

Pwyllgor Diwylliant, y Gymraeg a Chyfathrebu
Culture, Welsh Language and Communications Committee
CWLC(5)-06-16 P5

Dear Bethan,

I write to you in your capacity as Chair of the Cultural Committee to express my concern that some of the changes apparently being mooted as to the structure and organisation of the National Museum might lead, inadvertently or otherwise, to the undermining of the core purposes and holistic effectiveness of that key cultural institution in Welsh public life. In effect, there seems to have been a leap of intent from some of the rather more circumspect proposals in the PWC report towards precipitate implementation without the due diligence of informed discussion and evidential investigation.

What has particularly alarmed me is the manner in which long and widely held convictions about the civic and national function of such a body might be overturned by the topsy turvy accountancy logic of means and resources. This is not to say that income generation, commercial exploitation and partnership working are, in themselves, dirty words or false concepts, but rather that they are, or should be, entirely secondary to the rooted role we have given to our cultural bodies in Wales for more than a century. Our Victorian and Edwardian predecessors understood that the cultural focus on the nation which they deliberately created around the new University, Library and Museum, was essential in articulating an emergent and cohesive sense of identity for their fissiparous modern Wales: so they founded, nurtured and supported the ability of those bodies to be confident and visionary. Being self-regulating in their elected governance and independent in their professional activity was a crucial factor in their subsequent success. They have been, at their best, central to our understanding of ourselves and, thus, to our expression of ourselves in and to the wider world. Further, they have been of distinction precisely because their own core separate roles were envisaged as distinctive.

This is especially true in case of a Museum whose meticulous attention to the natural and physical sciences, to geology, to the configuration of natural and manmade landscapes, to arts and crafts, to educational outreach and communication, has always been about much, much more than being the custodian of "outstanding historic collections". That phrase comes from the Written Statement by the Welsh Government of 28 September, where I also read that the hope, ancillary to prospective changes, is for Wales to have a "heritage sector...global in ambition and renowned internationally". But that is exactly what we have had, and will continue to project---along with all those other internationally renowned and globally ambitious museums worldwide---if we still understand that it is the fulfilment of their original missions, evolving but also bedrock solid, which we should, in our turn and in our own fissiparous Wales, cherish and support. Kiddiecraft sloganising about them helping to "build a more prosperous Wales" via "an outstanding

visitor experience" threaten, in their vacuity, our intellectual integrity and demean the wondrous and profound exhibitions which have opened so many hearts and minds, here and abroad. Marketisation and branding are, or should be, the back-up carts for our front-line cultural horses, not, ever, the other way round.

I had hoped, after some of the travails we encountered in the arts sector (and not just in Wales), that the now universal acceptance of the dictum that there is no worthwhile instrumental value to the arts in society if they are not also seen to be of intrinsic importance in people's lives, was also understood to be applicable across the whole of the cultural sector. That view is the driving force behind my Report to the Welsh Government on the educational role of the arts in Welsh schools and the backbone of Baroness Andrews' adjacent report on cultural deprivation and material poverty. Our National Museum has been stalwart and creative in helping the Welsh Government enact these vital programmes. It is for Government to show how those lessons are learned for their own practice, and how they will validate the cultural well springs of our common life without let, hinder or passing excuse.

Personally, I strongly believe and have said publicly when I was in office at the Arts Council, that we need, again, a ministerial post in Cabinet which is solely dedicated to arts, heritage and culture, and not one whose remit, as in recent years, has been tugged hither and thither by the mechanistic lever pulling which seems to be entailed by being sited within the spheres of Economy and Infrastructure. A commonwealth of culture is not only priceless in today's fractured Wales, its sustenance is how we we in Wales will be assayed for human value on the global scales of history. We still owe it ourselves now, and to our children tomorrow, to be so much more than "an outstanding visitor experience".

I hope that your committee will be able to give some consideration, at this present time, to these and related matters,

Yours sincerely,

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