

Welsh Parliament

**Culture, Communications, Welsh Language, Sport,
and International Relations Committee**

The National Contemporary Art Gallery for Wales

December 2023



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The National Contemporary Art Gallery for Wales

December 2023



About the Committee

The Committee was established on 23 June 2021. Its remit can be found at:
www.senedd.wales/SeneddCulture

Current Committee membership:



**Committee Chair:
Delyth Jewell MS**
Plaid Cymru



Hefin David MS
Welsh Labour



Alun Davies MS
Welsh Labour



Llyr Gruffydd MS
Plaid Cymru



Tom Giffard MS
Welsh Conservatives



Carolyn Thomas MS
Welsh Labour

The following Member was also a member of the Committee during this period:



Heledd Fychan MS
Plaid Cymru

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Chair's foreword

The value of visual arts to our society cannot be underestimated, from supporting younger and future generations with creative learning programmes to building a stronger economy through job creation and cultural tourism. What's more, there is growing evidence to suggest that the arts have a valuable role in promoting good health and well-being. As things stand, much of Wales's great art is housed in the vast archives of our museums, with only a small amount being available to view by the public (typically, only around 5 per cent of the collection is thought to be available to view at any time). There has long been a desire to provide greater, and more democratic, access to those parts of our cultural inheritance that are currently hidden from public view.

The origins of the Welsh Government's plans for a National Contemporary Art Gallery for Wales date back to 2008, culminating in a feasibility study which was published in 2018 and, later, a commitment to take this forward which was contained in the Co-operation Agreement between the Welsh Government and Plaid Cymru. The plans that have been put forward have the potential to challenge conventional thinking, and there is little doubt that they could be hugely exciting. Our Committee is still of the view that, if these proposals are given adequate funding and support, they could live up to that potential, but progress has evidently been slow in developing them, and the plans that exist seem incomplete. Questions remain as to how ambitious this project will be allowed to become.

As a Committee, we are aware of the challenging financial situation in which the Welsh Government finds itself, and the costs of establishing and running a national arts and culture institution would, without question, be considerable. There is, however, a lack of clarity about how much ongoing revenue support the gallery will need, or indeed how much will be provided by the Welsh Government. These gaps in information will have to be filled if this project is to be realised.

It is not clear to us how much new gallery space will be created as a result of this project, which hinders attempts to visualise it as a national institution. We are excited at the prospect of an anchor site, though at the time of writing this report, no decision had been made on its location. The dispersed model element of the project could be an innovative way of bringing our collections to our communities, but our Committee is also alive to the possibility that it could lead to a loss of exhibition space for local artists. This must be guarded against.

There are laudable elements of these proposals: particularly their scale and ambition in seeking to build the national and international profile of Welsh contemporary art. We also acknowledge and welcome the work that is going into digitising and curating the national collection online: many opportunities to showcase Welsh art and artists will be provided by the new digital platform, Celf ar y Cyd. That is precisely why we would urge the government to put further work into developing a marketing plan to connect the tourism sector and this new global digital platform – there is such a need to shine a light on Wales as a cultural tourist destination.

The concerns we raise in this report are borne of our desire to see the existing art ecology in Wales being supported, and not diminished. We want to see the gallery succeed. What's more, we as a Committee want to see a new national institution that positions Wales at the front and centre of a global stage, which supports Welsh artists, fosters collaboration, promotes our nation as a destination for cultural tourism, and which democratises Welsh art by making it more accessible to the public. All of this can still be achieved through this project: but it will require the Welsh Government to provide greater clarity and commitment to the establishment of this new national institution.

Our Committee will be keeping a close eye on developments over the coming months as the Welsh Government's plans for this project develop, and we remain hopeful that the promise of a National Contemporary Art Gallery for Wales can be fulfilled – if it is given the right support.



