



The Culture, Communications, Welsh Language, Sport and International Relations Committee of the Senedd was established on 23 June 2021 to examine legislation and hold the Welsh Government to account by scrutinising its expenditure, administration and policy matters, encompassing (but not restricted to): the Welsh Language, culture; the arts; historic environment; communications, broadcasting; the media, sport, and international relations.

What is the current impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on your sector, and what further support is needed from the Welsh and UK Governments both to mitigate the impact of the pandemic and enable the post-pandemic recovery?

Summary

The Covid-19 pandemic has had a considerable impact on mental health of brass band players, but also worryingly on the overall financial outlook and sustainability of brass bands, with the BBC¹ recently highlighting “Coronavirus restrictions have decimated incomes, bands said, with groups relying on online donations. Performers said the lack of rehearsals and meet-ups has also had a detrimental effect on their wellbeing.”

Whilst the immediate thoughts and activities of the brass band community is focused on the potential return to some form of rehearsals and performances, the longer-term impact of these further challenges cannot be underestimated and could potentially lead to some Welsh brass bands not surviving this pandemic.

Further background

We have seen, as in many of the other genres of community music making, the older demographic of members are expressing concerns about returning to rehearsals and performance. This is particularly concerning for the groups involved but also in terms of wellbeing, as playing and performing in a brass band can have a positive impact to well-being, mental health, and the feeling of social inclusion. Williamson, V.J., and Bonshor, M.,² identified that making music in a group is one means by which people can enhance wellbeing, with Brass Bands fulfilling this key aspect of Wales’ musical culture.

Lack of rehearsals over the last 18 months leading to a drop in standards is a high concern of our member brass bands, this leads to a reluctance to perform in public, with concern around potential concert audience numbers, resulting in a detrimental effect to our communities.

The lack of Brass Bands hosting such concerts in Wales will have a direct impact on this sector of Wales’ performance arts in engaging professional guest artistes. Many of the 73 member brass bands would have been hosting numerous concerts over the summer, engaging with many professional artistes as their guests.

The pandemic has seen the cancellation of numerous Brass Festivals across Wales, generally hosted by community Brass Bands which bring in much needed revenue and visitors to particular areas. These visitors attending such Festivals would have spent money in the local communities, thereby having a direct and positive impact to their communities.

Encouragingly, a number of Bandiau Pres Cymru | Brass Bands Wales’ member bands have highlighted the need to start to look at things differently, consider re-evaluating artistic priorities and consider the different opportunities that this could bring for the genre.

¹ BBC (2020) *Covid: Yorkshire brass bands 'fight for survival'* [Online] Available at: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-south-yorkshire-55279899> Accessed 27th January 2021

² Williamson, V.J., and Bonshor, M., (2019) *Wellbeing in Brass Bands: The Benefits and Challenges of Group Music Making* [Online] Available from <https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/fpsyg.2019.01176/full> Accessed 27th January 2021



It is excellent news that The Slate Landscape of Northwest Wales has been awarded UNESCO World Heritage status. <https://gov.wales/new-world-heritage-site-wales> This could offer opportunities for collaboration with Brass Bands in the area for future events, Brass Bands have been one of important cultural voices of this industry and country, and this could be an ideal opportunity new ways to hear this cultural voice.

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

Summary

For our youth population in Brass Bands, the Covid-19 pandemic has been particularly challenging, the art of performing music, in a brass and percussion group, working together, as a team is difficult (if not impossible) in a digital online environment.

Equally, opportunities to encourage our younger generation to pick up percussion sticks or a brass instrument have decreased significantly during the Covid-19 pandemic. Potentially two academic years' have lost the opportunity to experience of playing in a Junior or Youth Band.

Not only does this mean that these youngsters have missed out on this opportunity, but they are the future concert audiences for all forms of performance arts in the future. Engaging with and listening to live Music has long been recognised as key to helping people improve their mental health and wellbeing.³

Further background

Poverty, digital exclusion, and ill-health are common exclusionary barriers that have been made worse as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Music Education has been a significant topic of Bandiau Pres Cymru | Brass Band Wales' dialogue with Brass Bands across Wales during the Covid-19 pandemic. Numerous Brass Bands across Wales are keen to grow and develop their Youth Bands. They offer a key ingredient to a longer-term sustainability of brass and percussion playing, in their communities, for the future.

