

Direct and long-term impact on the sector due to the COVID-19 pandemic

The events sector was one of the first sectors to be affected by the pandemic, and we were the last to reopen as a result of restrictions. And whilst the events industry is beginning to re-open, this comes with significantly higher costs not to mention uncertainty regarding further future waves and audience response.

Covid hit the industry at a very crucial time of year, as we and many other festivals, completed the arrangements and contracts for 2020. This is the most expensive and busy period of the year for us as an organisation, and having to postponing the festival had significant financial implications for the charity. With our income stream disappearing overnight we had to carry out a staff restructure, creating a short-term smaller core team to realise an alternative programme.

We were very aware of our responsibilities as a content provider for audiences throughout the pandemic. The lockout had a negative impact on the well-being of our communities and giving everyone a taste of the Eisteddfod, sharing some of the familiar in unfamiliar times, was vital.

AmGen was launched, primarily for streaming on digital platforms, and our intention was to make elements of the Eisteddfod available for people to enjoy during these difficult times, but over a period of months as appose to the usual Eisteddfod week.

We used the Eisteddfod archive, collaborated with a large number of partners and created original projects from scratch. We had to think about our work in a completely different way and ensure audiences came on this new journey with us.

As not everyone has access to technology, we worked with the press and media across Wales, to ensure that everyone could experience AmGen. Working regularly with programmes such as Heno and Prynhawn Da, traditional audiences were given the opportunity to participate.

After two years of creating digital content, and successfully developing new audiences for the Eisteddfod within Wales and across the world, the work of re-planning a live/hybrid event began.

We, like other festivals, are currently planning a live event within the new normal. Costs are currently significantly affected by three major factors,- inflation, transport and crewing. Fuel prices and the lack of lorry drivers mean that almost all estimates have increased significantly. In addition, due to a significant number of technical freelancers leaving the events industry during Covid, crewing costs are much higher. There are also the additional costs of safely realising an event during Covid and our site has to be re-designed to ensure we following current guidance and advice.

Although the UK Government introduced the Covid Assurance Scheme for events, full standard cancellation insurance, which is expensive, must be purchased to take advantage of the scheme. Most in the sector feel that the scheme, because of this requirement, remains beyond its reach.

Another issue of concern is our sources of income. As an entrepreneurial body that receives only 12% from the public purse, it is difficult to predict the implications of Covid on our income. Current research

indicates that the older generation is less willing to venture to large scale events in the medium term, while the younger generation is hungry for the sector to reopen. A number of events currently indicate that ticket income has fallen by 20%. Sponsorship is expected to be significantly lower for at least the next two years as businesses rebuild.

Sector plans for recovery

Collaboration between the sector and the Welsh Government has been crucial over the past two years and remains vital as the sector recovers. As a member of the Government Sector Advisory Group for the Events Sector, we were given the opportunity to feed the views of the events industry to Government and its agencies whilst dealing with the pandemic and working on recovery planning efforts. These meetings provided a voice for the sector and ensured that the Government truly understood the industry's position.

The pandemic has seen greater collaboration across the sector and it is vital that this collaboration continues. The National Eisteddfod has assisted the Llangollen International Musical Eisteddfod over the past year and a half by steering the body through the pandemic to ensure its longevity.

Similarly, we collaborated with partners to create content for AmGen, e.g. exemplar projects were created with Tŷ Cerdd and the BBCNow developing opportunities for a range of artists and distinct opportunities for learners were programmed with the National Centre for Learning Welsh. These partnerships will continue into the future and reap further results.

Again, it must be noted that realising the new normal isn't an easy task. There are a range of obstacles ahead, including rising costs and uncertainty over income. But there is a real desire within the broader public for events to restart to provide that much needed opportunity to come together and celebrate.

Any impact from Brexit now and in the future

We do not believe the true impact of Brexit has been felt to date. The impact of the pandemic is still being addressed by the sector. We believe the impact of Brexit will become more and more apparent in the medium term.

Your priorities in the context of the Committee's work in the Sixth Senedd

The National Eisteddfod's priority is to promote the Welsh language and culture. Reaching the one million speakers and doubling the daily use of Welsh is central to our strategy, as well as creating opportunities for people to use whatever Welsh they have, confidently and in a welcoming, friendly and inclusive environment. The Committee's work in verifying processes for achieving this is crucial. It is

imperative that all public bodies in Wales have a clear programme of work in place to deliver the 2050 Strategy.

Your priorities in the context of the Welsh Government's Draft Budget for 2022-23

The Eisteddfod needs to rebuild in order to deepen our community involvement across Wales. The National Eisteddfod is the largest community project in Britain and the development of this work is central to the delivery of the 2050 Strategy.

The Eisteddfod, as a national body, has proven its role in assisting the sector to withstand the pandemic, introduce alternative content and rebuild. To continue this work, it is important that we are properly funded.

We firmly believe that affordable access to the Eisteddfod should be a priority in the Welsh Government's new Cultural Strategy, which was mentioned in the recent agreement between the Government and Plaid Cymru. It is imperative to normalise language use and to present Welsh in a relevant, modern way. The Cardiff Eisteddfod proved that culture can bridge linguistic barriers and break down stereotypes. And we want to do this across Wales, as we travel from area to area, reaching new communities and audiences as we celebrate our culture and language for years to come.