

Cytûn represents the principal Christian denominations in Wales and a number of other Christian organisations which work in Wales. The denominations have some 150,000 adult members, and meaningful contact with many more adults, children and young people in every community in Wales. A full list of Cytûn members can be found here: <http://www.cytun.co.uk/hafan/en/who-we-are/>

This consultation is very timely in terms of Cytûn's work. In December 2018, Cytûn wrote on behalf of a number of our members – the Free Church Council for Wales, the Society of Friends in Wales and the Church in Wales – at all the principal banks which operate in Wales, and to the Post Office. The purpose of these letters was to express concern regarding the number of bank branches which are closing in Wales at the present time. A number of towns and whole areas of Wales now have no operational bank branch, and some also lack a Post Office. At the same time, an article was published in the *Pedair tudalen* (the section of the denominational weeklies, *Y Tyst*, *Y Goleuad* and *Seren Cymru* which is shared interdenominationally) encouraging church members to use their remaining local bank branches, as lack of use is the explanation usually given by banks for closing them.

We believe that branch closures create severe difficulties for many people, including:

1. Local businesses and charities – including churches – who need to pay cash and cheques into their account and do not wish, or are not able, to carry money insecurely over long distances.
2. Elderly and disabled people and young families especially who cannot travel long distances to a branch for physical or financial reasons.
3. The recipients of Universal Credit, as it is rolled out, who require a bank account in order to have the money which they need to live.
4. When the cash machine is closed with the branch, customers may be left having to pay a fee for collecting cash, and with private company machines that do not use the Welsh language.
5. Anyone who cannot, or who does not wish to, use online banking facilities, or who feels more confident discussing financial matters face to face rather than on the phone or with a machine. Many areas of Wales still lack suitable broadband connections for secure online banking.
6. Those who bank through the medium of Welsh. The banks spent many years developing Welsh language services on the phone and at branches, but no bank offers online banking through the medium of Welsh.

We are also concerned at the aggressive marketing of online banking in some branches at the moment, despite the fact that the 'success' of such marketing would lead directly to closing the branch. We understand that banks are private businesses with duties to their shareholders, but we believe that they are also offering an essential public service.

We suggested in our letter that some of these matters could be addressed at modest cost. For example, we asked whether banks would be willing to consider:

1. Arranging with the Post Office that a greater range of banking services be available to their customers at its counters than currently.
2. Arranging together that the final bank in any community offers banking services on behalf of all the banks, in order to avoid the considerable effort of transferring accounts from one bank to another – difficult for individuals, but often impossible for businesses and charities because of the multitude of security requirements.
3. Committing to meaningful local consultation, including consultation on solutions such as the above, before taking the final decision to close any branch.

We received a reply from every bank apart from TSB. These replies were similar to each other. One (from Lloyds) is attached as an example - we would be happy to supply all the responses if the Committee felt that this would be useful. We did not feel that the replies had adequately addressed our concerns, and their replies were negative to the first two suggestions above. We were disappointed also that every reply came in English only (although one bank did offer to provide a translation into Welsh upon request).

We also received a reply from the Post Office. We felt that this response was rather more hopeful, and we have arranged a meeting with Stuart Taylor, Post Office External Affairs Manager for Wales and the South West [of England] on May 23. We would be happy to supply a report on that meeting to the Committee if you so wish.

We wish the Committee well in addressing this matter. We note with considerable interest in the terms of reference for this inquiry the suggestion that a community bank could be established with branches in Wales. In the light of the disappointing response of the current banks, we would urge the Committee seriously to consider this possibility for the sake of our communities.

We would be glad to offer any further assistance that the Committee might require.