This will not only help their own mental health, but also support the well-being, mental health and the feeling of social inclusion for the older membership of these community groups.

What other performance arts genre in our society has such a wide age range engagement?

In some bands, those from 8 to 88 years old, are all working towards a common goal of rehearsing and performing music. Brass Bands offer something unique to the fabric of our communities.

The Welsh Government's Manifesto pledge for a new National Music Service for Wales could be actively pursued, to ensure that the umbrella organisation could be the key to co-ordinating both LEA and privately-run music services to offer opportunities. Bandiau Pres Cymru | Brass Bands Wales would be happy to work with all existing and any new music service structures in the future to ensure that children from all backgrounds, and all parts of Wales can have an opportunity to learn brass or percussion instruments and to make music in their communities.

³ Global Citizen (2018) *Going To Concerts May Help You Live Longer, Research Finds* [Online] Available at: <https://www.globalcitizen.org/en/content/live-music-mental-health-live-longer-study/> Accessed 31st August 2021

How does Brexit and the new UK-EU relationship affect you or your organisation? What support have you received to respond to the changes? What further support, if any, is needed from Welsh and UK Governments?

Summary

In terms of world recognition of our Brass Band communities here in Wales, we have the highest regional representation in the top eight, with the world renowned Cory Band, #1 and Tredegar Town Band #8 in the current World Rankings⁴. Had it not been for the Covid-19 pandemic, 2020 would have seen these two Welsh Bands competing at the very highest level at the European Brass Band Championships in Palanga, Lithuania. (<https://www.ebba.eu.com>)

Further background

In order for Cory and Tredegar to travel to these European Brass Band Championships, as well as performing in Concerts across Europe, promoting Welsh music, and importantly, Wales, each member of the band will require a visa and work permit despite being an amateur organisation. The new visa and work permit requirements will add further financial and administrative burden that could have been avoided. The costs for representing Wales at such Championships, falls to the bands themselves to fundraise throughout the year to support their representative activities.

In addition to the Championships themselves, the European Brass Band Association host the European Youth Brass Band, and the European Youth Brass Band Championships. Music is a common language, for many of those youngsters, playing on a European stage is the highlight of their musical careers.

This issue isn't one for bands representing Wales at the European Brass Band Championships, but also for the many Brass Bands from Wales looking to tour EU countries, through their community twinning committees and such like as such tours off opportunity for enabling the growth of cultural relations and educational collaboration with EU colleagues.

Bandiau Pres Cymru | Brass Bands Wales has been actively engaged in dialogue with Caroline Dinenage MP, UK Government's Minister for Digital & Culture⁵ on this topic and would welcome further dialogue to find a resolution that works for all member Brass Bands. Music is a common language that transcends countries borders and brings people together. Bandiau Pres Cymru | Brass Bands Wales would welcome dialogue to explore the potential of engagement with the British Council Wales for furthering the cultural relations and educational aspects of the Brass Band genre.

A significant concern has been raised on the future of structural funds for Arts programmes in Wales, in recent dialogue with member Brass Bands there is a keen appetite for re-imagining artistic priorities and consider the different opportunities that this could bring for the genre for the benefit of all.

Bandiau Pres Cymru | Brass Bands Wales would welcome further dialogue on how we can continue to support this important part of our community fabric and continue and grow the benefits that Brass Band music making brings to our communities.

Bandiau Pres Cymru | Brass Bands Wales

3rd September 2021

brassbands.wales | info@brassbands.wales

⁴ 4barsrest.com (2021) *World Rankings* [Online] Available at <https://www.4barsrest.com/rankings/> Accessed 31st August 2021

⁵ Brass Bands Wales (2021) *Brass Bands Wales to meet with UK Government's Minister for Digital & Culture amid European travel concerns.* [Online] Available at <https://brassbands.wales/european-travel-concerns/> Accessed 31st August 2021