

IFRCS42, Carol Whittaker, Vice-President, Federation of Museums and Galleries 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: Carol Whittaker, Is-Lywydd, Ffederasiwn Amgueddfeydd Cymru | Evidence from: Carol Whittaker, Vice-President, Federation of Museums and Galleries of Wales

Evidence concerning the Museum Sector in Wales - Preamble

- i. This response is from the Federation of Museums and Art Galleries of Wales (the Federation), on behalf of its members, in relation to the issues affecting museums following cuts to expenditure on culture. The Federation is the independent strategic body for museums and art galleries in Wales. Registered Charity No: 1102270.
- ii. Museums are so much more than wet weather attractions for tourists. They care for over 1.2 million artefacts which tell the many stories of Wales' vibrant and diverse communities. The artefacts they care for embody personal stories now familiar from TV shows such as 'The Repair Shop'. Their activities and exhibitions build communities and sense of place. They are the largest provider of out-of-school education in Wales and many are 'Dementia Friendly' and 'Family Friendly'. Museums occupy over 200 buildings which are recognised historic environment assets¹.
- iii. A museum is a 'not-for-profit, permanent institution in the service of society that researches, collects, conserves, interprets and exhibits tangible and intangible heritage'². The majority of artefacts in museum

¹ Buildings and sites which are scheduled, listed or located in conservation areas. Data from 'Spotlight on Museums 2011'.

² Extract from The International Council of Museums definition of a museum, 2022

collections have been freely donated over many years in the expectation that they would be held in trust on behalf of the communities they serve, and used for public benefit.

- iv. 114 Welsh venues currently participate in the industry quality standard 'Accreditation Scheme for Museums in the UK'³, administered in Wales by Welsh Government. Accreditation is an eligibility criterion for many grant schemes.
- v. The museum ecosystem in Wales, as elsewhere in the UK, is complex. Governing bodies include charitable trusts⁴ (80), Local Authorities (29), and universities (5) but cuts are impacting across the sector.

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

- vi. Unfortunately, the recent cuts come on top of nearly 15 years of austerity measures. Over the decade from 2009 to 2019 total expenditure on local government museums in Wales fell by 31% in real terms⁵.
- vii. Local Authority (LA) run museums are facing direct budget cuts amongst stiff competition for funding with other services. The proportion of LA spend on protected services rose from 59% to 68% in 2019⁶. The situation for museums is unlikely to improve.
- viii. The impacts of this reduction range from closures; transfer out from LA control; reduced opening hours; reduced numbers of permanent staff hours; posts held vacant causing discontinuity of service; introduction of admission charges; unrealistic income generating targets; reduced funding for maintenance of buildings and collections; removal of artefact acquisition budgets; and, bans on out of county travel (severely restricting training and networking opportunities).

³ [Accredited museums in Wales \[HTML\] | GOV.WALES](#)

⁴ Including Amgueddfa Cymru, The National Library of Wales, the National Trust and the 4 regimental museums.

⁵ Local Authority Investment in Museums after a Decade of Austerity, MA Report 2022 p4.
<https://www.museumsassociation.org/app/uploads/2021/10/Local-Authority-Funding-Report-2021-final-version.pdf>

⁶ [Local authority revenue and capital outturn expenditure 2022-23 \(gov.wales\)](#)

