

Welsh Government's response to the Culture, Welsh Language and Communications Committee's report on the impact of the Covid-19 outbreak on the arts.

Recommendation 1: The Welsh Government should update its digital strategy in light of the increased reliance on online platforms since the outbreak. With regards to the arts, it should be updated to reflect:

- the increase in digital consumption and delivery of the arts;
- the need for training for those who work in the arts to deliver and benefit from digital delivery; and
- the need to ensure equality of access to the arts online, including increasing broadband reliability upskilling those who are at risk from the 'digital divide'.

WG response: Accept.

The importance of digital connectivity has become of critical importance in supporting the arts and creative sectors, especially during these unprecedented times. Now, more than ever, access to fast and reliable connectivity is crucial.

The crisis has highlighted our reliance on digital connectivity and the need to fully exploit both traditional and new forms of innovative digital infrastructure to ensure that the demands can be met.

To ensure that the Welsh Government fulfils its commitment to continue to provide robust connectivity across Wales, through both traditional and new means, the Welsh Government is updating the Digital Strategy to reflect current and new demands presented to us. This will see, amongst other initiatives, a focus on more targeted investment and support. This will build on the already large positive impact that Welsh Government intervention has made on digital connectivity across the country, closing the digital divide and bringing parity to business operations.

The Welsh Government has also provided vital support in the creation and launch of the AM platform, a platform for showcasing new and emerging welsh talent.

Financial implications: No additional financial implications for the Welsh Government.

Recommendation 2: The Welsh Government should set out, in its response to this report, the arrangements and guidance for teaching music across Wales during the pandemic and its assessment of the effectiveness of those arrangements.

WG response: Accept.

With music being a rich part of our culture and heritage, delivering a broad, balanced education is important to ensure our learners access a wide range of experiences and key to developing our young talent. Local authorities' music services play an important role in this area. Music services across Wales have been significantly

affected by the Covid-19 pandemic which will continue to impact on the opportunities for our learners to engage in music activities.

The Welsh Government has produced Operational Guidance which covers the area of music education and makes clear the importance of learners continuing to access a broad and balanced curriculum. The guidance outlines that supply teachers, peripatetic teachers and other temporary staff can move between schools, but in doing so, they should ensure that they minimise contact and maintain as much distance as possible from other staff and learners. The guidance, kept under regular review as new and emerging evidence becomes available, is supplemented by a Frequently Asked Questions document for schools to use, which includes advice relating to music activities such as the playing of wind or brass instruments, or singing. The Welsh Government is working with Public Health Wales on further guidance on the teaching of music in the classroom, which will be published shortly. The operational guidance has been put in practice with some school music services restarting when schools re-opened last year following the temporary withdrawal due to Covid-19. For example, Cardiff Council worked closely with Cardiff County and Vale of Glamorgan Music Service to make preparations for the safe return of music tuition in schools, putting in place a number of health and safety measures in line with Welsh Government guidance to keep children, tutors and schools safe, while minimising the risk of Covid-19 spread. These measures include adapting the way lessons are delivered, new guidance for tutors and putting social distancing and hygiene processes in place.

Welsh Government also published **Rehearsing, performing and taking part in the performing arts: guidance for a phased return** in September 2020, with a revision to the guidance in November. This guidance sets out guidelines within the context of rehearsing, training, performing and managing performers, audiences and participants safely while minimising the risk of Covid-19 spread. Section 3.2 of the guidance provides information on teaching music in performing arts workplaces and environments and the safe working practices that teachers must follow when they resume activity, paying particular attention to social distancing and ensuring mitigating measures, such as PPE, are in place.

Officials are also reviewing the recommendations of “Unlocking Music Education in Wales”, a report recently produced by CAGAG (Cymdeithas Addysg Cerdd Awdurdodau Cymru – Welsh Authorities Music Education Association). This highlights the significant impacts of COVID-19 pandemic on music education.

With a vaccination programme in progress, and planning ahead for the schools’ eventual return when it is safe to do so, officials are working with key music organisations across Wales, including local authorities, to determine what strategic and sustainable approaches could be adopted for current and future music provision. This will be in line with music within the Expressive Arts Area of Learning and Experience of the new Curriculum for Wales, to be implemented in our schools from September 2022 onwards. The Welsh Government has allocated £1.5 million in funding for 2021-22 to support music education.

