism economy’.*** (Minister for Culture 2018)

***‘I don’t accept that we have made cuts. I have maintained the level of funding of the library.’***(Minister for Culture Nov, 2020)

***‘Coming to Welsh Government for more funding could certainly be part of the solution.’***  
Jason Thomas WG official , Nov 2020

- Between 2008 and 2019 the NLW lost 40 % of its income, as grant-in-aid did not factor in inflation. A cut in all but name.
- Would WG like to justify how £17 million can be allocated to spectator sports institutions, and yet are unable to find £1.5 million to cover the shortfall of the NLW?
- WG **grant-in-aid** is less than it was in 2006. Staff numbers since 2010 have fallen from nearly 300 to about 225 . In order to balance the budget, due to pay reviews and pension law, a further 30 posts are to go in the next 12 months. This will impact the scholarship and skills necessary to preserve and grow the work at the National Library, rendering the institution a library in name only.
- Could the WG clarify the fact that £250,000 was paid to the NLW, as a result of Covid-19, but subsequently the WG asked for £200,000 to be returned, leaving a net gain of £50,000?  
To the public, this ‘funding’ seems cynical tokenism. Could the public be informed of similar payments and net gains by WG to other sponsored bodies in order to make a comparison?
- Can the WG explain how applying the same percentage to all sponsored bodies (Minsiter of Culture), is considered fair funding, **as equality of outcome does not**

**equate with equality of process**, as some institutions have low staff cohorts? The NLW has a large staffing complement and runs its own facility and site.

Where institutions should be financially supported to deliver services efficiently, what is the economic rationale behind such blanket financial distribution, leaving the very existence of the NLW in question?

- The basic business principle of **investing in infrastructure** is generally understood. To what extent has the WG listened to the outcome of the Consultation requested by the Minister of Culture where the NLW confirm that they will need £1.5 million as a baseline investment for maintaining the building and infrastructure in order to deliver a **fit-for-purpose institution for the 21st Century**.

Why commission a consultation with a cost implication for the tax-payer but not heed its findings?

- The overall picture is one of years of neglect and inadequate funding by WG. How would the WG counter the statement that its attitude towards the NLW over recent years **has lacked vision, ambition and national pride**, treating the NLW as a provincial institution, rather than an institution incorporated under Royal Charter, which houses almost the entire literary and cultural treasures of Wales?

- **Can the WG justify standing by when monies donated in good faith** to the NLW, around £12 million, for acquisitions, research and scholarship has had to be used for basic running costs?

£1 million will have **to be used to finance redundancy costs** leaving the NLW reserves at £500,000. **Is this not an abuse of trust** brought about **directly by lack of fair funding** by the WG?

- With a 2019 feasibility study on establishing a National Archive for Wales commissioned by the **same Minister of Culture**, estimating capital investment of £15-20 million, a Digital Preservation System as £9 million (£1.8 million p.a., and revenue operating costs of £2.1 - £7.5 million p.a. Can WG clarify why it is not able to secure the £1.5 million necessary to support the NLW which houses the largest collection of archives in Wales?

### **Prosperity for all, building resilient communities, with free access for all to culture and language**

Cultural institutions in Wales have the ability to help and empower people from all backgrounds and age to participate in cultural life, and to support the creation of cohesive communities.

- **The NLW is recognised worldwide as a pioneer in giving free online access to digital and digitized knowledge.**

With its long since ceasing to be just an 'Aberystwyth institution', anyone, anywhere can take advantage of its electronic services. As a government in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, the WG will, I believe, have an understanding of the importance of digitization. This being the case, can the WG explain why no financial support towards digitization has been granted since 2017? (£850,000 was allocated annually in the early 2000's to 2013; this was cut to £550,000 in 2013 and disappeared altogether in 2017).

- **Curtailling of access to the public**

How does the WG envisage it will deliver on improving and strengthening communities for all, whilst underfunding a public institution such as the NLW, which enables people, whatever their circumstances, to have free access to knowledge and information? Present cuts may result in closing one reading room, and leaving only one reading room available to the public further cutting services which will result in decreased footfall to the Library.

Children will be deprived of excellent educational services, and so will researchers, academics, the Welsh diaspora, genealogists, lovers of Wales and lovers of libraries and heritage all over the world will suffer.

