

# Pre-appointment hearing

## The preferred candidate for the President of the National Library of Wales

March 2022

### 1. Introduction

#### **Pre-appointment hearing**

- 1.** Welsh Ministers make a range of public appointments across all aspects of public life. These appointments are high profile and offer the opportunity to shape and inform many of the public services accessed by the people of Wales. Welsh Ministers must make regulated public appointments in accordance with the principles set out in the Governance Code on Public Appointments. The Commissioner for Public Appointments is responsible for providing independent assurance that appointments comply with the Code.
- 2.** Welsh Ministers and the Senedd have agreed to conduct pre-appointment scrutiny of some appointments by Senedd Committees in order to further improve the scrutiny and transparency of the public appointment making process. Pre-appointment scrutiny will take the form of a pre-appointment hearing of the preferred candidate conducted by the relevant Committee. It is for the relevant Committee to decide whether or not it wishes to carry out a pre-appointment hearing.



3. A list of ministerial appointments that may be subject to pre-appointment hearings has been approved by the Welsh Government, and will be reviewed regularly. The President of the National Library of Wales is included on that list.

## **National Library of Wales**

4. Since its foundation in 1907, the National Library of Wales has preserved Wales' documentary heritage. The National Library describes its purpose as

*'to ensure that Wales' unique history, culture and heritage, which is documented in many different formats and media over time, will always be available to better understand who we are, to explain our shared historical and cultural legacy which has shaped us as a nation over many centuries, and to encourage research and learning.'*

5. The Library's Strategic Plan for 2021 - 2026 says that it aims to:

- Well-being - The National Library of Wales - is a library for the whole of Wales, and contributes positively to global well-being. We have a key contribution to make in achieving the seven goals of the Wellbeing of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015.
- Social impact - We will promote an equal, fair and inclusive society, working to eradicate poverty, and provide a safe platform and space where we can have a healthy, honest and open discussion about all aspects of Welsh life.
- Sustainability - We accept our responsibility to respond to the global climate crisis by mitigating the environmental impact of our operations.
- Diversity - In collecting, preserving and giving access to knowledge, we are committed to working towards diversity, reflecting the diverse backgrounds and experiences of the people of Wales, and to ensuring that our collections and services are accessible to everyone of all backgrounds and abilities.
- The Welsh language - We will promote the Welsh language and encourage its use in all of our activities

## **2. Recruitment process and candidate selection**

### **Recruitment process**

6. The post was advertised from 8 December 2021 until 10 January 2022.

**7.** The role was advertised on the Welsh Government website, the Cabinet Office’s public appointments website, and on the National Library of Wales website. Publicity was further supported by paid for advertising on a number of relevant websites, and programmatic banners on social media, targeting cultural stakeholders across the UK. The National Library and the Welsh Government also made use of relevant networks and mailings lists to promote the opportunity. Individuals were contacted directly, and equality and diversity contacts were also approached.

### **Candidate selection**

**8.** Five candidates applied, four of the candidates were white, one was of mixed ethnicity. The Advisory Assessment Panel carried out a sift of the applications on 25 January 2022. Three candidates were invited to interview. One applicant subsequently withdrew their application following the sift and prior to interview.

**9.** The interview process consisted of a short 40 minute stakeholder session and a formal interview. Stakeholders included representatives from the National Library, Welsh Government and local library and archive sectors. At the stakeholder session, candidates led a forty minute discussion with nine stakeholders on the topic of delivering the Tailored Review and Welsh Government priorities. The stakeholder panel scored candidates against four criteria: content, Chairmanship skills, ability to deal with and answer questions and diversity and inclusion. The members of the Advisory Assessment Panel were not in attendance at the stakeholder session.

**10.** At interview, candidates were asked a series of questions closely linked to the essential criteria. Interviews lasted approximately 45 minutes each.

## **3. The Welsh Government’s preferred candidate**

**11.** The preferred candidate for the position of President of the National Library of Wales is Ashok Ahir. He was appointed as interim president and trustee of the National Library of Wales in September 2021.

**12.** Mr Ahir, 52, is Director of Communications and Engagement at Qualifications Wales. This follows three years in the senior civil service, working in both the Cabinet Office and at the UK Government in Wales, where he was Director of Communications.

**13.** Before that, he worked for the BBC as a journalist, editor and programme maker in London and Cardiff. For more than a decade, he was responsible for BBC Cymru Wales’ politics team, overseeing coverage of Welsh politics on television, radio and on digital services.

