

IFRCS14 Pedr ap Llwyd, Personal Capacity, Former CEO of National Library of Wales

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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: Pedr ap Llwyd, Sail Personol, Cyn Brif Weithredwr Llyfrgell Genedlaethol Cymru | Evidence from: Pedr ap Llwyd, Personal Capacity, Former CEO of National Library of Wales

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

I write as a former CEO of the National Library of Wales.

The sustained reduction in funding has already had a significant impact on both the National Library of Wales and the broader cultural sector. One of the most immediate consequences has been the reduction in staff numbers, which directly affects the range and quality of services the Library was able to offer the public. With fewer staff, particularly those with specialist skills, its ability to care for and preserve our national collections was severely compromised. This raises serious concerns about the long-term safety and preservation of Wales' documentary heritage.

Furthermore, reduced funding limits the resources available for essential building maintenance, which is vital to safeguarding our national collections. If this underfunding continues, the Library's Board of Trustees risks passing on to future generations a diminished National Library and documentary heritage in worse condition than it is today.

Another critical impact is the restriction of access to the Library's services and collections. For example, digitisation—a key method of ensuring wider access—is a costly process, and without adequate funding, such initiatives will be severely limited. This will hinder public access to invaluable resources, reducing the cultural and educational benefits the National Library can provide.

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

In addition to reducing staff numbers, I was forced to take several other measures in response to reduced funding. We had to prioritise essential services, often at the expense of broader programming, limiting the scope and variety of projects we were able to undertake. For example, certain preservation, outreach, and research initiatives had to be scaled back or delayed indefinitely.

To mitigate the impact on public access, we had sought to streamline our operations, focusing on cost-saving measures such as reviewing internal processes and increasing reliance on digital tools where possible. However, these changes couldn't fully compensate for the loss of skilled staff or the diminished capacity to offer comprehensive services.

We also sought external funding and partnerships, such as grants or collaborations with other institutions, to support key projects. However, these efforts often come with constraints and are not a sustainable solution to the structural underfunding the Library faced.

Despite our best efforts, these measures could only go so far in addressing the long-term challenges posed by ongoing funding cuts. The impact on the quality and accessibility of Library services, as well as the preservation of its collections, remains a serious concern to me.

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)?

Many of the impacts of reduced funding are likely to be irreversible if current trends continue. The loss of specialist staff, for instance, should be a critical concern. Expertise in fields such as conservation, archiving, and digital preservation takes years to cultivate, and once these skills are lost, it will be incredibly difficult, if not impossible, to replace them. This would have a devastating effect on the ability of the National Library to properly care for our national collections in the future.

At the time of my departure from the Library (May 2024) the preservation of the collections themselves was also at risk. A failure to maintain adequate conservation practices or to invest in the fabric of the building will lead to long-

term damage, which may be irreversible if left unaddressed. Over time, this could result in the deterioration of our nation's documentary heritage, diminishing the cultural legacy passed down to future generations.

Furthermore, the reduction in public access—whether through fewer services, reduced opening hours, or limitations on digitisation—could have lasting effects on public engagement. Once access is restricted, it is difficult to rebuild trust and reconnect with the communities who rely on our services.

As the only copyright and legal deposit library in Wales, if due to reduced funding, a decision were made to limit or scale back the collection of legal deposit materials, the consequences would be absolutely irreversible. Legal deposit ensures that every significant publication is preserved for future generations, and any gaps in these collections cannot be retroactively filled. Once an opportunity to collect is missed, the materials are lost to the national record forever, compromising the completeness of our cultural memory and the historical record of Wales. Limiting the National Library's collection of legal deposit materials would not only result in irreparable gaps in the nation's documentary heritage, but it would also undermine the Library's status as a truly national institution. The ability to collect and preserve the intellectual output of the nation is a core function of the National Library. Any reduction in this capacity would effectively relegate the Library to a lesser institution, diminishing its standing and its role as the custodian of Wales' cultural and intellectual history. Over time, this would erode its identity as a comprehensive national library, weakening its ability to serve future generations.

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

Beyond increased funding, I believe a key intervention from the Welsh Government should be to strengthen its relationship with the National Library of Wales. During my tenure, I had only two meetings a year with the relevant minister, each lasting just thirty minutes, and throughout that time, our key Welsh Government official did not visit the Library once. This lack of meaningful engagement prevented a full understanding of the challenges the Library was facing, as well as the opportunities it was able to offer. Regular, in-depth dialogue and on-site visits from government officials would foster a better appreciation of the Library's needs and the vital role it plays in Welsh culture.

It is also essential for senior cultural officials to have a better understanding and appreciation of the Welsh context, which is often best achieved by living in Wales and actively engaging with its vibrant culture. While those outside of Wales can bring valuable perspectives, there are unique insights and nuances that come from being immersed in the local community. This helps ensure a well-rounded approach to preserving and promoting Welsh culture.

Additionally, I would like to see the Welsh Government offer greater strategic support to the National Library. This could include working together on long-term sustainability plans that go beyond short-term funding solutions, ensuring that the Library's collections, services, and expertise are preserved for future generations. Furthermore, the government should actively recognise the Library's unique role as the guardian of Wales' documentary heritage and facilitate stronger collaborations with other national institutions and sectors.

By establishing a more robust partnership, the Welsh Government can help safeguard the Library's future while ensuring it continues to enrich the cultural life of Wales.

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

The impacts of reduced funding are felt across the entire population, but they disproportionately affect individuals with protected characteristics and those from lower socioeconomic backgrounds.

People with disabilities, for example, may face greater barriers to physically accessing the National Library, making remote access through digitisation and online services crucial. A reduction in digitisation efforts, caused by underfunding, severely limits their ability to engage with our collections. Similarly, individuals who rely on accessible formats such as audio or large print may face reduced access to the Library's resources if staffing and specialised services are cut.

For people from lower socioeconomic backgrounds, reduced funding limits opportunities for free public access to cultural and educational resources. The National Library plays a vital role in providing access to knowledge and learning materials for those who may not be able to afford alternatives. If services are restricted or digitisation efforts slowed, these individuals are likely to be disproportionately disadvantaged, as they rely heavily on the Library for educational support and research.

Moreover, those from minority ethnic backgrounds or with specific cultural needs may see less representation and access to materials relevant to their communities if staff reductions or cuts to outreach and engagement programmes limit the Library's ability to expand and diversify its collections.

In summary, reduced funding risks deepening inequality by making the Library's collections and services less accessible to those who already face barriers to participation, particularly people with protected characteristics and those from lower socioeconomic groups.

During my time as CEO, I would have loved to reach out more to people with protected characteristics and those from lower socioeconomic backgrounds. However, due to limited resources and staff capacity, it simply wasn't possible to do so effectively. Expanding our outreach and making our collections more accessible to underrepresented groups requires dedicated funding, specialist staff, and targeted programmes. Unfortunately, the reality of reduced funding made it difficult to prioritise these essential initiatives, despite their importance.

Without the necessary support, the Library's ability to reach those who could benefit most from its services was significantly hampered.

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