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Financial implications. No additional financial implications for the Welsh Government.

Recommendation 3: The Welsh Government should provide an update on its current thinking in terms of re-starting live arts and music events. This should include:

- a comparative assessment of the situation in Wales in relation to England;
- an outline of what assessment it has made on the potential for creating a timeline for reopening venues and enabling more outdoor live events, including a specific date to work towards.

WG response: Accept

The Welsh Government continues to liaise with the UK Government and the other devolved administrations on the re-opening of events. We will continue to engage closely with the event and venues stakeholder groups the Welsh Government have established. Given the unpredictability associated with the public health crisis, the Welsh Government cannot give a timeline for reopening of the events sector at this point and decisions will continue to be taken in the context of the public health position and in line with the Welsh Government's Coronavirus Control Plan.

Financial implications: Continued closure of the events sector requires additional financial support.

Recommendation 4: The Welsh Government should update the Committee on the latest state of play in terms of its talks with the Treasury, and the insurance industry, on the creation of a government-backed insurance scheme.

WG response: Accept.

The Welsh Government is continuing to liaise with UK Government on the potential for an insurance fund to support re-opening of the events sector and has raised the issue with the Association of British Insurers.

Financial implications: No additional financial implications for the Welsh Government.

Recommendation 5: The Welsh Government should set out in its response to this report what assessment it has made of the number of freelancers in Wales and whether the current level of support provided is sufficient. The response should include details of the quantitative data gathered.

WG response: Accept.

Funding support has been provided this year through the £63m Cultural Recovery Fund. In developing the freelancer fund it became clear that there was insufficient information regarding the size, make-up and economic impact of the freelancer

community in Wales. Through the first three phases of the freelancer fund the Welsh Government supported 3,584 individuals with funding of £8.9m. The fund has been well received by the freelance community, and the case for investment still remains as the creative and cultural sectors remain closed.

The Welsh Government is currently working with the local authorities to review the impact of the fund, which includes as a priority undertaking qualitative research into the wealth of data gathered through the application process. This will be the start of the commitment from Welsh Government in developing a stronger evidence base and narrative around the importance of the freelancer community to the economy of Wales.

Financial implications: No additional financial implications for the Welsh Government.

Recommendation 6: The Welsh Government should outline its latest thinking in terms of post-pandemic recovery planning. This should include:

- its latest assessment of how Brexit will impact the sector and what steps it is taking to manage these impacts;
- how the Welsh Government intends to continue engagement with the sector including engagement with smaller, grassroots and community organisations; and
- whether it has any ideas or examples of best practice from elsewhere in terms of effective innovation with partner organisations and how these will inform recovery planning.

WG response: Accept.

The Welsh Government is continuing to liaise with the UK Government, Wales Arts International and other stakeholders on post-pandemic and post-EU exit recovery issues for the sector, working to identify solutions across the devolved nations.

Wales Arts International has recently announced the launch of Arts Infopoint UK, helping to connect to other Infopoint networks across the EU to identify and understand the challenges of working internationally within the new post-EU exit context and signposting to other networks, useful sites and possible solutions, as well as interpreting generic information not specific to arts and culture to help people, post-pandemic, to start working internationally.

Arts Infopoint UK is being led by Wales Arts International, with the other devolved nations and the UK government showing a strong desire to participate in the project.

We reiterate our disappointment in the UK Government's decision not to support the creation of the Welsh Shortage Occupation List as a method of working the sector to bring in talent from outside of the UK, we continue to look at options with the UK Government.

As a result of the trade deal negotiated by the UK Government with touring for the creative sector remains problematic, the Welsh Government will work with DCMS colleagues to resolve the issue.

Additional work has been completed under the Cymru Wales brand to ensure Arts & Culture have a destination brand approach that can be adopted both virtually and physically when suitable. The Cymru Wales brand offers a platform for key cultural partners to use in international showcasing activities. Wales Arts International have worked closely on developing this approach and have used the Cymru Wales brand for their Celtic Connections presence at Showcase Scotland virtual event.

Financial implications: No additional financial implications for the Welsh Government.