

Pwyllgor Diwylliant, y Gymraeg a Chyfathrebu
Culture, Welsh Language and Communications Committee
CWLC(5)-08-16 PTN6

30 Caswell Drive
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Bethan Jenkins AM
Chair, Culture, Welsh Language and Communications Committee
National Assembly for Wales

24 October 2016

Dear Bethan

Welsh Government review of heritage services

I find the Welsh Government's current plan to create a body called 'Historic Wales' to be deeply worrying, for many reasons.

- 1 The plan isolates 'commercial functions' from the other functions of our national cultural bodies. That is not to say that raising money is not a desirable, even essential, activity for them: it is. But to elevate commerce above the core objects of the bodies cannot be right. To make it the sole basis for a major structural reorganisation is like putting the box office manager in charge of conducting the orchestra's next concert.
- 2 It is unclear how 'commercial functions' will be defined. A radical definition could leave the National Museum as an institutional zombie, still standing (unsteadily) but stripped of the ability and the resources to fulfil the objects of its Royal Charter. (Or is the government really aiming ultimately at a complete merger of all the bodies?)
- 3 It is unclear what the legal and organisational status of 'Historic Wales' would be. Certainly there will be plenty of scope for turf wars and duplication between it and the other bodies. I know of no other country that has attempted to do what the Minister is now proposing.
- 4 Creating 'Historic Wales' will be extremely costly and complicated, at a time of unprecedented austerity and difficulty. Achieving a revised Royal Charter for the National Library of Wales in 2006 took three years of hard work and distracted us all from the work we should have been doing. Under this plan there will be *two* Royal Charters to amend, and many other complex changes.
- 5 The National Museum – and the National Library, if it is made to follow the same route – is likely to lose some or all of its independence from government under the plan, and its status as a Royal Charter body, a charity and a limited company. But only totalitarian states insist on direct control of their national cultural institutions. History suggests that when art, culture and national memory become tools of the state all are impoverished.

- 6 The Minister appears to have decided already which option in the *Investing in the future to protect the past* report will be adopted (option 4) – without proper public consultation. The results of implementing option 4 are so far-reaching that the public must be given a chance to comment. There is too much at stake to leave discussion to the closed group chaired by Mr Justin Albert.

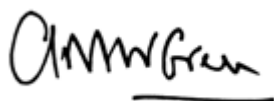
The National Museum and the National Library were set up to preserve the common memory of Wales, and to use that memory to help build the Wales of the future. For over 100 years both institutions have succeeded in those missions in their different ways. They are cherished by the people of Wales. They have international reputations. They make a difference to people's lives. The government's current plans endanger all of this.

A rethink is urgently needed. Instead of promoting his plan the Minister should be spending his time and resources defending our national institutions – restoring the severe budget cuts they have experienced and helping them thrive as independent institutions pursuing the objects they are intended to perform.

As a country we should have more confidence and ambition that we can support a prosperous and effective range of national cultural and heritage bodies. Shouldn't we?

I should be grateful if you could share this letter with your Committee colleagues.

With best wishes,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Andrew Green". The signature is written in a cursive style with a horizontal line underneath the name.

Andrew Green
Librarian, National Library of Wales, 1998-2013