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Comisiynydd y Gymraeg
Welsh Language Commissioner

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Culture, Welsh Language and Communications Committee
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26 June 2020

Dear Committee Members

**Inquiry into the Covid-19 outbreak and its impact on culture, creative industries,
heritage, communications and sport**

Thank you for the opportunity to respond to the above consultation. As my role is to promote and facilitate the use of the Welsh language my comments focus on the pandemic's impact on the language. Of course, it is currently difficult to predict what exactly will be the long-term implications of this challenging time, and I am sure that we will continue to learn about and discuss the effects for a long time to come. I should note that in the process of writing this response the situation has already been changing regularly. However, here are some initial impressions. It is possible that I will provide further information as the situation continues.

I will limit my response to the impact of controlling the virus on the Welsh language within the areas that you refer to in your call for evidence, namely culture and the creative industries; heritage; national and community media; journalism; and grassroots and elite sports. However, I should note that I am concerned that the impact of managing Covid-19 cases may have a wider and longer-term impact on the Welsh language in a number of areas beyond those listed above. With that in mind, as the Welsh language is part of the Committee's wider remit, I ask you to consider holding an inquiry into the impact of the crisis on the Welsh language and how those effects could be mitigated.

The *Cymraeg 2050 Welsh Language Strategy*¹ highlights the relationship between the Welsh language and culture and notes how multi faceted that relationship is:

¹ <https://gov.wales/cymraeg-2050-welsh-language-strategy>

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The relationship between language and culture is multi-faceted and complex. This is no different for Welsh. Culture is an integral part of our society and identity, and our feeling of nationhood. It has the ability to empower, and enable increased confidence, skills and employability, which are all integral to this strategy. It plays an increasingly important role in public life in Wales, including our economy, health, education and regeneration. Cultural and language awareness need to be celebrated and harnessed to support prosperity.

Opportunities to socialize in the Welsh language at cultural and sporting events are central to the vitality of the Welsh language and in people's confidence in the language as a living language. Evidence shows for example that people who consider themselves to be fluent in Welsh are more likely to speak it regularly, so every opportunity must be taken to ensure that people can socialize through the medium of the language. However, the absence of these cultural events will have an economic as well as a cultural impact that could in turn undermine future cultural opportunities. This is true of course in the context of cultural, arts and sporting events in general, but we are concerned that the impact could be longer term on Welsh language events due to the smaller market, numbers and opportunities. We detail this further below.

Key events

All national, regional and community events in the Welsh calendar have been postponed for the foreseeable future. These cultural, agricultural and community events are the cornerstones of the Welsh language. They provide important opportunities for people to speak and reinforce their confidence in the language. They are also opportunities to attract non-Welsh speakers to the language and for learners to practice the language. Cultural opportunities provide the change for people to socialize and to speak Welsh reflecting the vibrancy of a living language. But it must also be remembered that cultural opportunities in the Welsh language are also important sources of income for a number of Welsh artists, businesses and suppliers involved in hosting these events, and employ officers who organize them. For example a review of the National Eisteddfod undertaken in 2013 quotes research that the National Eisteddfod creates a net income (GVA) of £3-£4m, depending on the location. It states that the Eisteddfod "creates a greater impact in a rural area due to the relative scale and impacts of wealth locally."² This will be particularly true in Tregaron where the festival was supposed to be held this year.

The Eisteddfod's website reinforces the messages regarding the economic benefits to the areas which the festival visits: "A significant percentage of the economic benefit to the local area during the Eisteddfod goes to the tourism and hospitality sector."³ The postponement of the 2020 Eisteddfod is likely to have a detrimental impact on the hospitality sector in Ceredigion and the neighbouring counties of Carmarthenshire and Pembrokeshire.

² <https://gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2018-12/national-eisteddfod-task-and-finish-group-report-and-recommendations.pdf>

³ <https://eisteddfod.wales/business/tourism>



On 16 March, it was announced that the Urdd Eisteddfod in Denbighshire would be postponed until 2021, and three of the organisation's centres would be temporarily closed, with a financial blow of nearly £4m to the Urdd⁴. An assessment of the economic value of Urdd Gobaith Cymru in 2018 stated that the organisation had produced an economic value of £25.5m in Wales in 2017-18. This included £5.5m in the locality of the Eisteddfod in 2018 and a total economic value of £6.9m in Wales through the centres⁵. Of course, the Urdd centres also provide an important opportunity for children to socialize in Welsh outside the classroom, which is especially important for children from areas where Welsh is not spoken on a community level or who come from non-Welsh speaking backgrounds. It is not clear when the centres will reopen or how this will be done. This is a cause for concern for the children themselves but also for the economic situation of the Urdd and its activities for the coming period.