## 4. Pre-appointment hearing

### Before the hearing

**14.** The Welsh Government's Public Bodies Unit provided the Committee with the following advice in advance of the pre-appointment hearing:

- application form, CV and personal statement;
- an anonymised summary of the demographic profile of the candidates who applied for the post and who progressed at each stage of the recruitment process;
- a copy of the information pack that was provided to candidates who applied for the post.

**15.** All these documents were provided to Members of the Committee ahead of the hearing.

**16.** The Committee also asked the preferred candidate to complete a short questionnaire. This was in order to provide further information to the Committee in advance of the hearing. A copy of the questions and answers provided by the candidate are outlined in Annex C of this paper.

### The pre-appointment hearing

**17.** The hearing took place on Wednesday 16 March 2022, the candidate was asked questions based on the pre-hearing questionnaire with the intention of exploring these themes further.

**18.** A full transcript of the hearing is available on the Senedd Record.

## 5. The Committee's view

**19.** Members of the Culture, Communications, Welsh Language, Sport and International Relations Committee are content to endorse the preferred candidate, the interim President Ashok Ahir, for this role.

**20.** Members discussed the need for the National Library's finances to be able to withstand pressures, such as calls for public sector pay increases and the re-evaluation of the pension scheme, without resorting to additional funds from central government. The Committee intends to explore the Library's plans to generate commercial income to increase financial stability and reduce the need for additional government funding in the future.

- 21.** Members learned of Mr Ahir’s experience of working at Board level with the National Eisteddfod of Wales, Sport Wales and the British Council within Wales and look forward to hearing more detail on the Library’s efforts to increase international partnerships.
- 22.** Mr Ahir was asked about increasing the diversity of the Board. He spoke about a recent appointment to the Board and also the need to ensure diversity within the Senior Team. Members are keen to ensure that all Boards of national organisations represent the people of Wales not only in terms of ethnicity but also geographically and socio-economic diversity.
- 23.** Members would like to see greater promotion and marketing of the Library’s activities across Wales and the regions to ensure everyone is able to access our national archives.

## Annex A: President of the National Library of Wales job description

The Welsh Government provided the Committee with the following job description from the job advertisement:

### The Role of President

This is a high-profile, strategic and influential role in the cultural sector in Wales.

The new President will join the National Library of Wales during a period of change as the findings of the 2020 tailored review are addressed and as the Library moves to implement its new five year strategic plan for 2021-2026. **National Library of Wales: Tailored review of the National Library of Wales | GOV.WALES**

The President is accountable to the Deputy Minister for Arts and Sports, and Chief Whip for the National Library's performance and for the delivery of strategic priorities. Developing a close relationship with the Deputy Minister and key members of the Welsh Government is a crucial part of the role.

The position requires a person of stature and vision, capable of leading a national institution in a senior non-executive role, and of being an advocate for the Library with its key stakeholders. The President acts as a spokesperson, a representative and a figurehead for the Library, operating with tact, diplomacy and well-practiced powers of persuasion.

The President is the Chair of the Board, and ensures that business is dealt with effectively and efficiently. He / she ensures that the Board is fit for purpose, offering appropriate scrutiny and a strategic steer. The President is responsible for ensuring that Trustees receive induction, training, and performance assessments, and comply with governance requirements under the Royal Charter, Charities Act, and the Board's Code of Conduct. The President also represents the Library at joint public appointments processes with the Welsh Government to select new Trustees.

At the Library, the President chairs the Appointments and Remuneration Committee (which oversees Trustee and senior staff appointments, including that of the National Librarian) and is also a member of the Governance and Performance Committee, the Financial Planning committee, and of the Audit and Risk Committee.

Part of the President's role is establishing a strong and supportive working relationship with the Library's Chief Executive and National Librarian and with the senior executive, providing advice, support and challenge, but whilst respecting executive responsibility.

From time to time, the President will represent the Library in the Welsh and English media, during visits by senior public figures, and at the opening of exhibitions and events.

The President must always be able to work comfortably and effectively within the bilingual cultural, political, social and economic context in which the Library operates.

## Annex B: President of the National Library of Wales person specification

The Welsh Government provided the Committee with the following person specification from the job advertisement:

We are seeking someone who:

- demonstrates an understanding, a commitment, and an enthusiasm for the Library's work and for Wales' cultural sector;
- has an awareness of Welsh Government policies and strategies and of how they influence the work of the Library and the culture sector as a whole;
- has extensive leadership skills and experience of driving change;
- has a commitment to equality issues and to challenging discriminatory practices;
- has a commitment to Nolan's Seven Principles of Public Life  
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-7-principles-of-public-life>;
- is able to communicate effectively with the Library's audiences in both Welsh and English.