- ix. In 2011 there were 40 Accredited LA museums. By 2024 this has decreased to 28. One new LA museum opened but six have closed and seven have been transferred to trusts (including to the National Trust and two trusts established specifically as vehicles for outsourcing provision of museums and other services). Transfer to trust status does not remove legal responsibilities for collections so it is a nuanced tool that does not automatically reduce a Local Authority's liabilities. The integrated impact assessment carried out by Caerphilly County Borough Council for closure of The Winding House, the only Accredited museum in the county, seems more concerned with the café than its responsibilities for collections⁷.
- x. 75% of museums rely on LA support⁸. Independent museums in Wales receive financial and/or professional support such as operating costs, discretionary business rate relief and free or low-cost building occupancy. Cuts have led to building and maintenance costs being transferred to museum trusts via Community Asset Transfers. At least two museums are currently facing eviction with no identified alternative homes. As a result of LA cuts, there are fewer qualified staff available to provide professional advice via the Accreditation museum mentor scheme.
- xi. There have been other, hidden, impacts from the cuts which are difficult to quantify and articulate e.g.
- xii. Council officers do not have the confidence, or are no longer allowed, to make financial decisions so projects get postponed, posts go unfilled and some museums have been waiting for years for decisions about lease extensions – essential for museums to retain Accreditation.
- xiii. Building repairs which rely on the LA to specify and/or implement are seemingly being ignored. Even when a museum can apply for a grant to carry out work, they cannot obtain the necessary permissions or quotes within the grant application period.
- xiv. The impact of cuts on Amgueddfa Cymru – Museum Wales (AC-MW) is well documented and will be devastating, not just for AC-MW but for the many museums and communities which rely on their expertise. 64% of local museums in Wales use AC-MW services and over 50% have

⁷ [explore-community-asset-transfer-for-winding-house.aspx \(caerphilly.gov.uk\)](https://www.caerphilly.gov.uk/explore-community-asset-transfer-for-winding-house.aspx)

⁸ [Museum Spotlight Survey 2022 \(gov.wales\)](https://www.gov.wales/museum-spotlight-survey-2022)

worked in partnership with them. Most museum subject and discipline specialists in Wales are based in AC-MW.

- xv. University museums rely on academic bodies for funding and the parlous financial situation of most universities is well documented.
- xvi. The Executive Committee of the Army Board 2011 Army Museums Study set out a long-term plan of funding cuts which led to a loss of support for curatorial posts at Regimental Museums in Wales.

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

- xvii. In 2010, Welsh Government, in partnership with the whole museum sector in Wales introduced the first Museums Strategy in the UK. It was very successful, but coincided with the start of reductions in public funding. In 2014, Welsh Government recognised that austerity was affecting service delivery and commissioned an Expert Review of Local Museums⁹. This was intended to inform the next iteration of the Museum Strategy but lack of resources meant that recommendations were not implemented effectively and sector strategies were 'banned'. It is hoped that the new 'Cultural Priorities' will provide a new strategic framework but as yet it is difficult to see how these will be delivered in practice.
- xviii. The Expert Review counselled against transferring museums out of LA control for financial reasons. Nonetheless, as a response to austerity, nine LA museums have been transferred to independent trusts for financial reasons. This can be an opportunity for museums to develop entrepreneurial skills and source revenue streams only available to the independent sector, but there have been few resources to support the transition. One museum has already been taken back under LA control amidst a multi-million pound redevelopment.
- xix. Entrepreneurial and fundraising skills have improved with many museums successfully increasing their earned income e.g. Ceredigion Museum increased income from sales, fees and charges from £9,963 in 2009/10 (adjusted for inflation) to £210,000 in 2019; a staggering

⁹ [Expert review of local museum provision | GOV.WALES](#)

increase of 2007%. 'Rewards' for such success include reduced opening hours, increased income targets and options of transferring to trust status explored. Sadly, many more museums have seen income decrease against a backdrop of reduced disposable income and shorter opening hours.

- xx. 17.70% of museums bring in external grant aid to support their activities¹⁰. Some museums e.g., have established trusts specifically to fundraise. Cardiff Museum Development Trust created an endowment fund supported with £265,000 from the National Lottery Heritage Fund¹¹. Despite this success, the museum is currently forced to seek new premises.
- xxi. In 2015 museums reported providing 11,600 formal and informal learning and outreach sessions to over 625,000 participants. By 2019, this had risen to nearly 30,000 sessions and almost 1 million participants. The pandemic took a devastating toll on this, despite a move to online provision and has not yet recovered.
- xxii. Many museums ensure that events, activities and collections are targeted at disadvantaged and ethnically diverse communities in pursuance of local and national government priorities as set out in numerous frameworks including the Programme for Government, the Wellbeing of Future Generations goals and the Anti-Racist Wales Action Plan.
- xxiii. Volunteers have always played an important role in local museum delivery, but volunteers need encouragement and support. Between 2011 and 2019 volunteer numbers increased to constitute 72% of the museum workforce, rising from 3400 volunteers (223,000 hours) to 4,200 (405,000 hours). Post pandemic, figures were only 1,800 volunteers (144,000 hours). AC-MW increased its volunteer numbers from less than 100 in 2011 to over 1,100 by 2020.

