



Response by Literature Wales

to Senedd Cymru's Culture, Welsh Language & Communications Committee: Inquiry into the COVID-19 outbreak and its impact on culture, creative industries, heritage, communications and sport

About Literature Wales

Literature Wales is the national company for the development of literature. Our vision is a Wales where literature empowers, improves and brightens lives.

We are a registered charity, and work to inspire communities, develop writers and celebrate the literary culture of Wales. Literature Wales works in Welsh, English and bilingually across Wales. We have offices in Llanystumdwy and Cardiff. Our patron is **Sir Philip Pullman**.

We facilitate, fund and directly deliver a literary programme across Wales. All our activities are structured into three Activity Pillars. Concentrating on these three areas will help us to ensure that all of our work is clearly linked to our mission, and enable us to use our resources most effectively:

Participation – inspiring some of our most marginalised individuals and communities through active participation in literature.

Writer Development – developing the creative and professional potential of early career writers.

Wales' Literary Culture – celebrating our contemporary writers and the literary heritage of Wales.

All of the pillars are inter-linked, and much of our work will flow from one to another. Projects will not be developed in isolation, but will complement and enhance each other, with clear progression and development during the three years.

Our Priorities

Based on our understanding of the power of literature to improve and transform lives, and the need to focus our activities where they will have greatest impact, we have identified three Tactical Priorities which will cross-cut all Activity Pillars. They are not types of activity but thematic priorities which will feature in everything we deliver, and in our partnership and facilitation work:

Representation & Equality – by ensuring representative inclusion throughout our activity and internal structures, we will provide platforms for, and encourage, under-represented literary voices; creating a national literary culture which represents contemporary Wales.

Health & Well-being – by supporting and advocating the various ways literature can contribute positively to the nation's health and well-being, we will improve the lives of people in Wales.

Children & Young People – by increasing accessibility to, and conveying the joy of creative writing and reading, we will make a significant contribution to the well-being of the future generations of Wales.

1. What has been the immediate impact of Covid-19 on the sector?

All arts organisations, and most importantly freelance artists, including writers, have been adversely impacted by the pandemic, some very severely and immediately, by losing all contracts and bookings almost overnight. The closure of venues, schools, bookshops etc. has meant an immediate and total stop to project delivery, especially in the first weeks of the pandemic. Many writers have been left without sources of income (e.g. from providing workshops, delivering events or facilitating training), and freelance writers not in regular employment have been particularly hard-hit.

Covid-19 has also affected people from Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic backgrounds disproportionately higher and more severely. Furthermore, the death of George Floyd and the subsequent global mobilisation to support the Black Lives Matter movement has highlighted issues relating to institutional and structural racism, including in the arts in Wales. Many individuals and cultural organisations have engaged in difficult conversations about this in recent weeks and Literature Wales, like many others, is keen to see fundamental change and we are addressing these matters as a priority and with urgency.

For Literature Wales, the closure of Tŷ Newydd Writing Centre, a significant source of income generation through writing courses and private hires has led to significant financial losses, which continue to accumulate. We are currently planning different for scenarios, the most likely is provided below to give an indication of financial implications:

Circumstances

- Tŷ Newydd Writing Centre remains closed and courses are cancelled until January 2021, but with a possibility of taking private hire venue bookings from October 2020.
- Course uptake and private hires are lower than expected upon re-opening due to participants being unable to afford places from income losses.

Resulting financial situation

- With restrictions on expenditure, Tŷ Newydd reopening for venue hire in October and other savings leave a **deficit of approximately £53,000**.
- Literature Wales has sufficient reserves to manage a deficit of this level as a one-off, if ACW

2. How effectively has the support provided by the Welsh Government, the UK Government and arms-length bodies addressed the sector's needs?

The support offered is vital and necessary and many organisations would already have dissolved without it. The most widely accessed has been the Job Retention Scheme (JRS) which most arts organisation have made use of. This has meant that there have been few redundancies in the arts in Wales to date, and this financial support is needed whilst the lockdown measures from the Government continue and schools, venues, theatres, arts centres and bookshops remain closed.

The emergency funding provided to the sector by Arts Council Wales (ACW) has further been a life-line and has been very positively received by the sector. Decisions were made quickly, and financial support was awarded swiftly, in particular to individuals. In addition, the ACW's decision to postpone the Investment Review for 2020 was also welcomed and it enabled organisations to prioritise their response to COVID-19 at a time of severe crisis.

Literature Wales agreed with Arts Council of Wales in early April to contribute 50% (£48,000) of our earmarked lottery funding for 2020-2021 to the Arts Council of Wales Arts Resilience Fund in response to the COVID-19 crisis. We were one of many organisations who contributed to this broader package of support, which includes the Urgent Response Fund for Individuals for those freelance creative individuals – including writers - most in need of financial assistance due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Further information can be found [here](#).