Delyth Jewell MS

Chair, Culture, Communication, Welsh Language, Sport, and International Relations

Recommendations

Recommendation 1. The Welsh Government should provide an estimate of the ongoing revenue funding for the NCAGW and clarify whether this will be new funding to the culture sector, or a reallocation of funding currently provided to other culture bodies..... Page 19

Recommendation 2. The Welsh Government should provide further information to this Committee on the steps it has taken since 2018 to quantify the likely demand for the NCAGW and new revenue opportunities..... Page 19

Recommendation 3. The Welsh Government should provide further information to this Committee relating to an assessment of the impact of the proposal on existing exhibition programmes..... Page 19

Recommendation 4. The Welsh Government should return to the Committee early in the parliamentary summer term of 2024, with an update and more detailed plans. In particular, the Welsh Government should clarify the net amount of new gallery space that is to be created. Page 26

Recommendation 5. The Welsh Government should provide this Committee with progress updates every six months on the delivery of the NCAGW. This should include whether key timelines and milestones are being met. Page 29

Recommendation 6. The Welsh Government should develop a clear communications plan to encourage sector wide support and advocacy for the NCAGW..... Page 31

Recommendation 7. The Welsh Government should produce a clear plan for widening engagement with the visual arts sector, including public, third and private sector providers to ensure that the widest range of views and experience are considered in the planning and design of the remaining elements of the NCAGW..... Page 31

Recommendation 8. The Welsh Government should take steps to ensure that the branding and marketing teams and the tourism sector work closely to align plans for the NCAGW and ensure it is embedded into tourism campaigns.
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Recommendation 9. The Welsh Government should provide further information to this Committee relating to the plans to provide assurance that the NCAGW is environmentally sustainable. Page 34

1. Introduction

Terms of reference

1. Amid concerns about the Welsh Government's proposed model for the National Contemporary Art Gallery for Wales, and delays in the project's delivery, we decided to review this issue.
2. On 19 June 2023, we published the following terms of reference which set out the following areas for consideration:
 - Delivery of the Welsh Government's plans for a National Contemporary Art Gallery for Wales,
 - The merits of the model proposed by the Welsh Government (8-10 regional sites and an anchor hub),
 - Digital access to contemporary art.

Evidence gathering

3. We obtained written evidence from a range of stakeholders and held two oral evidence sessions. On 5 July 2023, we heard evidence from interested parties and delivery partners. On 14 September 2023, we heard evidence from the Deputy Minister for Arts, Sport, and Tourism, Dawn Bowden MS ("the Deputy Minister"). A full list of participants in this inquiry is available in Annex 1.
4. In addition, the Senedd Commission's Citizen Engagement Team facilitated a series of focus groups on our behalf to gather the views of academics, artists, gallery staff, and members of arts charities and organisations on the Welsh Government's plans.¹
5. We would like to thank every person and organisation who took the time to contribute to this inquiry.

¹ [Engagement findings: National contemporary art gallery \[PDF 455KB\]](#)

2. Background and progress to date

6. The origins of the Welsh Government's current proposal date back to 2008, when a feasibility study for a National Gallery of Art for Wales, and an options study for a National Centre for Contemporary Art were carried out. Whilst the recommendations of that study were not taken forward, the proposal was revived during budgetary discussions between Plaid Cymru and the Welsh Government in 2016. Capital funding was earmarked to take this work forward during the period 2017-2020.

7. A feasibility study for a National Contemporary Art Gallery Wales ("NCAGW") was commissioned and its findings were reported in June 2018 ("the Feasibility Study").² The central recommendation of the Feasibility Study was:

*"Rather than endorsing a single new building to house and display contemporary art, we recommend a dynamic, distributed national model that builds on 6-8 existing and developing arts locations across Wales, along with a permanent central hub."*³

8. A commitment to develop the proposals for the NCAGW was set out in the Cooperation Agreement between the Welsh Government and Plaid Cymru in December 2021.⁴

9. In written evidence to the Committee in January 2023,⁵ the Welsh Government said that, since 2019-20, it had committed a total of £1.939m to the development of the NCAGW. This included:

- ongoing work to digitise the contemporary art collection held by Amgueddfa Cymru,
- the development of a website providing public access to this, and other digital collections; and
- the development of proposals for a number of galleries to be involved in a dispersed model of the NCAGW along with an anchor site.