### Essential Criteria:

- Demonstrates a commitment to the values and the vision of the National Library of Wales, and an appreciation of its role and purpose as a national institution in Wales, including the cultural, learning, health and well-being, economic and socio-political contexts in which it operates; and an understanding of its obligations under the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015;
- can evidence strong interpersonal, communication and stakeholder management skills, including ambassadorial skills;
- committed to increasing diversity and promoting equality, identifying relevant experience to develop an inclusive and diverse Board;
- Has experience of developing strategic partnerships, and of outreach and engagement activity who will drive the agenda of ensuring the Library serves and represents the diverse communities and regions of Wales;
- demonstrates senior leadership skills and the ability to provide effective support and challenge to a high profile organisation;
- demonstrates the ability to think and operate strategically;
- demonstrates a thorough understanding of good governance;
- demonstrates business and commercial acumen and experience of income-generating activities (including fundraising);
- has experience of operating at a senior level in a complex, multi-disciplinary organisation.

### Location

The President's activities will vary from week to week. They will undertake the role remotely and from the National Library of Wales' buildings in Aberystwyth as required. There may be times



when the President is required to travel to meetings and events.

### **Time Commitment**

The time commitment for the role of President is one day per week, with additional days to be agreed with the Library as required.

### **Term of Appointment**

The appointment will be made by Welsh Ministers and will be for a term of four years.

### **Welsh Language Skills**

The Library is a bilingual institution delivering its public services and its internal and external relationships in both Welsh and English. The President's post is considered **Welsh essential**, at the level specified below:

Understanding – 5

Reading – 4

Speaking – 5

Writing – 4

### **Remuneration**

The President will be remunerated based on a fee of £337 per day. Travel and other reasonable expenses that might be incurred in carrying out the role can also be claimed from the Library.

## Annex C: Completed questionnaire completed by preferred candidate ahead of the appointment hearing

<p><b>Tell us a little bit about yourself and your background</b></p>	<p><b>Dywedwch ychydig wrthym amdanoch chi eich hun a'ch cefndir</b></p>
<p>I am a journalist by trade having worked for the BBC in both Cardiff and London, culminating in a decade as Executive Editor, Politics for BBC Cymru. That involved leading the political team based in the Senedd and at the UK Parliament and overseeing political programmes and coverage on TV, radio and online.</p> <p>Having moved on from daily journalism I established a successful communications agency alongside my wife, which we subsequently sold to a larger rival. Since then I have been involved in government and public communications, firstly as Director of Communications for the UK Government in Wales before moving on to the Government Communications Service at the Cabinet Office. Last December, I started in my current role as Director of Communications and Engagement at Qualifications Wales.</p> <p>I have been involved in many governance roles, including my current duties as President and Chair of the National Eisteddfod and as a board member at Sport Wales.</p>	
<p><b>Question 1: What is your motivation for applying to be the President of the National Library of Wales?</b></p>	<p><b>Cwestiwn 1: Beth yw eich cymhelliant dros wneud cais i fod yn Gadeirydd Llyfrgell Genedlaethol Cymru?</b></p>
<p>I was fortunate to be appointed to the role of President on an interim basis last September. Given my long-term interest in our nation's cultural heritage, it has been an honour to have the opportunity to work with the executive team, staff and trustees, during what has been an important period in the Library's recent history.</p> <p>In recent months, not only have I been able to oversee the concluding efforts to meet the recommendations of the 2020 tailored review, I also helped to finalise and launch a new five-year corporate strategy.</p>	
<p><b>Question 2: Why do you think you are well-suited for the role?</b></p>	<p><b>Cwestiwn 2: Pam yr ydych o'r farn eich bod chi'n ymgeisydd addas ar gyfer y rôl hon?</b></p>
<p>I am confident in my abilities as a chair having being able to bring my media, communications and engagement skills, and knowledge of diversity matters to a wide range of boards and committees. I have been chair of the governing body of the country's largest Welsh-medium primary school, sit on the British Council's Wales Advisory Committee and I'm in my second term on the Sport Wales board where I am also a member of the strategic investments, diversity and audit committees.</p>	

