

## **IFRCS44, Andy Warnock, Regional Organiser, The Musicians' Union**

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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: Andy Warnock, Trefnydd Rhanbarthol, The Musicians' Union |  
Evidence from: Andy Warnock, Regional Organiser, The Musicians' Union

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The Musicians' Union (MU) is the trade union for musicians in the UK, with over 35,000 members working across the UK in all sectors of the music business.

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

It's important to note that the latest set of cuts this consultation relates to, in the 2024/25 Welsh Government budget and Arts Council of Wales (ACW) 2023 investment review, took place in the context of a series of other challenges. These include significant cuts to arts and culture funding across the UK since 2010, the difficulties and extra costs for touring in Europe caused by the UK leaving the EU, increased costs resulting from inflation and energy costs, the reduced BBC licence fee settlement, and changing audience behaviour thanks to the Covid-19 pandemic and cost of living crisis. Reduced funding combined with these existing and ongoing issues causing significant problems for culture, and music in particular, in Wales.

The most significant effect of reduced funding in Wales is the devastating proposed cuts at Welsh National Opera (WNO). WNO experienced a significant cut in the ACW 2023 investment review on top of a large cut to its funding from Arts Council England (ACE) in autumn 2022. The company is now seeking to save £3.5m per year so has presented proposals to make the orchestra and chorus part time, with an associated pay cut of around 15%. It is unsustainable for our members to endure this reduction in income that will also be damaging for professional music in Wales due to the removal of stable, secure jobs.

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Other organisations were also affected by the cuts, such as Trac and Mid Wales Opera. Both are important parts of the musical ecosystem in Wales with distinctive aims and have been considering how to continue without funding from the ACW portfolio.

Cuts in other areas of the Welsh Government budget also have a significant effect on music in Wales. One example is a £500,000 cut to the National Music Service Wales (NMSW) from a previous budget of £4.5m per year since being established. My understanding was that NMSW and the music services intended to absorb as much as of this reduction through cuts and changes to administration and management rather than frontline services, but it is clearly detrimental to the sector and our members' work in any case. 2024/25 is the last year of confirmed funding for NMSW, which has been very positive, and further funding for 25/26 onwards must be found in the next budget.

The recent closure of Young RWCMD was not necessarily based on any one specific funding cut. However, it is vital to note that Young RWCMD did not benefit from equivalent funding to the music and dance scheme in England, which provides grants and help with fees for students at 8 schools and 20 Centres for Advanced Training in England. RWCMD also operates as part of the HE sector which is facing challenges of its own.

Finally, cuts to budgets for culture and music education by individual organisations, Local Authorities, and schools that have taken place across Wales all have an effect on the cultural and musical ecosystem across Wales. Blackwood Miner's Institute is an example of a venue currently facing closure due to Local Authority budget cuts, as Caerphilly Council plan reduce the venue's subsidy from its current value of £347,000.

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

The Musicians' Union is continuing to take a series of measures in response to these cuts, with a particular focus on our core services to members.

Firstly, our priority continues to be supporting musicians with their work and careers. It's particularly important in the current difficult circumstances that organisations across Wales support all of their workers, who must be treated properly, and that musicians are able to seek to earn a living from areas that aren't directly affected by public funding cuts. This work includes support for members to resolve issues with unpaid fees and cancelled gigs, and to increase professionalism in the sector.

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Secondly, we continue to negotiate, monitor, and enforce our collective agreements, and to provide support to members through promulgated rates and advice on other contracts.

Finally, we are seeking to continue, and deepen whenever possible, our engagement with members and also organisations across Wales, some of which feel restricted in their ability to express their view on issues such as funding.

Measures we have observed in response to funding cuts by other organisations can largely be grouped into two categories.

Firstly, issues with rates for work by professional musicians – including in relation to collective agreements - as organisations seek to reduce their costs and pay less for the same services. For instance, we are concerned about the extent to which production companies in Wales are consistently paying the appropriate fees as required by the TAC agreement.

