

Lesley Griffiths AS/MS
Ysgrifennydd y Cabinet dros Ddiwylliant a Chyfiawnder
Cymdeithasol
Cabinet Secretary for Culture & Social Justice



Ein cyf/Our ref: AL1501

Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

Delyth Jewell AS
Chair - Culture, Communications, Welsh Language,
Sport, and International Relations Committee

5 June 2024

Dear Delyth

Thank you for your letter of 8 May regarding protecting the national collections.

The national collections cared for by Amgueddfa Cymru, the National Library of Wales and the Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Wales (the Royal Commission) belong to us all. They are an integral part of our heritage and I take their safety very seriously.

Since being appointed as Cabinet Secretary at the end of March, I have met with the Chairs and Chief Executives of Amgueddfa Cymru, the National Library and the Royal Commission. I have been assured the collections in their care are currently safe. However, I fully appreciate urgent planning is needed to address the long-term maintenance issues. I have visited National Museum Cardiff and the National Slate Museum and intend to visit the other Amgueddfa Cymru sites as soon as I can. I have also committed to visit the National Library and the Royal Commission during the summer recess. These visits allow me to meet the specialist staff who care for our national collections so diligently, to see for myself any maintenance work needed and discuss areas of concern.

Maintaining an aging estate

Amgueddfa Cymru and the National Library face significant challenges in maintaining their iconic and historical buildings. In recent years, my predecessors have increased their capital budgets significantly. This financial year Amgueddfa Cymru is receiving £5,000,000 capital Grant in Aid (GiA), £4,731,000 of which is for maintenance. This is a significant increase from the £600,000 it received in 2015/16. In total, Amgueddfa Cymru has received £22.5m in GiA capital maintenance funding in the five years up to and including 2024/25. The National Library continues to receive £2,000,000 capital GiA this financial year, of which £1,695,000 is for maintenance. During the five years up to and including 2024/25, the National Library has received £11,765,000 in GiA capital maintenance funding.

In addition to their GiA, we also provide Amgueddfa Cymru and the National Library with other grant funding to address priority maintenance, improve their estate and for storage. In recent years, this has included:

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Rydym yn croesawu derbyn gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg. Byddwn yn ateb gohebiaeth a dderbynnir yn Gymraeg yn Gymraeg ac ni fydd gohebu yn Gymraeg yn arwain at oedi.

We welcome receiving correspondence in Welsh. Any correspondence received in Welsh will be answered in Welsh and corresponding in Welsh will not lead to a delay in responding.

- £2,000,000 in 2023/24 to tackle long-term maintenance issues at Amgueddfa Cymru sites and to progress the redevelopment of the National Slate Museum.
- £500,000 in 2022/23 for a new fire system at the National Library to ensure the safety of its collections and a further £250,000 in 2023/24 for priority maintenance work. This is in addition to the £1,500,000 the National Library is receiving between 2023 and 2025 for collections storage redevelopment.
- £1,250,000 for Amgueddfa Cymru and £920,000 for the National Library between 2022 and 2025 for decarbonisation work.

However, even with the increased capital funding we have provided in recent years, further support is needed. Given the size of the work required and the importance of these institutions to the people of Wales, I believe this issue now needs to be addressed through co-operation across Government, rather than by a single department. This is something you also referenced in your letter and is in line with one of the central goals of the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act, to create 'A Wales of Vibrant Culture and Thriving Welsh Language'. This is a goal which is embedded in policy portfolios across the Welsh Government.

I acknowledge the significant maintenance backlog Amgueddfa Cymru has across its estate. As part of the increased capital funding we have provided, condition surveys were updated to give us, and Amgueddfa Cymru, more up-to-date information on the condition of the estate as well as the associated backlog of works required. In 2022, the total backlog and future maintenance requirement for Amgueddfa Cymru was £66.8m. Whilst discussions regarding the maintenance issues across the wider estate are ongoing, the priority is National Museum Cardiff (NMC). Between 2020 and 2023, £3,000,000 of GiA has funded two major roof projects at NMC which have addressed significant leak sites. However, there remains serious concerns regarding its aging mechanical, electrical and plumbing infrastructure and the impact of water ingress due to further issues with the roof. Colleagues at the Amgueddfa believe an additional £30,000,000 over six years would address the problem and they are working with my officials to develop a formal business case to be submitted to the Welsh Government requesting this funding. In preparation for this, my officials have been working with their Finance colleagues to identify all available funding options.

The National Library also has significant issues with its roof and it needs an additional £3,000,000 to address this. Again, my officials are working with colleagues there to develop a plan to address this issue as well as developing a greater understanding of the wider maintenance needs of the National Library over the coming years.

Culture can contribute, and add value, to the delivery of wider policy aims, including health and well-being, education, tackling the climate and nature emergencies and the economy. I have therefore also began having discussions with my Cabinet colleagues.

Retaining expert staff

From my visits, I have seen first-hand the expertise and skills of the staff at our institutions which are instrumental in ensuring our national collections are safe and accessible. The 2024/25 budget settlement was the most challenging we have seen since devolution. We acted to mitigate the full scale of the budget pressures on the culture sector, however, our budget is up to £700m less in real terms than when it was set in 2021. We have had to take extremely difficult decisions to focus funding on core public services, including the NHS. Amgueddfa Cymru, the National Library and the Royal Commission received a 10.5% reduction in their revenue GiA for 2024/25. Following the draft budget announcement on 19 December 2023, colleagues at each of the arm's length bodies have had to make difficult

decisions about how to deploy their workforce to make sure they can operate within their revised budget and continue to serve the people of Wales.

Our priority must now be on retaining jobs. We have reprioritised revenue funding allocated to delivering the Culture Strategy in 2024/25 to mitigate against job losses, including at Amgueddfa Cymru and the National Library. Since the draft budget was published, additional funding has also been found for the Royal Commission.

Digitisation

Digitisation is key to making the national collections more accessible to people in Wales and beyond. I have been inspired by the discussions I have had with Amgueddfa Cymru, the National Library and the Royal Commission on this matter. We are investing around £1.3m over three years in digital projects, including supporting the Wales Broadcast Archive at the National Library and digitising the National Aerial Photographic Collection at the Royal Commission. In addition, by April 2025, Celf ar y Cyd will contain the fully digitised national contemporary art collection, accessible to anyone, anywhere, at any time. The opportunities which come with digitisation is something I will continue to discuss and explore with our culture organisations.

I am fully aware of the challenges our culture arm's length bodies face. The financial pressure under which we are working is set to continue and there are no easy solutions to addressing these challenges. The UK Government intends the squeeze on public spending to continue over the next few years and, based on their plans, our budget will be lower per person in real terms in 2028/29 than it was in 2022/23. We must therefore work together across government and with our national institutions to find a way forward.

Our national collections are an integral part of our heritage. I will continue to play my part in ensuring they are safe for future generations.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Lesley Griffiths". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, sweeping flourish at the end of the name.

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