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)?

¹⁰ [Museum Spotlight Survey: 2022 \(summary\) \[HTML\] | GOV.WALES](#)

¹¹ [Heritage Endowments interim report \(heritagefund.org.uk\)](#)

- xxiv. It is difficult to see how further cuts can be made without wholesale closure of museums, major reductions in access, falling standards and loss of collections developed for community learning and access over many years.
- xxv. It is equally difficult to quantify unknowns and museums have generally proven to be remarkably resilient. Many of the impacts of budget 'salami slicing' in recent years may be reversible by investing additional funding and time. But the longer austerity measures remain in place, the more difficult it will be to reverse the measures taken.
- xxvi. Museum collections embody huge historical, social and educational value for the communities they serve but many artefacts have low intrinsic financial values and are as likely to be scrapped as sold. However, stewardship of museum artefacts needs human and financial resources, and structurally sound buildings. Without these, collections will decay beyond repair and may be disposed of to reduce care costs. Disposal is a legitimate part of good collections management but it must be done within an ethical framework. Disposal for purely financial gain causes irreparable reputational damage donors, external funders and communities.
- xxvii. The most recent information about audiences and community engagement was gathered when pandemic impacts were still being felt. Museums have demonstrated an ability to rebuild audiences, however there remains a huge shortfall at 69%¹² of pre-pandemic levels. They are unlikely to recover if capacity and access continues to be reduced. Rebuilding community trust and relevance requires resources.
- xxviii. 25.60% of the paid FTE museum workforce in Wales works for national bodies. But in 2022, AC-MW reported only 19 curatorial FTE staff¹³ and that was before the most recent round of redundancies. This is an astonishingly low figure for a national museum. It has already been noted how much the local sector relies on specialist knowledge from AC-MW. Wales is fortunate to have a highly respected collections care and conservation course at Cardiff University so these skills are unlikely to be lost

¹² [Museums as community learning organisations \(gov.wales\)](#)

¹³ [Museum Spotlight Survey 2022 \(gov.wales\)](#) Table 3.23

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

- xxix. The Welsh Government has a unique and strong relationship with the local museum sector in Wales. It is the only home nation to provide direct professional advice, support and funding to the sector. Elsewhere this is done via 'arms length' bodies. Officials in the Culture Division regularly works with the Federation and we are grateful for this. Welsh Government also awards funding to the Federation to redistribute as training and small project grants which are hugely valued by the sector. Since 2016, museums have also benefitted from capital grants.
- xxx. There are a number of Welsh Government interventions which the Federation would like to see:

Create three Regional museum bodies

- xxxi. Welsh Government should ask the Senedd for powers to enact the key recommendation of the 2015 Expert Review i.e. amalgamation of LA museums into three, more viable, regional bodies each with direct funding support from Welsh Government.
- xxxii. The Review recommended that instead of Welsh Government giving Local Authorities money to spend on museums (although the budgets are not hypothecated), those funds should go directly to the museum bodies. No extra running costs were proposed at the time, nor did the review suggest closing museums.
- xxxiii. Welsh Government commissioned research to establish what would be required for genuine transformation to be realised, but this was never published. Neither LA senior officials nor elected members were interested in the idea. It seems they would rather see museums close than collaborate and Welsh Government has no enforcement powers to prevent this.

