

PCS Cymru/Wales
1 Cathedral Road
Cardiff
CF11 9HA
7TH October 2024

Peredur Owen Griffiths MS
Chair, Finance Committee
Senedd Cymru
By email

Dear Peredur

Senedd Commission draft budget 2025-26

I am writing to provide PCS Union's views on the Senedd Commission's ('the Commission') draft budget for 2025-26, following its laying on 27 September and the Finance Committee's meeting on 3 October. We appreciate that scrutiny occurs within tight timescales, but we hope you can give the contents of this letter some consideration.

As set out in our letter dated [11 October 2023](#) during last year's scrutiny, PCS is committed to advocating for a sustainable funding settlement for this institution. Robust funding for the Commission is essential as Senedd Reform ('Reform') nears. The 2025-26 financial year is a crucial one in the history of the institution as it prepares for its most challenging transition – the transition to the 7th Senedd.

We note the 16.77% headline increase of the total budget, and the increase in the operational budget of 11.08%. In the context of preparing for a 60% increase in the number of Members of the Senedd ('Members'), there can be no reasonable argument against significant budgetary increases for the Commission. Core operations, outside of the ring-fenced programme budgets, must also be strengthened in advance of the 2026 election so that Reform, as legislated for by Welsh Government and passed by an enhanced majority of Members, can be properly delivered. Hefin David MS, representing the Commission during the 3 October Finance Committee meeting, said

'we've been tasked by...a two-thirds majority of the Parliament...to engage in Senedd reform, and that was carried through a democratic vote of the Parliament. It's now up to the Parliament

to decide whether...this should be funded in the way that we propose. My argument today is that there isn't really any other way of doing it.¹

We support the Commissioner's position, and we believe that it is Members' collective responsibility to recognise the demands that their decisions place on the institution that supports them and support the budget accordingly.

PCS also welcomes the jettisoning of the GDP Deflator as an index for operational budget growth, a metric we criticised in our letter last year. We agree with the assessment in the draft budget that it 'is not a realistic target due to the level of funding gap that would be created' (p12). We expect the Commission to ask for the funds it needs to maintain and enhance the services it provides to Members in the coming transformational years. Selling itself short is detrimental to its staff, its stability and the Senedd's effectiveness as a parliament for Wales.

The PCS Senedd Commission Branch, by far the largest union branch at the Commission, also welcomes the inclusion of a 5% pay award to staff for 2025-26 and will not oppose its implementation. PCS has been in dispute with the Commission since the autumn of 2022 and has successfully achieved a mandate each time it has balloted its members. Its third successive strike mandate is still active. Although the award is not likely to be sufficient to end the dispute formally, it is a step in the right direction and should to some degree lessen the significant real terms pay cut suffered by staff in recent years. If this budget is passed by the Senedd, the Branch will look to engage with the Commission on future years, to see whether an agreement can be found to limit uncertainty for staff and the institution.

We would also like to welcome the 6% pay uplift for support staff, which include members of the PCS Plaid Cymru Branch, that is in the Determination for 2025-26.

We note that the Welsh Government's First Supplementary Budget for 2024-25 was published on 1 October. It includes additional consolidated pay awards (above the original 3%) for the lowest-paid grades at the Commission in this current financial year. It is due to be debated in Plenary on 22 October, and we urge all Members to support it.

PCS asks the Finance Committee to bear in mind the importance of stability and operational viability in these critical years, and the scale of the challenge facing the Commission and its staff because of Members' commitment to Reform, when applying its Statement of Principles in scrutiny. We also expect Members to support this budget, and to press for the robust funding that this institution needs before, during and after Reform.

Yours sincerely

Jayne Smith

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PCS Industrial Officer

¹ <https://record.senedd.wales/Committee/14896#C615179>