² Welsh Government: [National contemporary art gallery Wales: feasibility study](#) - 1 July 2018

³ Welsh Government: [National contemporary art gallery Wales: feasibility study](#) - 1 July 2018

⁴ Welsh Government: [The Co-operation Agreement: 2021](#) - 1 December 2021

⁵ Ministerial evidence: [Memorandum on the Draft Budget proposals for 2023-24](#) - 18 January 2023 [PDF 963KB]

10. In May 2023, the Welsh Government published a more detailed update and outline of the proposals.⁶ It explained that the NCAGW will have the following key components:

- a. An online gallery which will provide public access to 30,000 images of art, many of which have not been on public display before.
- b. A network of galleries across Wales (nine have been shortlisted) will provide free access to the national collection and bring contemporary art closer to communities.
- c. Host galleries will host the national collection of Welsh art. These are galleries that are already part of the current infrastructure, or plan to be in future (i.e. the National Library or Amgueddfa Cymru's Cardiff site).
- d. An anchor gallery which will become the anchor site for NCAGW. Five local authorities and one third sector organisation have an expressed interest in hosting the anchor gallery.

11. The Welsh Government explained that:

"The national collection belongs to everyone in Wales. This unique model will allow people to explore the collection in their local communities while also ensuring more people across Wales, the UK and even internationally can access to the national collection. It will help boost the visitor economy and support local businesses and jobs."

12. The NCAGW project is overseen by a Project Board. Delivery of the individual elements of the model is led by a partnership between the Arts Council of Wales, Amgueddfa Cymru, and the National Library of Wales ("the Delivery Partners"), with support from the Welsh Government. In June 2023, the Welsh Government announced a series of appointments to support delivery of the project: an independent chair to provide effective leadership for the Project Board; a project director to lead on operational and strategic matters; and a creative director.⁷

⁶ Welsh Government: [Written Statement: National Contemporary Art Gallery for Wales](#) 12 May 2023

⁷ Arts Council of Wales: [Project Director](#) and [Independent Chair](#): National Contemporary Art Gallery Wales

13. The list of galleries making up the network will be finalised in late autumn 2023, with phased openings planned until March 2025 as works are completed to bring participating galleries up to Government Indemnity Scheme standards (“GIS”⁸). Decisions relating to the location and plans for the anchor gallery will take place in early 2024.⁹

⁸ A government scheme to facilitate the loan of objects for public benefit.

⁹ Record of Proceedings: Culture, Communications, Welsh Language, Sport and International Relations Committee - 14 September 2023, paragraph 55

3. Funding

Initial proposals and costings

15. The preliminary capital costings for the dispersed network proposals (Phase 2) set out in the Feasibility Study range from £35-£134 million. The preliminary capital costings for the anchor site proposals (Phase 3) set out in the Feasibility Study range from £40-£45 million.¹⁰ By way of context, the Feasibility Study notes the capital costs of other recent cultural projects:

- V&A Dundee (£80m project designed by Kengo Kuma),
- Courtauld Institute (£50m project designed by Witherford Watson Mann), and
- Factory in Manchester (£110m designed by OMA/Rem Koolhaas).¹¹

16. In addition to this, the ongoing, annual revenue costs for operating the dispersed network were forecast to be in the region of £2.7 million, and between £2.5m and £15m for the national headquarters (Phase 3).¹² The Feasibility Study notes that these operating costs are:

“... significantly higher than the average annual operating expenditure of most visual arts organisations in Wales”.¹³

17. The main source of public funding for the arts is the Arts Council of Wales, which distributes about £30 million from the Welsh Government and £15 million from the National Lottery each year¹⁴.