Secondly, reductions in activity, offers for audiences, and work for professional musicians, which are all connected. Even the largest organisations are coping with the current situation by simply reducing the quality and/or quantity of what they do, which means less work for professional musicians and a reduced offer for audiences. For example, the current proposals at WNO would see a reduction in quality and quantity, due to productions featuring a part-time orchestra and fewer performances reducing the pay and work available for employed and self-employed orchestra members and extras/deps. Some other examples of this are sensitive, but one is am-dram theatre companies using recorded music rather than live bands, while audience members still pay for tickets to see these productions.

**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)?**

We are certainly at a point where the effects of the issues set out above, and the changes at specific organisations, are becoming irreversible, while the effects here and now are already significant. A major reason for this is because organisations that have largely survived through the period of austerity since 2010 until recently, through the sorts of changes outline above as well as alternatives such as using reserves, are now finally either closing or dramatically changing their operations.

WNO is a clear and vital example of this: it is a nationally significant arts organisation that was founded over 70 years ago and is currently being forced to

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become a part-time performing company. Trac and Mid Wales Opera, as referred to above, are comparable examples in their distinct areas. In terms of venues St David's Hall - the national concert hall, with no equivalent in Wales or South West England - remains closed with an unclear reopening date, while it seems Blackwood Miner's Institute would be closed indefinitely under Caerphilly Council's current plans.

We are concerned that some changes and problems in music may be less visible and obvious than those in other areas of culture, but it's important to emphasise that cuts to music are having real and specific effects. Organisations like WNO, Trac, and Mid Wales Opera, as well as some of those that use St David's Hall, are and will be doing less work than they would be otherwise. If the proposals at WNO go ahead then musicians in the orchestra will have lower salaries on worse contracts, with less work for freelance players, and with specific cuts to performances that would have happened otherwise, such as those in Bristol and Llandudno in February and May 2025 respectively. We have already seen changes to the number of professional musicians from Wales that are utilised by certain orchestras, with an increase in players travelling from outside Wales.

The changes in music education that are taking place now, and have done in previous years, will also inevitably lead to fewer children having an interest in music and probably fewer professional musicians from Wales. The National Music Service Wales has been important in stabilising music services across Wales and beginning the process of rebuilding them, including areas such as ensemble provision. The current project looking at terms and conditions for instrumental and vocal music teachers is very positive, but provision for children who cannot afford to learn an instrument without financial assistance is still worse than it was in previous decades.

Similarly, the closure of Young RWCMD, which means it is the only conservatoire in Britain without a junior department, leaves a gap in Wales' music ecosystem that is likely to lead to a reduction in professional musicians, and people studying for a music degree, from Wales. That closure will lead to a personally irreversible gap for the children and young people who would have benefited from the previous provision until it is mitigated, as

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

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It's important to note that we are ultimately dealing with a financial issue: many areas of culture and cultural education need funding in order to offer high quality professional provision. That is particularly true for certain art forms, such as opera, and for certain companies, especially those that work in less wealthy areas or with less commercially successful productions (and Wales is already at a disadvantage in that context compared to several parts of England).

However, we believe there are some areas that should be explored, although we wouldn't currently advocate for any of these ideas to be adopted without further consideration and discussion.

Firstly, Welsh Government needs to work with the Arts Council of Wales (ACW) and other arms-length bodies, national companies, and public bodies to take a more strategic approach to funding and supporting culture. We have significant concerns about the content of Welsh Government's draft culture strategy, particularly its lack of information and focus on professional performers and the workforce, and the timing, given that it is being consulted on a year after the ACW investment review while there is a crisis developing in Welsh music. The fact that WNO could be forced into becoming a part-time company (although we hope that can still be avoided) while Welsh Government is finalising its cultural strategy illustrates that problem. Welsh Government must work ACW and local authorities on a strategic approach to culture, including considering and addressing medium and long-term issues, given the importance of those bodies to funding and delivering culture in Wales.