These large festivals and smaller regional festivals are important trading destinations for a large number of Welsh and Welsh language businesses. One business owner who produces unique goods in Welsh told us that the impact of COVID-19 on their business will be catastrophic. This business, like many other small businesses, is completely reliant on events and festivals to sell its goods and stay in business. Unlike shops, craft traders such as these will not regain their market after the restrictions have been lifted; and their sources of income will have disappeared completely for the year. This raises questions about their long-term viability as they provide employment for many Welsh speakers in communities across Wales. It is fair to say that digital opportunities have of course developed to provide a platform for many of the traders who would have introduced their products this holiday such as @CrefftwyrAberystwyth.

Another consideration is the sources of charitable and private sponsorship available to promote Welsh culture and events and which are dependent on the economic success of the companies and the economy as a whole. Again, it is uncertain how the current situation will affect the economy but it appears that there will be at least a short-term, if not a long-term, impact. The National Eisteddfod and the Urdd are working with the Welsh Government and public broadcasters to ensure an alternative cultural offering during the weeks in which the festivals should have been held; and the Welsh Government has announced funding of more than £800,000 that will be shared between the Eisteddfod Genedlaethol and the Llangollen International Musical Eisteddfod⁶. Many festivals have successfully turned to digital media and other means to stage their festivals, such as Tafwyl⁷ that was held digitally; Eisteddfod T⁸ that was held on S4C and BBC Radio Cymru and Eisteddfod AmGen⁹ which is held digitally. This shows the flexibility of Welsh language culture and its ability to innovate. Indeed, it could be argued that opportunities have increased for people to enjoy the contributions more widely because digital media

⁴ <https://www.bbc.co.uk/cymrufyw/51908413>

⁵ https://www.urdd.cymru/files/7715/4219/7589/Asesiad_Effaith_Economaidd_yr_Urdd_09.11.18_English.pdf

⁶ <https://www.bbc.co.uk/cymrufyw/52387302>

⁷ <https://tafwyl.org/>

⁸ <https://www.urdd.cymru/en/eisteddfod/eisteddfod-t/>

⁹ https://eisteddfod.wales/amgen?_ga=2.129739916.186363432.1593125591-659079285.1585436581



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reaches a wider audience and people will be able to access the contributions at a later date. However, despite these successes and their ability to partially fill the cultural gap, they will not make up for the economic and social blow that the adjournment of eisteddfodau and other major festivals bring.

Of course, it's not just major cultural events such as the eisteddfodau that have been postponed. Smaller festivals and events, many of which are organized by groups of volunteers who work through the medium of Welsh, and range from gigs to food festivals to music and arts festivals and small and large agricultural festivals have had to be postponed or cancelled completely. These events provide opportunities for people to socialize and enjoy Welsh culture through the medium of Welsh. They attract people to areas all over Wales contributing to the economy in those areas by using local companies to maintain their infrastructure, and giving small companies a market to sell their goods. It must be borne in mind that fundraising events for hosting the events may also have had to be postponed and that the exceptional weather of recent years has in many cases already undermined their financial standing, as of course in the course of the National Eisteddfod. Many of these events are also dependent on volunteers. In the face of uncertainty over the financial position of some of these events in the medium term it is important to ensure that these events continue into the future and that there is support for volunteers to face difficult situations. Many of these volunteers are also likely to be older, and consideration must be given to whether they will still wish to be involved in these events in the future. We would want to see the Government and its partners working with organisers of local and national Welsh events to support their continuation and to identify all businesses that are heavily reliant on festivals and cultural events to find a way to support them to overcome this difficult time.

