

IFRCS08 Meg Ryder, Archivist and Union Representative, Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Wales

Senedd Cymru | Welsh Parliament

Pwyllgor Diwylliant, Cyfathrebu, y Gymraeg, Chwaraeon, a Chysylltiadau Rhyngwladol | Culture, Communications, Welsh Language, Sport, and International Relations Committee

Effaith Gostyngiadau Cyllid ar Ddiwylliant a Chwaraeon | Impact of Funding Reductions for Culture and Sport

Ymateb gan: Meg Ryder, Archifydd a Chynrychiolydd Undeb, Comisiwn Brenhinol Henebion Cymru | Evidence from: Meg Ryder, Archivist and Union Representative, Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Wales

1. What impacts has reduced funding had on your organisation and sector so far?

We have lost five members of staff, all of whom had more than two decades of experience working at the Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historic Monuments of Wales. Six of the members of staff who took voluntary redundancy worked full-time, but there has been no money to recruit and train replacements, so the remaining staff have little option but to take on the work they can, but without the level of expertise we previously had.

Those who took voluntary redundancy are: our digitisation and conservation specialist, our historic aerial photography specialist, our head of library and copyright expert, our head of public services and our graphics officer

2. What measures have you taken in light of it, such as changing what you do and how you do it.

The main changes the public will notice is to our Libraries and Enquiries service. The reading room is only open three days a week now, instead of five. We can no longer offer digitised copies of prints or negatives in our collection, and enquiries take much longer to respond to.

Behind the scenes, we are attempting to mitigate these losses and enhance the collection by, for example, systematically digitising the aerial photographs and

other well-used collections. However, this process takes time and can only continue if we successfully apply for grant money, making the project somewhat time-limited and precarious.

Long term, we are also looking to make all the material in our collection which is either out of copyright or produced inhouse freely available to the public. However, this process also takes a lot of time and resources that we don't currently have whilst staff are still undertaking their usual duties.

3. To what extent will these impacts be irreversible (e.g. venues closing, or specialist skills being lost rather than a temporary restriction in activities)?

The voluntary redundancy process was undertaken at such speed that there was no time for those leaving to pass on their extensive skills and experience. Three members of staff had been with us since the 1980s and although they have done their best with desk instructions and conversations, it is impossible to convey that amount of knowledge in a few months.

Our digitisation and conservation officer was a specialist who will be particularly hard to replace, as they had a background in analogue photography and was an expert in the preservation and conservation of historic photographs, in addition to knowing how to scan all manner of materials, from maps to acetate negatives, to a very high specification. It is unlikely that, even if we had the funding to replace ■■■, we would find someone who had the same skills set.

4. What interventions would you like to see from the Welsh Government, beyond increased funding?

Stability of funding, and more notice of how much funding will be received for the year ahead. At present we don't find out what our annual budget will be until half way through the year, neither do we know if staff will receive a pay rise, and if so how much. This makes planning for the long term incredibly difficult. This year, we were told just before Christmas that we would be facing a 22% cut, which would have been catastrophic. It was not confirmed that we would instead be facing a 10% cut to our budget until January, and the voluntary redundancy process had to be completed by the end of the financial year. For a small organisation to live with such uncertainty long-term is unsustainable and demoralising as it prevents staff from dealing with their important day-to-day work, and causes weeks of preventable stress.

5. To what extent do the impacts you describe fall differently on people with protected characteristics and people of a lower socioeconomic status?

Accessing our collections is more difficult as the reading room is only open for three days a week instead of five, and it is more difficult for our library and enquiries staff to provide digital copies of records for those who cannot travel to Aberystwyth

6. Do you have any other points you wish to raise within the scope of this inquiry?