Fund the transition to regional bodies

- xxxiv. The Expert Review recommended a one-off revenue transformation fund, to facilitate creation of the new bodies. Instead, a capital scheme called 'Transformation Grants' was opened to all Accredited museums in 2017. Whilst they are grateful for this and major improvements have
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been made, it has not transformed the way museum provision is delivered across Wales.

Give LA museums direct relief from National Non-Domestic Rates (Business rates)

- xxxv. This was recommended by the Expert Review to place LA museums on an equal footing with independent museums and remove a key driver for transferring LA museums to trusts. Since the Review, and thanks to national campaigning, in 2023 the Valuation Office changed the way museum business rates are calculated which should result in significant savings. However, charity run museums still benefit from at least 80% reduction compared to LA museums.

Statutory protection for museum collections

- xxxvi. This is already afforded to historic environment assets, library services, and to archives under the various public records acts.
- xxxvii. Attempts were made incorporate museum collections into the Historic Environment Act (Wales) 2016 but they were deemed too difficult as there was no recognised system for determining historic value. However, officials in Culture Division are currently looking at the potential for a scheme to recognise the significance of museum collections. Schemes already exist in England (Designation) and Scotland (Recognition) but these are not tied to legislation. Wales has a unique opportunity to set a precedent for the rest of the UK.

Require Local Authorities to report on the contribution of their museums to The Wellbeing of Future Generations commissioner

- xxxviii. This would help raise awareness with elected members and other council departments about the true value of museums to local communities.
- xxxix. AC-MW is specifically named in the Act and reports directly to the Future Generations commissioner but few local authorities report on their museums' contributions¹⁴. This is despite having national indicators for 'Professional standards in heritage collections' (39); 'Looking after our cultural heritage' (40); and, 'Participation in arts, culture and heritage'

¹⁴ **Museum Spotlight Survey 2022 (gov.wales)** Only 9 local museums were asked to supply data. Table 3.51

(35). Local Authorities could report on all / any museums they support – not just on those they manage directly.

Workforce research

- xi. Welsh Government should build on its Spotlight data and the 2016 Character Matters¹⁵ report to discover what is happening to and within the museum workforce in Wales and identify development needs. Spotlight workforce statistics, which show a growing workforce, do not correspond to anecdotal evidence from museum workers who report increasing lack of capacity and low morale.

End financial ‘short termism’

- xli. We hope that Capital transformation grants will continue to be available to museums. However, despite the best efforts of officials to maximise the time available to spend the money, many museums still struggle to do so. Even with notional 3-year budgeting, Culture Division is not allowed to carry forward committed funds for uncompleted projects. Even when projects are notionally accepted over more than one financial year, there is no guarantee of funds being available beyond the first year.
- xlii. It is difficult to imagine such constraints applying to other capital investments such as the new Dyfi Bridge or Carnaerfon by-pass.

VAT Refund Scheme for museums and galleries.

- xliii. Welsh Government should ask the UK Government to adopt a more flexible approach to the scheme. It requires museums to be open to the general public for at least 30 hours per week, without exception (i.e. for 52 weeks of the year). This is impractical for museums in Wales which tend to be smaller than those in England and Scotland. In Wales, only AC-MW and the university museums are eligible.

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

¹⁵ **Character Matters: Attitudes, behaviours and skills in the UK Museum Workforce - Full Report | Arts Council England**

- xliv. The vast majority of people who live in Wales live within 30 minutes drive-time of a museum and museums are to be found in all types of communities from the most to the least deprived as determined by the Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation¹⁶.
- xlv. Museums work hard to build relationships with, and provide services for, people with protected characteristics and of lower socio-economic status. For example, the Egypt Centre at Swansea Museum runs an award winning volunteer programme which targets long term unemployed adults and volunteers of all ages with disabilities. Cuts in university funding may place this exemplary scheme at risk.