The arts

You have as a Committee already published your report on the effect of Covid-19 on the arts in Wales, so you are already aware of the challenges that face the sector¹⁰. The report does not however, highlight the situation of the Welsh language within the arts sector. The Arts Council of Wales' Developing Bilingualism in the Arts Toolkit¹¹ quotes statistics showing that 81% of people who can speak Welsh attend arts events once a year or more, compared to 77% of people who do not understand Welsh. Half (49%) of Welsh speakers in Wales take part in arts activities once a year or more, compared to 37% of non-Welsh speakers; and 36% of people who can speak, read and write Welsh are involved on a voluntary basis in organising an arts event or activity, compared with only 15% of those with no understanding of Welsh. Arts companies and centres across Wales are vital to the Welsh language and sustain the Welsh culture in communities across Wales.

As your report concludes the economic impact of Covid-19 on the sector will be considerable. As you note although the Arts Council of Wales has created a stabilisation fund for organisations and individuals in the sector¹², and the Welsh Government's

¹⁰ <https://senedd.wales/laid%20documents/cr-ld13215/cr-ld13215%20-e.pdf>

¹¹ https://arts.wales/sites/default/files/2019-10/Developing%20Bilingualism%20in%20the%20Arts%20Toolkit_0.pdf

¹² <https://arts.wales/funding/coronavirus>



Business Support Scheme offers a level of financial protection in the short term; there is real concern about what will happen to companies, centres and individuals in the medium and long term. We are concerned about the impact this will have on the viability of the Welsh language as a viability of the language as the medium for culture and the livelihood of many Welsh speakers. One travelling Welsh language theatre company shared their position with us saying that they had already cancelled one tour this year because of the situation even though they had to honour payments to all their contractors. They believed that they would have to cancel their next production for the autumn and anticipated that it would not be possible to continue with plans for a third production in early 2021. This would mean that there would be no income from the sale of tickets during the current financial year resulting in a loss of over £ 50,000 to the company, affecting their work and future plans. There is also concern about the impact of the disease on future audience patterns. They also note that they are well aware of their role as an employer of Welsh core and contractual staff, and their work in bringing Welsh culture to both rural and urban areas of Wales. There is, of course, further concern because by the time the crisis is over people may have had to leave this sector to look for work leading to the loss of a generation of people who work through the medium of Welsh in the sector, or they will have left the Welsh language sector and/or Wales as higher wages are available elsewhere.

We broadly support the recommendations of your report, but would like to stress that consideration should be given to whether the Welsh-speaking arts sector will need to receive further support because of the opportunities it provides for Welsh speakers to socialize in Welsh and its importance in promoting the cultural and economic viability of a minority language such as Welsh.

The book industry

Despite the fact that more people are turning to books during the pandemic and that reading, like film and television, is supporting people's mental health during this time, it is a worrying time for the companies and publishers who are responsible for producing and selling Welsh language books. It is encouraging that according to reports in the media¹³ there has been an increase in the number of Welsh books sold on the Internet, and that there has also been an increase in the number of e-books sold. However, this does not mitigate the fact that sales have generally decreased. Although some shops and publishers houses are selling through the post and on their websites one publisher, which employs 22 members of staff told us that they lost up to 90% of their income at the beginning of the lockdown as they were not able to publish any books at all. In their case, as in the case of many other publishers, the eisteddfodau would have been key places to sell books. The fact that local papers have either ceased publishing or are publishing in digital format only means that publishers are losing a regular source of printing work and that some readers are being deprived of them. The Books Council of Wales has announced £ 150,000 from the Welsh Government to help the book sector during the current coronavirus crisis. The Books Council of Wales website has details of the Welsh

¹³ <https://www.bbc.co.uk/cymrufyw/53064380>



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bookshops selling online, and Welsh books can be purchased on the gwales.com website with commission being given to a bookshop of the buyer's choice. However, due to the loss of crucial sales opportunities at the eisteddfodau it is necessary to ensure that the crisis does not affect the Welsh book industry in the long term.