Not everyone in our communities have wifi or computer access (WG will be aware that remote learning for schools has been difficult for some because of this). School groups from all over Wales and beyond regularly visit the National Library. Is the WG happy that knowledge becomes the privilege of just a few?

- **Fake news and a culture of misinformation undermine democracy.** In which way is the WG taking into account the importance of copyright libraries with easy and unimpeded public access to secure knowledge? Can the WG confirm that it has a robust funding policy to ensure that democracy is upheld throughout Wales?
- **Neglect is a form of abuse. Starving libraries by depriving them of funds is a way of destroying shared culture.**

Let us consider some of the treasures at the NLW and realize what is at stake:-

- **6.5 million books and periodicals**, and the largest collections of archives, portraits, maps and photographic images in Wales
- **Rare Books**, including William Salesbury's *A Dictionary in Englyshe and Welshe* (1547), the translation of the Welsh Bible (1588)
- **National collections of Welsh manuscripts** (approx 25,000), for example, the **Peniarth collection** is considered to be of global significance, and is included in the UK Memory of the World Register Heritage in 2010. To mention only a few of this collection alone:-
  - The Black Book of Carmarthen (c.1250)
  - The Book of Taliesin (c.1350 -1400)
  - The White Book of Rhydderch (c.1350)
  - Tales of the Holy Grail (c.1300)
  - The Chronicle of the Princes (c.1330)
  - History of the Kings
  - The Laws of Hywel Dda (c.1300-1350)
- **Art:** The collection contains unique examples of artists' work such as that by Kyffin Williams, Charles Tunnicliffe. J.M.W Turner. With 15,000 portraits and 50,000 photographs and negatives, it comprises the most comprehensive collection of paintings and topographical prints in Wales.
- **Maps:** There are over a million maps in the NLW.
- **Screen and Sound Archive of Wales:** Included in the UK Memory of the World Register is *The Life Story of David Lloyd George*, a 1918 biographical film which is thought to be the first feature-length biopic of a living politician.

Can the WG justify present levels of funding where so much is at stake, and the scholarship and expertise brought to the acquisition, preservation, enhancement and transmission of the heritage of Wales is not adequately supported?

**The NLW embodies the literary and cultural treasures that belong to the nation.**

In *A List of Subscribers to the Building Fund* (1924), it was estimated that there were almost 110,000 contributors to the establishment of the NLW, these funds were contributed by the subscriptions of the working classes. In view of this is it fair judgement to state that the present WG shows **a lack of vision and ambition in regard to its commitment to culture and heritage?**

- As Wales struggles to deal with some of the most deprived areas in northern Europe can the WG afford to ignore the income that can be generated through Wales' unique heritage, culture and art?
- Have the WG considered an **economy of culture** where money invested brings economic benefits at community and national level? The petitions had signatories from 50 different countries, indicating that the NLW can act as ambassador for Wales, promoting its unique culture and heritage, at home and worldwide.
- In order to enhance the NLW as a live and vibrant center for learning and education, housing as it does Wales' heritage, and a contributor to a wider European and world culture, can the WG confirm that it will **introduce Welsh History as part of the new school curriculum?**

We would wish to see the resources and facilities, both digitally and otherwise that the National Library of Wales has to offer, embedded in our school curriculum so that all children in Wales have access to Welsh culture, language and history.

***States are encouraged to provide appropriate legislative frameworks for memory institutions and ensure their necessary independence in preserving and providing access to documentary heritage.*** (UNESCO, Recommendation on Documentary Heritage, 2015)

**Accountability and Transparency in WG dealings with the NLW. In light of the scandalous years of neglect of the NLW, can WG agree that the following areas ensure improved efficacy and communication?**

**Points of Action:**

- Members of the Board should include a majority of library and heritage specialists. These would be best placed to guide on matters of funding and staffing requirements, also they could advise on the balance between public funding and commercial income.
- The NLW, as an institution of national importance, should be overseen directly by the First Minister.
- The review should be reopened and any debate about the future of the NLW must include the wider public. The initial review was conducted by the *Challenge Panel of the Welsh Government Board*. These are unelected and unaccountable executives drawn from a range of other public bodies. None of the people involved have library or heritage management experience. We request a wide ranging public consultation with researchers, academics, public users and supporters of the Library.
- The NLW should have a right of reply and WG should evidence that they have listened, heard and responded appropriately.