

To the Chair and members of the Senedd Culture,
Communications, Welsh Language, Sport, and
International Relations Committee:



Delyth Jewell MS, Delyth.Jewell@senedd.wales

Hefin David MS, Hefin.David@senedd.wales

Alun Davies MS, Alun.Davies@senedd.wales

Tom Giffard MS, Tom.Giffard@senedd.wales

Llyr Gruffydd MS, Llyr.Gruffydd@senedd.wales

Carolyn Thomas MS, Carolyn.Thomas@senedd.wales

Comiswn Brenhinol Henebion Cymru
Royal Commission on the Ancient and
Historical Monuments of Wales

Ffordd Penglais | Penglais Road
Aberystwyth SY23 3BU
+44 (0)1970 621 201

christopher.catling@cbhc.gov.uk
christopher.catling@rcahmw.gov.uk

CC Dawn Bowden MS,
Correspondence.Dawn.Bowden@gov.wales

The Rt Hon Mark Drakeford MS,
Correspondence.Mark.Drakeford@gov.wales

Date: 10/01/2024

Dear Delyth,

The future of the Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historic Monuments of Wales

I am writing to you in your capacity as Chair of the Senedd Culture Committee to ask if you would consider asking Welsh Government to think again about the Royal Commission's baseline grant when you meet to scrutinise the 2024–25 budget on 17 January 2024.

The Government has announced that our budget next year will be cut by 22 per cent to £1.413m. Cadw faces the same percentage cut and three other cultural institutions in Wales are being cut by 10 per cent – the National Library, the National Museum and Arts Council Wales. Culture (along with Rural Affairs, down by 10.47 per cent) appears to have been singled out for particularly deep cuts compared with the very much smaller reductions – all less than 5 per cent – to the other ministerial portfolios.

A more equitable reduction in our budget of 10 per cent would still leave us struggling, but it would buy us the necessary breathing space to avoid precipitate decisions and enable us to work with Cadw and others to plan for an orderly strategic solution to the future of the heritage sector. If we cannot secure an improved grant settlement, we will need to take immediate steps to reduce our headcount from 28 to 20 in order to avoid running out of money just before Christmas 2024.

The Royal Commission has won many plaudits in recent years. We secured a Euro 6m grant to fund our CHERISH climate change project and we are leading the sector's contribution to the Government's adaptation plan. We compiled the dossier of evidence that resulted in the award of World Heritage status to Welsh slate industry. We are currently engaged in a much-praised community archaeology project to investigate the history of Pendinas, one of Wales's most impressive hillforts. We are contributing to the Anti-Racist Wales Action Plan by recording the lived experience of those Ugandan Asians who found sanctuary in Wales after being expelled by Idi Amin in 1972. This acclaimed project has the potential to be the first of many celebrating the contribution of diaspora communities to the social, economic and cultural life of the nation.

We have encouraged young people to engage with Welsh culture through our Unloved Heritage project, and we are helping to protect the Welsh language through our historic placenames list, which is used by local authorities for naming new streets, housing, industrial and shopping estates. We are working with the Foundation for Jewish Heritage to turn the Merthyr synagogue into a Heritage Centre presenting the centuries-old history of the Jewish community of Wales. With the rapid increase in the closure of places of worship in Wales we are the only body recording their interiors and finding homes for their archives ahead of their redevelopment. The historic environment data that we supply to planners and conservation officers is vital to their response to the threat to upland archaeology from large-scale tree planting and to maritime archaeology from wind turbines and aggregates extraction.

We had been looking forward to playing a leading role in the delivery of the ambitious and visionary Culture Strategy that was to have been launched this year and we were in the process of integrating the People's Collection Wales into the Royal Commission, combining our expertise in recording buildings and archaeology with their skills in capturing oral history, 'lived experience' and intangible heritage.

All of this work is now under threat. With a much-reduced team, our capacity to continue with many elements of our work will be severely constrained, doing long-term damage to a centre of excellence that is held in high regard in Wales and internationally. I personally have worked hard over the last nine years to restore morale at the Commission and to give colleagues a clear sense of purpose following the decision to halt the planned merger with Cadw in 2014. Our Welsh Government sponsor division has many times acknowledged that we deliver value for money and our outstanding achievements are plain for everyone to see in our annual reports. The Royal Commission makes a major contribution to the growing sense of Welsh nationhood and distinctiveness, and it should be a matter of pride for Welsh Government that their investment has achieved so much (needless to say, the money cultural bodies receive is infinitesimally small and would not keep the NHS in Wales going for more than a few minutes).

I will end by contrasting the cuts we are being asked to bear in Wales with the additional public spending on arts, heritage and culture in Scotland (increases are also planned in England and Northern Ireland next year). When the Scottish Deputy First Minister announced an extra £15.8 million in spending on the arts and culture in Scotland on 19 December 2023, she promised that this was the first step towards doubling expenditure to at least £100 million by 2028–29. She said: ‘the transformational power of our culture is immense’, not only for enabling ‘individuals and organisations to realise their potential’, but also for ‘attracting people from all over the world who want to come here and experience it first-hand’.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in purple ink that reads "Christopher Catling". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Christopher" written in a larger, more prominent script than the surname "Catling".

Christopher Catling
Secretary and CEO