Fusion

- xlvi. Welsh Government's commitment, made last year, to double its investment in the Fusion programme was warmly welcomed. Local museums, e.g. Storiell in Bangor, have been enthusiastic Fusion partners since its inception. Programme funding has enabled museums to engage proactively with stakeholders through local Fusion co-ordinators and partners such as Kids in Museums. Removal or reduction of Fusion funding will undoubtedly reduce the capacity of museums to support the reduction of poverty through culture.

Grants

- xlvii. Projects which involve people from disadvantaged communities are prioritised for grants awarded by the Federation and funded by Welsh Government. Small grants can make a huge difference and a few hundred pounds may be enough to secure engagement with a local group.
- xlviii. Museums have focused on building new audiences particularly groups that were under-represented in former audiences. Many of our grants are targeted at audiences referenced in government agendas and policies particularly as in-house resources and specialist staff disappear. Wellbeing, diversity and work to reduce inequality are continuing, but protected from cuts by grant programmes such as ours. As resources, capacity, access and experience disappears, the impact will be felt

¹⁶ Spotlight on Museums 2011, Welsh Government, maps 1 and 2.

harder by people with protected characteristics and lower socioeconomic status.

- xlix. Capital Transformation grants from Welsh Government have helped museums become more accessible – both physically and intellectually. Access improvements are likely to stop without this funding. The current minimum grants of £20,000 can be daunting for many small museums which may not need this much to transform access.

Admission Charges

- i. Most museums have not introduced admission charges, although several have in the 24/25 budget cycle, which affect the less well-off socioeconomic groups.
- ii. However, admission charging is a complex issue. Many independent museums prefer to encourage donations than charge for entry but most rely on income from admission fees. They find it unhelpful when politicians and media assert that museums are ‘free entry’ without specifying that they mean AC-MW.
- iii. In response to an Expert Review recommendation, Welsh Government supported the Association for Independent Museums’ research into admission pricing policy. Bilingual reports and advice were published and revised in 2023¹⁷.
- iiii. More museums might be able to offer free admission if they were eligible for the UK VAT Refund Scheme for museums and galleries¹⁸. However, VAT is complicated and most museums will need specialist advice and support on this.

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

- iv. In February 2024 the Federation wrote to the then Deputy Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism regarding the impact of cuts on museums in Wales. Our letter and the response are published on our website:

¹⁷ **[Resources - AIM - Association of Independent Museums \(aim-museums.co.uk\)](https://aim-museums.co.uk)**

¹⁸ **[VAT Refund Scheme for museums and galleries \(VAT Notice 998\) - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk)**

<https://museumsfederation.cymru/correspondence-from-the-deputy-minister/>

- iv. Several reports on the impact of austerity and funding cuts on museums, visitors and workers in Wales and the rest of the UK have been published since reductions in public spending started in 2010. Some are referenced within this submission and may be of interest to committee members:
- Character Matters: Attitudes, behaviours and skills in the UK Museum Workforce, BOP Consulting with The Museum Consultancy, Arts Council England
<https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/supporting-arts-museums-and-libraries/supporting-museums/character-matters-attitudes-behaviours-and-skills-uk-museum-workforce-full-report>
 - Local Authority Investment in Museums after a Decade of Austerity, Museums Association 2022
<https://www.museumsassociation.org/campaigns/advocacy/la-funding-report/>
 - Museums in the UK 2018, Museums Association
<https://archive-medimuseumsassociation.org/31012018-museums-in-the-uk-2018.pdf>
 - Museum Spotlight on Museums Survey 2022
<https://www.gov.wales/museum-spotlight-survey-2022>
 - Spotlight on Museums Survey 2020
<https://www.gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2023-06/spotlight-on-museums-2020.pdf>
 - Spotlight on Museums Survey 2015
<https://www.gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2019-08/spotlight-on-museums-2015.pdf>
 - Research to Understand the Levels of Public Investment in Museums Final Report January 2024 DC Research
<https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/research-and-data/research-understand-levels-public-investment-museums#:~:text=In%202023%20we%20commissioned%20DC%20Research%20and>
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