18. It is noted in the Feasibility Study that the Arts Council of Wales’s total annual allocation for the visual and applied arts, amounts to less than the proposals in the report.¹⁵ Consultations for the Feasibility Study revealed a sector-wide concern that:

¹⁰ Welsh Government: [National contemporary art gallery Wales: feasibility study](#) – 1 July 2018

¹¹ Welsh Government: [National contemporary art gallery Wales: feasibility study](#) – 1 July 2018

¹² Welsh Government: [National contemporary art gallery Wales: feasibility study](#) – 1 July 2018

¹³ Welsh Government: [National contemporary art gallery Wales: feasibility study](#) – 1 July 2018

¹⁴ Arts Council for Wales: [Report and Financial Statements for the year ended 31 March 2022](#)

¹⁵ Welsh Government: [National contemporary art gallery Wales: feasibility study](#) – 1 July 2018

“... any new national entrant, requiring both major capital and ongoing revenue support might at best destabilise and at worst destroy the existing publicly funded ecology”.¹⁶

19. The Feasibility Study makes recommendations firstly for a large commissions budget for 50 new artworks.¹⁷ Secondly, for a new capital structure, or semi-permanent pop-up structure to be put in place at 6-8 venues in a distributed network of galleries to create temporary exhibition space for the national collection.¹⁸ The capital estimates assume additional temporary exhibition space ranging from 300 to 1300 square meters.

20. The Feasibility Study cautions that it is not possible on the available data to state with confidence that a demand or a lack of demand for contemporary art in Wales is demonstrated. It says, “The visual arts sector as a whole does not fully understand its existing or potential markets”.¹⁹ Further nationwide market research and analysis is recommended, “... to fully understand the existing and potential audience for the new national entity”.²⁰

21. The Culture, Welsh Language and Communications Committee previously reported on the challenges faced by the arts sector in reducing its reliance on public funding:

“The difficulties faced by those within the arts sector when attempting to raise revenue are wide ranging. Scale and location are key factors in enabling the generation of non-public funding. The potential to raise commercial revenue, to secure funding from businesses and to successfully bid for grants is harder the smaller the organisation, and the further it is away from a metropolitan centre of population. Such difficulties serve to underline the value of the public funding provided to arts organisations, funding which has reduced greatly over the last decade.”²¹

¹⁶ National Contemporary Art Gallery Wales. Preliminary Feasibility Study and Options Appraisal, page 122

¹⁷ Welsh Government: National contemporary art gallery Wales: feasibility study – 1 July 2018

¹⁸ Welsh Government: National contemporary art gallery Wales: feasibility study – 1 July 2018

¹⁹ Welsh Government: National contemporary art gallery Wales: feasibility study – 1 July 2018

²⁰ Welsh Government: National contemporary art gallery Wales: feasibility study – 1 July 2018

²¹ Culture, Welsh Language and Communications Committee – Fifth Senedd: Building Resilience: Inquiry into non-public funding of the arts – March 2018 [PDF 669KB]

22. We asked the Deputy Minister how much had been spent on the gallery to date. The amount invested so far was about £1.76 million²², much of which was spent on the digitisation project. With regard to how much the NCAGW would cost, we were told:

“Until a preferred site is identified, it is not possible to identify the level of investment required to support the development, affordability, or operational models for any future anchor gallery.”²³

23. The Delivery Partners told us that:

“In 2023-24, the intention, as a total in terms of the project funding, is £1.8 million, then it goes to £3.8 million and £5.7 million over three years. I think that primarily reflects the capital requirement to bring the galleries up to standard.”²⁴

24. When asked about the capital estimates and if these had changed since the Feasibility Study in 2018, the Welsh Government told us that the costs for the dispersed network were considerably less:

“Where we are now in terms of Phase 2 for those nine sites is significantly lower than the £35 million. In fact, I’d say you’re probably looking at about a quarter of that cost.”

25. We asked the Deputy Minister to confirm how much new exhibition space will be created in addition to the space existing in the network of galleries.²⁵ The Deputy Minister advised that, following capital investment to comply with GIS standards, the space provision for the NCAGW at the galleries in the network will

²² [Record of Proceedings: Culture, Communications, Welsh Language, Sport, and International Relations Committee - 14 September 2023, paragraph 46](#)

²³ Ministerial evidence: [Memorandum on the Draft Budget proposals for 2023-24](#) – 18 January 2023 [PDF 963KB]

²⁴ [Record of Proceedings: Culture, Communications, Welsh Language, Sport, and International Relations Committee - 5 July 2023, paragraph 56](#)

²⁵ [Letter to the Deputy Minister for Arts, Sport, and Tourism: National contemporary art gallery - 22 September 2023](#) [PDF 284KB]

total 2,255 square meters. The Deputy Minister did not state that this was new exhibition space.²⁶