<p>In government, I have been a member of a departmental board, providing strategic and operational leadership, working alongside Ministers, other senior officials and non-executives from outside government, helping the department to operate in a business-like manner. In addition, I was also part of the leadership team of the Government Communication Service, which sets standards and frameworks for the UK's 7000-strong public communicators profession.</p> <p>My public, private and voluntary sector leadership experience has given me deep insights into all aspects of our nation's civic, public and business life. It has also given me the chance to work with some very inspirational and effective chairs and senior leaders. Which is why, when acting as a chair myself, I always strive to use the skills, understanding and expertise of others to get the best out of the organisations I am involved with.</p> <p>My experience leading the trustees of the National Eisteddfod, over the past three years, has provided me with the strongest platform and for this role. It's a role which requires me to interact, network and influence all aspects of our cultural, historic, linguistic and civic life. The President of the Library is another such role.</p>	
<p><b>Question 3: What are the three main outcomes that you want to achieve during your tenure?</b></p>	<p><b>Cwestiwn 3: Beth yw'r tri phrif ganlyniad yr ydych am eu cyflawni yn ystod eich cyfnod yn y rôl?</b></p>
<p>Having launched the Library's new five year strategy in November, I will focus the board's work on the priorities outlined in that document. The strategy is an ambitious plan that provides a clear, coordinated and prioritised focus and direction for everyone involved in the organisation. The plan aims to harness the unique range of skills and expertise at the Library to cultivate and care for the nation's memory, lay the foundation for a knowledge economy, empower learning and research, and be at the heart of national life.</p> <p>In terms of specific outcomes, I want to see the Library:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• share its collections widely and openly with the aim of achieving the greatest reach and deepest engagement</li> <li>• develop its home in Aberystwyth as a visitor destination for people from across the country and across the globe</li> <li>• foster connections with ethnically and cultural diverse individuals and communities, and review the way in which our collections are described, interpreted and promoted</li> </ul>	
<p><b>Question 4: How will you work with local, national and international partners which benefit both the National Library and other organisations?</b></p>	<p><b>Cwestiwn 4: Sut y byddwch yn gweithio gyda phartneriaid lleol, cenedlaethol a rhyngwladol er budd y Llyfrgell Genedlaethol a sefydliadau eraill?</b></p>
<p>By ensuring that the Library shares its expertise in physical and digital conservation with local libraries, archives and museums and internationally.</p> <p>By pushing forward plans to establish local 'clip centres' in a range of locations across the country.</p>	

<p>By developing and deliver an updated International Strategy and collaborating with Welsh Government and other organisations to promote Wales on a global stage.</p>	
<p><b>Question 5: How will you work in a way that maintains independence from Welsh Government whilst also trying to influence the government to achieve the objectives of the National Library of Wales?</b></p>	<p><b>Cwestiwn 5: Sut y byddwch yn gweithio mewn ffordd sy'n cynnal annibyniaeth y sefydliad ar Lywodraeth Cymru, wrth hefyd geisio dylanwadu ar y Llywodraeth i gyflawni amcanion Llyfrgell Genedlaethol Cymru?</b></p>
<p>Given my experience as an editorial leader for the BBC, I have always been proud of my impartiality and diplomacy. I understand the need to listen to a range of views and assess complex positions and situations both in the political and civic space.</p> <p>The common thread that runs through my career is a determination to drive improvement in the lives of people in every part of the country. A country where we build equality and fairness in all of our communities and workplaces. From Bangor to Beijing, I have seen first-hand how culture can play a central role in breaking down barriers, lift individuals and communities both emotionally and economically and also provide an international platform to our nation and culture.</p> <p>It is an approach and ethos that sits naturally with the Welsh Government's programme and with the Library's new five-year strategy. I alongside the National Librarian and the senior team will endeavour to make our work align, as much as possible, with the delivery of key government policies and with the expectations of other key audiences across Wales and beyond.</p>	
<p><b>Question 6: How will you work with Senedd Members and Senedd committees?</b></p>	<p><b>Cwestiwn 6: Sut y byddwch yn gweithio gydag Aelodau o'r Senedd a phwyllgorau'r Senedd?</b></p>
<p>As chair of the trustees I will happily appear before any Senedd committees alongside the National Librarian and other members of the executive.</p> <p>I will also support any members in queries relating to any Library activities relating to their local constituencies.</p> <p>I will also meet with relevant members and committee chairs during events and other meetings in Cardiff Bay, Aberystwyth and elsewhere across the country, including at Welsh Political Archive events.</p>	