

Jack Sargeant MS  
Minister for Culture, Skills and Social Partnership  
Welsh Government

9 January 2025

## **Scrutiny of the Minister for Culture, Skills and Social Partnership**

Dear Jack,

Thank you again for appearing before the committee on 28 November 2024. I write to seek clarification about some of the issues which were discussed during your appearance, and these matters are dealt with below.

### **Broadcasting**

During the evidence session, you were questioned about the Welsh Government's policy position when it comes to the devolution of broadcasting. You mentioned plans to engage in further discussions with stakeholders to help shape your views on this matter.

- Could you please clarify whether, as it says in the Programme for Government, the Welsh Government will still "pursue the case for devolution of broadcasting and communication powers"? If not, could you please clarify why the Welsh Government has changed policy direction on this matter? Or if, conversely, the Welsh Government still intends to pursue the case for devolution in this field, could you please clarify how this aim is being pursued?

### **Welsh National Opera**

The Committee is deeply concerned about the financial crisis facing the Welsh National Opera (WNO) due to significant funding reductions from Arts Council England and the Arts Council of Wales. Whilst we welcome the Welsh Government's September announcement of an additional £1.5 million for the Arts Council of Wales to help mitigate the financial pressures facing cultural bodies, we believe that further action is required to address the immediate challenges. We understand that the WNO has applied to the Arts Council for a share of this funding.

Beyond addressing these immediate challenges, however, we would strongly urge the Welsh Government to consider the need for additional, secure, long-term funding for the WNO. This funding must recognise the WNO's national status and its critical contribution to Wales's cultural standing on the global stage. Without decisive action, we, as a Committee, are in no doubt that there is a serious risk that Wales could lose a significant national asset.

It is important to emphasise that the current crisis extends beyond the loss of jobs: it also threatens Wales's international reputation, the cultural sector's skills base, and essential partnerships, such as those with health boards.

You told the Committee that, "...failure is not an option" for the WNO, and that the Welsh Government is "...absolutely committed to the cause". You did not, however, mention any policies you were considering introducing which might help the WNO, other than the £1.5 million of additional funding that had already been announced for the Arts Council. We would therefore ask:

- What specific interventions, beyond short-term crisis funding, the Welsh Government is considering introducing in order to safeguard the WNO's future?
- Whether the Welsh Government recognises the significance of the WNO's future in the context of Wales's international reputation and influence.

We are concerned that undue recognition has not been given to the broader implications that might arise from the WNO's loss, and we therefore call on the Welsh Government to act decisively to protect the jobs, skills, and talent inherent in this company, and to ensure the future security and sustainability of the WNO.

## Sport

- How is the Welsh Government addressing the recommendations from the Committee's earlier report on participation in sport in disadvantaged areas to ensure equitable access to sporting opportunities across all areas of Wales?

## Video Games Industry

During the evidence session, you stated that you do not share the University of South Wales's view that Wales is underperforming compared with other UK regions in the video games industry. Instead, you commented that Wales is "...performing very well and punching above our weight".

- On what evidence does the Welsh Government base this assertion?

## Cultural diplomacy

The International Strategy's action plan on soft power focuses on cultural diplomacy.

- How have you been delivering on the strategy's cultural diplomacy aspirations, and what are your future plans for this area of work, including for the Strategy's future?

During the Committee's Culture shock inquiry, witnesses spoke about the need for diplomacy to counter perceptions that Wales and the UK are unwelcoming to creative workers from the EU and further afield.

- In light of the domestic pressures facing the sector, how will you ensure that Wales's soft power will not diminish on the world stage?

During the evidence session we discussed the fact that your written evidence includes a section relating to Wales-Ireland relations.

- Could you explain, please, how the new Cabinet is working on the refresh of the Wales-Ireland shared statement?
- Could you please clarify whether the First Minister will be overseeing that work?

I look forward to receiving your response by 6 February 2025.

Yours sincerely,



Delyth Jewell MS  
Committee Chair

Croesewir gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg neu Saesneg.

We welcome correspondence in Welsh or English.