Ongoing costs

26. We asked the Deputy Minister about the future viability of the project and its ongoing costs.

27. Regarding the future viability of the anchor site, which is yet to be chosen, the Deputy Minister told us that:

“... giving any kind of definitive answers on viability in such uncertain financial times is difficult to do. I can only tell you what our commitment to this is, and our commitment is absolute...”²⁷

28. When asked about ongoing revenue support, the Deputy Minister told us, although it was not anticipated that government funding would end entirely, reliance on central revenue funding was expected to reduce.²⁸ The Deputy Minister explained that sustainability was being built into the business case for the network of galleries through a range of activities that the sites will deliver.

29. The Delivery Partners raised concerns about a commitment to ongoing revenue funding and the opportunities for increased commercialisation:

“Consideration needs to be given to the long-term sustainability of any digital contemporary art platform...once the platform is created it will also need an ongoing team dedicated to updating and maintaining the content. Investment can’t be limited to the initial set-up phase – it needs to be long-term and sustainable.”²⁹

30. Separately, Amgueddfa Cymru said that there is the, “...potential for some commercial exploitation.” However, they warned that it would not be enough to make the NCAGW financially sustainable “in and of itself”.³⁰ The National Library of

²⁶ [Response from the Deputy Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism: National contemporary art gallery - 11 October 2023](#) [PDF 146KB]

²⁷ [Record of Proceedings: Culture, Communications, Welsh Language, Sport, and International Relations Committee - 14 September 2023, paragraph 75](#)

²⁸ [Record of Proceedings: Culture, Communications, Welsh Language, Sport, and International Relations Committee - 14 September 2023, paragraph 71](#)

²⁹ [Evidence from Cultural Freelancers Wales \(CFW\)](#) [PDF 439KB]

³⁰ [Record of Proceedings: Culture, Communications, Welsh Language, Sport, and International Relations Committee - 5 July 2023, paragraph 122](#)

Wales told us that, while capital funding was in place to 2025, they would like assurances about ongoing revenue funding to sustain the gallery in future. They warned that without such funding other services they deliver will suffer.³¹

31. The Contemporary Arts Society Wales told us that the gallery:

“... is a long-term commitment, so, it's not like project funding. It would have to be something for sustainable funding, and that, obviously, is something that would need to be tackled and very carefully.”³²

Funding for digitisation

32. When asked about ongoing revenue support for the maintenance of Celf ar y Cyd, the Deputy Minister told us:

“... at this point in time...we're thinking that the main cost is going to be the initial capital and the rest could possibly be undertaken as part of day-to-day delivery and business as usual.”³³

33. In respect of the ongoing maintenance of the digital platform, Amgueddfa Cymru told us:

“The funding that we have in place, which has facilitated the digital work and is facilitating the lending model, and the support needed for that, takes us up to 2025. There is a question, as we move forward, as to how we continue to maintain that level of service.”³⁴

“And if I could also add that one can print much of our digitised collection free of charge, so it's difficult to see the potential for income

³¹ Record of Proceedings: Culture, Communications, Welsh Language, Sport, and International Relations Committee - 5 July 2023, paragraph 111

³² Record of Proceedings: Culture, Communications, Welsh Language, Sport, and International Relations Committee - 5 July 2023, paragraph 245

³³ Record of Proceedings: Culture, Communications, Welsh Language, Sport, and International Relations Committee - 14 September 2023, paragraph 188

³⁴ Record of Proceedings: Culture, Communications, Welsh Language, Sport, and International Relations Committee - 5 July 2023, paragraph 108

generation in reproducing our national collection. All of our thinking is around providing a service free of charge to the public.”³⁵

Our view

34. The Feasibility Study for the NCAGW is clear about the scale of funding required to implement the recommendations. Following our review of the funding for the Welsh Government’s project, however, we are unclear as to how much it is going to cost – in spite of some elements of the NCAGW having already progressed. As such, we are concerned that there may be a lack of resolve on the Welsh Government’s part to provide sufficient funding for the gallery.