For instance, Cardiff Council – a single local authority – should have never been left to manage St David's Hall given its importance as the national concert hall, the significant maintenance issues, and the level of investment committed to other venues around the country. As a specific point, Welsh Government must urgently reconsider how they can support the redevelopment and reopening of St David's Hall, the national concert hall with no equivalent provision in Wales or South West England. This is not a criticism of any of the specific work that has been done or is ongoing by Cardiff Council or AMG, but a reflection of the fact that the national concert hall should be safeguarded by national bodies such as Welsh Government and ACW, not a single local authority.

Thirdly, Welsh Government and ACW need to seek to further embed a social partnership approach and focus on fair work in all their work on culture. We remain concerned about whether issues that musicians and other professional performers and workers in culture experience – some of which have been highlighted above – will be prevented and acted on by the current approach, particularly given the recent cuts to ACW's own staff. Funding agreements must

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have more stringent requirements around fair work and social partnership that are monitored.

Welsh Government should also explore ways to establish formal long-term agreement with the UK Government and ACE in relation to organisations funded in Wales and England. These joint funding arrangements have many positives for both nations, but can become problematic if either side undermines, or takes advantage of, the shared responsibility.

Finally, Welsh Government should consider how cultural organisations are funded and managed, across various different issues. One of those is current imbalance between nationally significant cultural organisations, some of which are funded directly as arms-length bodies in their own right (e.g. Amgueddfa Cymru) and others which are funded via an arms-length body (e.g. WNO, St Davd's Hall, RWCMD). This creates significant differences, such as the amount and type of lobbying that these organisations have the freedom to do, and the extent to which the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 applies. Another is the extent to which organisations that are very different in terms of their sizes, purposes, and the amount of permanent employed work they provide, are treated in broadly similar ways by ACW, and whether competition via funding applications is appropriate across those differences. This is particularly important now that ACW funding has moved on from the model of Arts Portfolio Wales and an Investment Review every five years to a more flexible model with initial funding terms of three years. We are unconvinced this gives the largest organisations that provide the most permanent and stable employment the certainty they need. It is possible for this to be done differently, such as in Scotland where the five National Performing Companies are supported directly. We are also unsure whether the current model provides enough proactive management of nationally significant companies that may be managed poorly, to the detriment of audiences and workers across Wales.

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

I don't think there can be any doubt that the effects of the cuts described above fall differently on people with protected characteristics and people of a lower socioeconomic status.

We are extremely concerned about the effect the erosion of the relatively small number of secure, full-time, employed jobs for musicians (such as in the WNO

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Orchestra), and some relatively secure and well paid part-time jobs (such as teaching at Young RWCMD), will have on the sector and the ability of people without security from family or elsewhere to fall back on to participate in professional music in Wales.

We are also concerned about the effect of the issues and changes described above on the provision of affordable culture for audiences across Wales.

As set out above, the issue of children and young people across Wales being able to access music education is also an ongoing concern.

The results of the Musicians' Census that we carried out in autumn 2023 in partnership with Help Musicians UK, highlighted a number of concerns in relation to this and the music industry across the UK:

<https://www.musicianscensus.co.uk/insight-reports>

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

Firstly, Welsh Government needs to consider where culture fits into government and the cabinet. We broadly welcome the relatively recent move to having a cabinet secretary-level role with a significant focus on culture. However, this has issues. Firstly, when most money for culture is already committed to arm's length bodies each year there is presumably very little flexibility for that minister to spend money on specific issues that arise, whereas when culture was covered by a Deputy Minister within the economy portfolio we suspect there was probably more flexibility within and between budgets. Similarly, the relatively recent split between culture and the creative industries (which at the time of submission is still covered by a Minister reporting to the Cabinet Secretary for the Economy, Transport and North Wales) is potentially confusing and unhelpful, especially when it comes to some specific areas such as broadcasting.

Secondly, we feel that the issues in culture set out above highlight the issues of applying the principles of the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 in practice. Major changes to Welsh National Opera, which was founded over 70 years ago, seem like a future generations issue but WNO is outside the bodies that the Act applies to, as it applies to ACW as a funder instead.

Finally, it's important to emphasise the amount of culture – including music education – that used to be funded by Local Authorities and that has been cut since 2010.

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