

Delyth Jewell MS
Plaid Cymru
Chair, Senedd Culture, Communications, Welsh Language, Sport, and International
Relations Committee
By email: Delyth.Jewell@senedd.wales

30 May 2024

Dear Ms Jewell,

Welsh National Opera

I hope this finds you well. I'm writing in advance of the Committee's meeting next week with an update on my previous letter.

Firstly, I want to express my thanks to all the members of the Committee and your colleagues who showed their support for Welsh National Opera's protest outside the Senedd on 21 May, which we and our members really appreciate. The petition calling on the Arts Councils and governments in Wales and England to protect WNO has now received over 10,000 signatures, showing the level of concern about the future of the company.

I wanted to address a particular issue, which is that in recent discussions about WNO there have been frequent references to the need for governments to avoid interfering with funding decisions made by arms-length bodies like the Arts Councils. However, we strongly feel this should not be a barrier to Welsh Government working with the Arts Council of Wales, Arts Council England, and the UK Government to explore possible alternative solutions to the devastating cuts facing staff, particularly in the chorus and orchestra, at WNO. It's important to note that the Welsh Government sets the remit and budget of the Arts Council of Wales and that cuts to WNO and other organisations have occurred because of an overall lack of funding. The CEO of ACW noted back in January that their budget is now worth around 37% less in real terms than it was back in 2010, at c.£30m now compared to c.£35m then.¹

¹ <https://nation.cymru/news/arts-council-chief-calls-for-national-debate-on-value-of-the-arts-with-funding-cut-looming/>

Now that it has become clear that these reductions are leading to such significant and permanent changes at a national company that is structurally important for arts and culture in Wales there is a strong case for Welsh Government to step in with additional support. It would be entirely appropriate and possible for them to do so without undermining the broader system of arms-length bodies. The importance and influence of Welsh Government's work in the culture sector is demonstrated by the fact they are consulting on a culture strategy. As a specific example, WNO is a touring company and the costs of touring are currently causing problems across the culture sector so there is an extremely strong case for specific intervention in that area.

I am also concerned that the cuts to WNO, as well as the other issues facing our sector, are going to create further long-term problems. It has become clear in the last 18 months that the problems at St David's Hall should have been addressed on a national basis years earlier, and I am concerned that in the future we will look back at this moment in a similar way for classical music and musicians' careers in Wales more broadly if action isn't taken now.

On that note, since my previous letter it has become more apparent that cuts to Young RWCMD are a further threat to our members' work and music in Wales, as well as the provision of music and drama education for young people. As with Welsh National Opera, it seems there are Wales-specific funding issues relating to this, such as that RWCMD do not benefit from funding equivalent to the Music and Dance Scheme in England.²

Our sector is facing major challenges and we need Welsh Government and arms-length bodies to consider how they can offer further help. We wrote to the Cabinet Secretary on 10 May setting out our concerns about Welsh National Opera and seeking a meeting, and hope to receive a response to that letter with an invitation to meet soon.

Thank you again to you and the other members of the Committee for your support and considering these issues, and my colleagues and I would be happy to discuss these points further if that would be helpful.

Yours sincerely,



Andy Warnock

Regional Organiser, Wales and South West England
Musicians' Union

07792413248

andy.warnock@theMU.org

² <https://www.gov.uk/music-dance-scheme>