



01st September 2022

Via email

Dear Delyth,

I write on behalf of Newsquest to your recent letter regarding The National Wales.

While I cannot detail specifics relating to individuals, I can assure you that we have been talking to those directly affected about any alternative roles in Newsquest, in Wales and beyond.

I agree with your points about the importance of pluralism in the media as part of a healthy democracy and the essential role of the media in holding power to account and providing a platform for debate and discussion of social issues.

These are the reasons why we established The National Wales and as launch editor and now managing editor I am proud of way the title has done just that. It is a testament to the dedication and brilliance of the journalists involved that you and others feel the loss of the title so keenly after just 18 months.

But any title must be financially sustainable and, sadly, The National Wales has not proved to be so.

The aim for The National Wales was for it to be primarily subscription funded, to enable us to produce original journalism telling stories that those already in the marketplace would not. After an encouraging first year, we could see a route towards breaking even.

This year has seen a steady decline in subscribers. That is understandable in the present cost of living crisis but nonetheless has left the title continuing to make losses without a clear path to sustainability. The increasing encroachment of the BBC into online news publishing has made the subscription market more challenging.

The very sharp cost increases facing the wider industry mean we have to make some difficult decisions.

We have considered internal proposals and suggestions for different ways to run The National Wales, both during the consultation and over recent months. Indeed, we have adapted the model as we have gone along. We have also cut costs such as freelance spend, but have not found an approach that now looks sustainable.

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It was always a lean model – a small core team generating original content supported by the local journalism already produced across Wales by Newsquest journalists. The team already worked hand-in-hand with Corgi.Cymru under one editor so a proposal for a bilingual newsroom would be no more efficient than the current one.

What would have made a difference was more support from the Welsh Government over the past 18 months. If the Welsh Government wants the pluralistic national media Wales deserves, it needs to support it in practical and financial ways.

The Public Interest Journalism Fund is one way to try to support small community start-ups but it is important to recognise that larger publishers provide the majority of investment in journalism in Wales and reach far bigger audiences, particularly online. Most of Newsquest's news titles are read by more than 70% of their local population – for example the South Wales Argus is read online each month by 76% of the adults in Newport, the Western Telegraph is read online each month by 75% of the adults in Pembrokeshire.

Wales will not have a strong, pluralistic media, local or national, without profitable larger publishers.

Support does not have to be through grants. It should, however, include harnessing the large audiences we have through advertising campaigns, event sponsorship and so on, so that both parties benefit.

As chair of the Culture, Communications, Welsh Language, Sport and International Relations Committee, I would welcome your backing in calling for the Welsh Government consider what practical support it can give our industry in the short, medium and longer term, particularly in terms of how the Welsh Government and other public bodies in Wales deploy their very substantial advertising budgets.

This could be a win/win for the Welsh Government and the public sector, that can use local and regional news brands' huge reach and trust to communicate extremely effectively to the Welsh people, and in doing so this advertising supports and sustains quality news journalism in Wales, which, as you say, is vital to a healthy and vibrant democracy.

Your sincerely

Gavin Thompson

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Regional editor (Wales), Newsquest

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