

# P-05-1034 Re-open theatres and performance venues in Wales in time for the festive season

Y Pwyllgor Deisebau | 3 Tachwedd 2020  
Petitions Committee | 3 November 2020

Reference: RS20/14079-6

**Petition Number:** P-05-1034

**Petition title:** Re-open theatres and performance venues in Wales in time for the festive season.

**Text of petition:** Most UK regional theatres will bring in more income during the 'festive' period than at any other time of year. Time is rapidly running out for theatres to be informed that they can open in time for this period. Whilst many of the high profile venues in Wales have already postponed their Christmas productions, there are still hundreds that will be able to safely produce and perform theatre if given enough warning that they can open. This issue must be debated and resolved promptly.



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# 1. Background

The Health Protection (Coronavirus Restrictions) (No.2) (Wales) Regulations 2020, as amended required certain businesses and premises to close to try to limit the spread of coronavirus. These are listed in Schedule 2 to the Regulations, and were:

- Theatres.
- Venues authorised to be used for the supply of alcohol by a premises licence or club premises certificate (within the meaning given by the Licensing Act 2003(32)) where live or recorded music is provided for members of the public or members of the venue to dance.
- Sexual entertainment venues (within the meaning given by paragraph 2A of Schedule 3 to the Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1982(33)).
- Concert halls.

This list was initially much longer. These Regulations have recently been revoked and replaced by The Health Protection (Coronavirus Restrictions) (No. 3) (Wales) Regulations 2020, which will be in place for the duration of the “firebreak” lockdown which began on 23 October 2020. During this period, more businesses and premises are required to close.

## 2. Welsh Government action

- 2.1. The Welsh Government has worked with the Arts Council to provide support for the arts and creative industries during the pandemic.

### The first tranche

In April 2020 the Welsh Government announced an £18 million package of support for the culture and sport sectors, This included a £7 million Arts Resilience Fund, £5.1 million of which is from the National Lottery. The Arts Council intended to distribute £1.5 million to individuals, and £5.5 million to organisations. This package of funding was fiscally neutral: that is, it did not consist of any Welsh Government funding that had not already been allocated to the sector.

## The second tranche

On 5 July the UK Government **announced** a £1.57 billion support package for the arts, culture and heritage. This includes a package of support for cultural institutions in England, and consequential funding for the devolved governments. **2.2**The funding included £59 million for Wales (less than a population-based shared of the total UK funding).

On 30 July the Welsh Government announced a £53 million **Cultural Recovery Fund**. By comparison, the annual Welsh Government **funding for the Arts Council** is about £30 million.

On 17 August Arts Council of Wales **opened** its portion of the fund (£27.5m) for applications. This comprised of £25.5m of revenue and £2m of capital funding, all for arts organisations. The Arts Council of Wales is managing funds for:

- theatres, arts centres and concert halls;
- galleries;
- organisations producing and touring arts activity; and
- organisations providing participatory arts activity.

The Welsh Government is managing the remainder of the fund (£25.5m). This includes £18.5 million for the following businesses:

- music venues;
- recording and rehearsal studios;
- Heritage organisations and historic attractions;
- accredited museums and archive services;
- libraries;
- events and their technical support suppliers;
- independent cinemas; and
- the publishing sector.

. A further £7 million fund is available to support freelancers.

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The Culture, Welsh Language and Communications Committee had previously called for the entirety of the £59 million allocated to Wales to be spent on culture.

### 3. Welsh Parliament action

The Culture, Welsh Language and Communications Committee has investigated the impact on the arts and creative industries throughout the pandemic.

In June the Committee published its report into the [Impact of the COVID-19 outbreak on the arts sector](#). This followed meetings with the Deputy Minister for Culture, Sport and Tourism and the Arts Council for Wales. Key findings of this work were:

- **The financial impact of the pandemic on arts organisations and individuals has been severe.** The Arts Council said:

Under normal circumstances we applaud organisations like Chapter, Galeri in Caernarfon and Wales Millennium Centre for their success in operating with a low dependency on public funding. But with around 80% of their income coming from commercial activities, an otherwise stable business model crashed overnight.

- **Most artistic performances are not commercially viable with social distancing in place.** The Arts Council's Nick Capaldi explained that if the Wales Millennium Centre were to open with current 2m social distancing rules, it could sell one seat in six. The Centre has cancelled all shows in 2020, with 250 jobs at risk, and has forecast that it could lose £20 million this financial year.
- Employment in the arts is dominated by freelancers. **Since the crisis began, most creative freelancers have had, according to the Arts Council, "100% of their work cancelled".**

The unsuitability of the main UK Government forms of employment support employment support for creative freelancers has been widely noted. Research conducted by Creative Cardiff and Cardiff University's Creative Economy Unit suggests that eligibility criteria of the Self-employment Income Support Scheme "exclude significant parts of the freelance workforce", and that compensation is a "a fraction of that received by furloughed PAYE employees".

In July the Committee published its report into the impact of the COVID-19 outbreak on the creative industries. This was based on a session with the Deputy Minister for Culture, Sport and Tourism and another with the Music Venues Trust,

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TAC (body representing the independent TV sector in Wales), Sara Pepper from Cardiff University, Ffilm Cymru, BBC, ITV and S4C.

Key aspects of the evidence included:

- As with the arts, **the workforce is dominated by freelancers** for whom the main employment support provided by the UK Government is unsuitable.
- The pandemic has highlighted the **key role of public service broadcasters** (PSBs) in providing up to date information, specific to Wales, on the pandemic and lockdown precautions.
- The biggest obstacle to restarting film and television productions at scale is the availability of full production **insurance** for domestic producers. Availability of insurance is also problematic for live performances.
- **Live events – such as gigs – often operate with a small profit margin.** This makes operating with any form of social distancing in place, not to mention compliance costs for additional safety measures, financially unviable.
- The financial impact of the pandemic is likely to have a **detrimental impact on diversity and skills** in the creative industries, as companies divert funding away from relevant schemes and towards survival.

In neither report has the Committee called for theatres or other venues to be re-opened.

On 15 October the Committee held a stakeholder workshop with the arts sector looking at the continued impact of the crisis. It will be writing to the Welsh Government with its findings from this workshop in the coming weeks.

Every effort is made to ensure that the information contained in this briefing is correct at the time of publication. Readers should be aware that these briefings are not necessarily updated or otherwise amended to reflect subsequent changes.