Since April 2020, Literature Wales has announced two rounds of funding for freelance writers to devise and create original digital content and projects for audiences. The second call-out was offered in partnership with the Royal College of Psychiatrists in Wales and had a particular focus of contributing to increasing the health and well-being of communities in Wales. These call-outs were intended to offer paid work to those freelance writers who have seen their work and commissions decline in recent weeks. In addition, the planned content will contribute to tangible societal, cultural, and economic improvements in line with our [Organisational Outcomes](#) whilst entertaining, inspiring and educating early career writers and participants across Wales.

You can find out more information about Literature Wales' shifted focus and work [here](#).

3. What will the likely long-term impacts of Covid-19 be on the sector, and what support is needed to deal with those?

Financially, it is clear that the wider arts sector and the literature sector is in jeopardy and return or recovery to pre-COVID levels may be impossible. Much will be dependent on Welsh Government and UK Government policies, funding levels and available support packages.

Even once venues can reopen, social distancing will make it impossible to return to pre-COVID levels for some time, maybe years. It is difficult to predict at this stage quite how far-reaching these impacts will be.

It is clear however, that Governments need to pay close attention to the challenges facing the Arts and Culture industries and invest properly in their survival to secure their future. There is an opportunity to re-examine the current funding model for the arts and look at other countries who are adapting better to some of these challenges, particularly those where high public investment for the arts is ensuring much better survival chances for arts organisations and individual artists.

In addition, whilst the Arts and Culture sector's ability to provide direct support to communities across Wales during the current Government lockdown measures is restricted, with the correct support, the sector could potentially be of major help in supporting a variety of recovery initiatives. Regardless of the art form, the sector has the capability of inspiring and empowering some of the most marginalised and vulnerable individuals and communities through participation in creative activities. Culture should be front and centre of the renewal process in Wales, and it forms a key element in the Well-being of Future Generations Act.

Whilst the sector may not be best positioned to provide urgent direct support for communities across Wales during the current lock down measures, with the correct support, we could have a major impact on helping in the recovery period. For example, our sector can provide young people with the necessary platforms to share their experiences in safe spaces, it can deliver creative initiatives to help decrease feelings of isolation within communities or curate murals to encourage artistic responses to the current times.

We would also like to echo some of the practical suggestions made by ACW, including:

- the extension of Job Retention Scheme and the Self-Employed Income Support Scheme as far as necessary for those sectors that need time to open and rebuild their businesses
- enabling furloughing to be done on a part-time basis to allow organisations to work where possible
- revising the Self-Employed Income Support Scheme to ensure no freelance worker falls through the gaps of government support.
- clarifying the eligibility of culture and leisure trusts to benefit from Government funding
- extending access to Local Authority administered business rate relief in Wales to all parts of the creative industries, not only those in retail, hospitality and leisure
- shaping the UK Shared Prosperity Fund to deliver a recovery focused business finance scheme, designed to stimulate business development and innovation across the arts and creative industries
- ensuring that funding continues to be available to organisations experiencing cash-flow issues and facing significant commercial rental costs
- the development of "safe space" protocols to help the sector return to business

4. What lessons can be learnt from how the Welsh Government, the UK Government, arms-length bodies and the sector have dealt with Covid-19?

The UK Government has been slow to respond and precious time was lost at the start of the pandemic. UK government advice in March to avoid attending venues before actually closing them was hugely unhelpful and cost time and money.

ACW's announcements of support packages to the sector was considered, clear and appropriate. More generally, whether in the arts sector or wider society, now is the time for better global collaboration, learning from other countries and being generous and open with sharing resources and information. The Welsh Government's more cautious approach to the easing of lock-down is also welcomed by many, particularly by vulnerable groups and those living in rural communities, who are important stakeholders and audiences for the arts in Wales.

5. How might the sector evolve after Covid-19, and how can the Welsh Government support such innovation to deal with future challenges?

The arts and creative industries should be at the core of government policy to revive and re-invigorate in the new post Covid-19 world. And at times of crisis and hardship, access to the arts for all should be central to government policy. But it is clear that the arts can only evolve with continued government investment and adequate financial resourcing, which is more important now than ever.



This is a crisis for the sector, with huge challenges but also enormous opportunities. Most obviously, the 'NEW' (whatever that may look like) needs to tackle:

- True commitment and accountability to meet Diversity and Equality targets.
- Action change, not empty pledges.
- Work with and include Black and Disabled artists on all levels of policy making.
- Include new voices and communities, especially those who have not been heard to date.
- Implement real and measurable changes to meet the goals of the Well-being of Future Generations Act.
- Guiding principles should be openness, collaboration and absence of protectionism.