The media

The role of the media during the crisis has been vitally important and the need for Welsh language items and resources is more evident than ever as many work and care at home. As already noted, the Welsh media has responded positively to the current situation with joint ventures between the eisteddfodau and S4C and BBC Cymru such as Eisteddfod T. They have also shared Welsh educational resources to help parents educate their children at home, supporting children from all walks of life, but especially those from non-Welsh speaking backgrounds. For example S4C launched Ysgol Cyw to support home learning and has released a large amount of archive material. It is striking that the average viewing figures for S4C's children's programmes has risen by 182%. In April S4C announced the intention to Commission tens of new programmes and series worth millions, to be broadcast before the end of July¹⁴. It has also employed two digital journalists¹⁵ to try to provide more news services in response to the pandemic on S4C's Facebook and Twitter Feeds, and it also broadcasted the first Covid-19 drama to be filmed entirely on laptops and mobile phones¹⁶. It is important to learn lessons from these opportunities once the crisis is over.

However, the situation has inevitably had an impact on the broadcasting industry and changes have had to be made to broadcasting schedules in the short term. This has had an impact on production companies as some programmes have had to stop filming due to social exclusion restrictions, and there are uncertainties about the circumstances of resuming production when that will be possible, as well as costs associated with filming in the production under these new circumstances. For example, filming of the popular drama series *Pobl y Cwm* and *Rownd a Rownd* was stopped, the first being a programme provided to S4C by the BBC as a result of the 1990 Broadcasting Act which requires the BBC to provide no less than 520 hours of content to S4C every year. Another element provided by the BBC to S4C is broadcasting from the National Eisteddfod providing 80 hours of the total of 520 broadcast normally during one week at the beginning of August.

As with workers in the arts sector, many workers in the television industry are freelance, and have to rely on Government support for the self-employed during this time. With this in mind it should be emphasised that S4C's annual report for¹⁷ explains that 44% of S4C's expenditure happens in the north and west of Wales which are areas that are economically disadvantaged. These are also areas where there is a high density of Welsh speakers. It is also a concern that the Welsh language arts and media will lose talented and experienced individuals to the English market in due course as workers and artists try to make up for

¹⁴ <http://www.s4c.cymru/en/press/post/37317/s4c-announces-tens-of-new-commissions//>

¹⁵ <http://www.s4c.cymru/en/press/post/37297/s4cs-new-digital-journalists-bring-the-latest-covid-19-news>

¹⁶ <http://www.s4c.cymru/en/press/post/37264/new-s4c-series-leads-the-way-for-lockdown-dramas/>

¹⁷ https://dlo6cyw1kmb.s.cloudfront.net/media/media_assets/s4c-adroddiad-blyn-2018-19.pdf



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the lost wages during the lockdown. We must ensure that the current situation does not jeopardize their livelihoods and that they can continue to work in Welsh.

Sport

The research gathered in the formulation the Welsh Language Commissioner's Welsh: Amdani!¹⁸ Project has highlighted that there are not enough opportunities to participate in sport through the medium of Welsh and that young people are eager for more opportunities. The Urdd plays a key role of course but sports associations were given the challenge to grab the opportunity to develop these opportunities across Wales. Despite my office's efforts in providing resources, support and examples of good practice, the feeling remains that provision is inconsistent and opportunities are missed. Leadership and investment is required from Sport Wales and others, so that the sector contributes proactively to the objectives of the Cymraeg 2050 Welsh language strategy. As the sports sector resumes following Covid-19, and as part of the new investment framework, this is a unique opportunity to consider the needs of members and players across Wales and to develop new ways of conducting activities naturally in Welsh.

It must be emphasized that there are important lessons to be learned from how Welsh language and culture has adapted and been creative in the face of the challenges of the pandemic. However, as I said at the beginning of this letter, we are only just beginning to understand the effects of the pandemic. I have not, for example, discussed the potential effects of the lockdown period on Welsh language services, on the importance of the use of Welsh as a working language, on childcare and Welsh-medium education, or on Welsh-speaking communities dependent on tourism and agriculture. As I become more aware of further effects I will contact you again as necessary. However, it is clear that the crisis is having a far-reaching impact on all those elements that are important to the social, cultural and economic viability of the Welsh language and on those things that contribute to Cymraeg 2050. As a result, I ask the Committee to consider conducting a specific inquiry into the impact of Covid-19, and the next stages of the crisis on the Welsh language in order to ensure that we learn lessons going forward.

Yours sincerely,

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Welsh Language Commissioner

¹⁸ <http://www.comisiynyddygyymraeg.cymru/hybu/en/guidelines/Pages/amdani!.aspx>