

Priorities for the Sixth Senedd

**Evidence to the Culture, Communications, Welsh Language, Sport and International
Relations Committee**

Professor Fiona de Londras, Dr Pablo Grez Hidalgo and Daniella Lock
COVID-19 Review Observatory, Birmingham Law School, University of Birmingham

2. What issues should the committee prioritise in planning our work programme for the immediate and longer term?

2.1. We respectfully submit that the Committee ought to consider the human rights implications of the Welsh government's support of the culture sector throughout the pandemic and during post-pandemic recovery. Article 27 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights states that 'everyone has the right freely to participate in the cultural life of the community, to enjoy the arts and to share in scientific advancement and its benefits'. As has been recognised by UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, cultural rights are 'inseparable' from human rights and fundamental to human dignity and identity.¹

2.2. The right to cultural enjoyment continues to apply during and beyond the pandemic. Yet, as the Committee's predecessor during the Fifth Senedd (the Culture, Welsh Language and Communications Committee) identified throughout its various inquiries, scrutiny of policy and legislation, and stakeholder engagement, that the pandemic has had a serious impact on the culture sector. Among the "common themes" were the sudden and dramatic loss of income due to mandatory closures, anxiety due to uncertainty about reopening, and the fact that many in the arts and creative industries are freelancers who fell through the gaps of governmental economic support packages.² Live music venues, museums, archives, heritage sites and organisations in the culture sector had to shut down operations for over a year. These organisations have struggled to recover from the significant financial loss caused by mandatory closures, and some may face financial failure. For instance, the Art Fund, an organisation that supports museums and galleries, conducted a survey of the impact of Covid-19 on UK museums and galleries, concluding that by May 2021 their finances remained extremely precarious, and their future uncertain.³ While the majority of museums and galleries have been able to reopen, visitor numbers have been "hit very hard". UK Music reported that musical artists are losing two-thirds of their income as a result of COVID-19, and that music revenues were due to have fallen by 85% in 2020.⁴ As the Committee will know, the threat posed by

¹ 2001 UNESCO Declaration on Cultural Diversity, available here:

http://portal.unesco.org/en/ev.php-URL_ID=13179&URL_DO=DO_TOPIC&URL_SECTION=201.html

² Culture, Welsh Language and Communications Committee, Fifth Senedd Legacy Report, March 2021, at para 63. Available at:

<https://senedd.wales/media/yuri41px/cr-ld14317-e.pdf>

³ Art Fund, Looking Ahead – Museum Sector Research, May 2021, p. 6. Available at:

<https://bigbangartfund-assets.s3.eu-west-2.amazonaws.com/downloads/looking-ahead-sector-research-report-2021.pdf>

⁴ Mark Savage, 'Musicians will lose two-thirds of their income in 2020' *BBC News* (18 November 2020) available at: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/entertainment-arts-54966060>.

COVID-19 to the culture sector in Wales follows a world-wide trend, which the UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights has urged policy-makers to respond to with targeted policies and action.

2.3. To assist states in formulating their responses to the crisis of the culture sector, the UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights has developed a resource for Governments entitled ‘Culture in Crises: A Policy Guide for a Resilient Creative Sector’ (the ‘Policy Guide’).⁵ The recommendations include providing financial support for the sectors of the cultural and creative industries.⁶ Among other matters, the Committee may want to assess the extent to which these recommendations are consistent with the Welsh Government’s policy to encourage cultural organisations to reduce reliance on public subsidy in order to increase their resilience, which precedes the pandemic crisis.⁷

2.4. In addition, we would like to draw the Committee’s attention to the wealth of other recommendations made in the ‘Policy Guide’. We hope that the Committee will examine this Guide thoroughly to determine whether the Government could follow more of its recommendations and provide additional funds or concessions to provide effective support for the culture sector in Wales. For example, the Policy Guide recommends investment by Government in skills development programs for artists and cultural and creative associations.⁸ Interestingly, this is in line with the Committee predecessor’s finding that the pandemic has prompted a move to digital engagement and delivery, and its recommendation about the need to increase spending on training and access to fast, reliable broadband infrastructure.⁹

2.5. The Guide also provides examples of good practice where governments across the world have introduced skills development programs.¹⁰ For example, the Guide includes recommendations to provide creative and cultural industries with relief from taxes and other social charges, as well as providing examples of Government’s doing this.¹¹ Whether the Welsh Government can pursue policies such as these is an issue the Committee ought to consider as part of its work programme for the Sixth Senedd.

⁵ UNESCO, ‘Culture in crisis: policy guide for a resilient creative sector’ (2020) available at: <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000374631>.

⁶ Ibid, I.3.

⁷ Culture, Welsh Language and Communications Committee, Building Resilience – Inquiry into non-public funding of the arts, March 2018, at p. 20. Available at: <https://senedd.wales/laid%20documents/cr-ld11483/cr-ld11483-e.pdf>

⁸ UNESCO, ‘Culture in crisis’ (n 5), I.4.

⁹ Culture, Welsh Language and Communications Committee, Fifth Senedd Legacy Report, March 2021, at para 67. Available at: <https://senedd.wales/media/yuri41px/cr-ld14317-e.pdf>

¹⁰ UNESCO, ‘Culture in crisis’ (n 5), I.4.

¹¹ Ibid, II, 6.