

Pwyllgor Diwylliant, y Gymraeg a Chyfathrebu
Culture, Welsh Language and Communications Committee
CWLC(5)-06-16 P8

Dear Ms Jenkins,

I am writing to you as I understand you chair the committee for Culture, Welsh Language and Communications in the Assembly.

I have been horrified to read last weekend (<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-wales-politics-37493894> ; <https://www.museumsassociation.org/news/30092016-ma-warns-against-nmw-merger>) that there could be a serious risk of the National Museum of Wales (NMW) losing its independence by being swallowed up by some sort of new body, "Historic Wales".

I write as a architect who is currently working with NMW on what we all consider may be a somewhat visionary and ground-breaking concept to bring museums and primary school education closer together.

Acting in partnership with NMW, the Cultural Institute at King's College London, the National Waterfront Museum in Swansea and the local St Thomas Community Primary School, we placed whole classes in the museum for 10 weeks in total, as part of an action research project. This aimed to test the hypothesis that there could be beneficial outcomes for primary school children, their families and communities, if pupils attended school in a museum.

The project has been carefully studied and draft assessment reports are currently being reviewed with a view to publishing results before the end of the year. Even before the findings are published we could see improved language and communication between children, and even improvements in attendance in one of the Swansea classes in particular, with clearly enhanced engagement and interest from the wider families.

Without going into the detail of this quite complex project, you might also be able to imagine some of the associated potential benefits

- wider and deeper understanding of the museum collections and the culture they represent
- great opportunity to understand the collection with assistance from the museum in welsh language as well as english
- sustainability of the museum; this delivery model could mark a sea change in core visitor constituency

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In any event, all of this was borne out of extensive negotiation and preparation in the project partnerships and was clearly dependent on satisfying the museum and school that core purpose and values were being honoured and developed from both sides. Whilst we hope that eventually such a model could bring financial benefits in optimising operational functions and costs to be shared on both sides, the fundamental principles were ones of learning, diversity, inclusion etc. and speaking to policies aiming to tackle areas of cultural poverty amongst others.

It is clear to me that for such creative and innovative projects to evolve, the long established and continuing values and governance of NMW are crucial.

The idea that the NMW might have to dance directly to government's tune runs entirely counter to a museum that has been clearly tasked over decades and generations to take care of the nation's collections.

NMW unquestionably embodies the tradition of professional expertise, wisdom and socially minded conscience, acting to support the best delivery of a service driven by the whole body's sense of democratic social justice. The museum itself should always decide how to optimise use of funds, subsidising some elements of programme if the trustees see fit.

It is also very disappointing to read in these articles that government has not apparently taken on board the comprehensive recommendations of the Welsh Review of Local Government Museums, that must have represented a tremendous investment of time and thought in production. I also submitted a paper relating to our partnership project for that and at the time was truly hopeful that new and creative ways of approaching sustainability in museums might be on the horizon.

I would be pleased to share more of this particular project with you given your committee's remit.

Meanwhile, I hope you will act to ensure the NMW can continue without this newly reported threat. NMW must be allowed work independently from the government of the day and much shorter term commercial concerns in life that I can imagine might be, at least in part, at the root of this new suggestion.

Yours sincerely
Wendy J.

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