35. The Welsh Government told us that the capital costs for the network of galleries will be a quarter of the £35million estimated in the Feasibility Study. We were not, however, given any indication of the ongoing revenue costs for this element of the project. Further, we were not given any assurance that the capital costs for the Anchor site would be met.

36. The costs of running a “national” arts and culture institution are considerable. For example, in 2023-24, the Welsh Government’s revenue support was £26.9million for Amgueddfa Cymru, and £11.8million for the National Library of Wales. Whilst we understand the constraints and competing demands on public finances, we need clarity about the ongoing revenue costs for the NCAGW, and to know where this funding will come from. If there is to be a new, national institution, we would expect there to be commensurate new funding, and not funding that has been reallocated from elsewhere in the Welsh Government’s culture budgets.

37. The financial sustainability of the NCAGW is dependent on a model of mixed revenue support with the Welsh Government seeking to reduce dependence on the public purse. Having considered the Welsh Government’s proposal, we believe a cautious approach is needed to some of the projections regarding increased demand and opportunities for income generation.

38. Our predecessor Committee has previously reported on the challenges faced by arts venues if they are to generate more commercial revenue.³⁶ The very nature of the proposed dispersed model, involving smaller-sized arts organisations at

³⁵ [Record of Proceedings: Culture, Communications, Welsh Language, Sport, and International Relations Committee – 5 July 2023, paragraph 119](#)

³⁶ Culture, Welsh Language and Communications Committee – Fifth Senedd: [Building Resilience: Inquiry into non-public funding of the arts](#) – March 2018 [PDF 669KB]

distance from large centres of population, will contribute significantly to their difficulties in raising funding. It is not enough for the Welsh Government to simply ask the Delivery Partners to come up with ideas for increasing commercial revenue. It also needs to be satisfied that any resulting financial forecasts are properly informed and credible to avoid funding shortfalls in the future.

39. We are also concerned that neither of the recommendations in the Feasibility Study for expanding the network of galleries (by showcasing new works and building new creative spaces) are being taken forward. As such we question whether the proposal is now of a scale capable of attracting the increased visitor numbers, new business, and revenue support that it would need to significantly reduce dependence on the public purse.

40. Although the Welsh Government's proposal will create more space for the national collection to be displayed, it appears that there will be very little increase in the footprint of the galleries in the dispersed network. Therefore, gallery space that is already being used to exhibit contemporary artwork free of charge will be given over to displaying the national collection. We are concerned that this may cause a detriment to existing curatorial programmes, and a loss of opportunity for practising Welsh artists who may be prohibited from showing their work.

41. Without a firm commitment from the Welsh Government to a significant net increase in gallery space, and assurances about the source and level of ongoing revenue funding, questions remain about the credibility of this project as a national institution.

Recommendation 1. The Welsh Government should provide an estimate of the ongoing revenue funding for the NCAGW and clarify whether this will be new funding to the culture sector, or a reallocation of funding currently provided to other culture bodies.

Recommendation 2. The Welsh Government should provide further information to this Committee on the steps it has taken since 2018 to quantify the likely demand for the NCAGW and new revenue opportunities.

Recommendation 3. The Welsh Government should provide further information to this Committee relating to an assessment of the impact of the proposal on existing exhibition programmes.

4. The merits of the proposed model

The vision

42. The Feasibility Study outlined the following vision for the NCAGW:

"Its principles would involve creating sustainable and resilient networks at all levels of the arts ecology. It would aim to make Welsh contemporary art iconic, along with the landscapes, people and culture that inspire it. It requires public sector priming investment but has the potential to generate new business.

Additionally, a new gallery would nurture artists throughout their career spans and participants and audiences throughout their lives. The aim would be to embed the arts in education, health, the creative industries and the tourist economy, ensuring it plays an inspirational role at every stage of people's lives. By building on existing assets, and leapfrogging current paradigms about gallery building, Wales could become a world leader in creative citizenship, addressing both its highest cultural ambitions and its commitment to a more sustainable, just and inclusive society."³⁷

43. In written evidence, the Deputy Minister told us that the gallery would ensure, "...the national collections of contemporary art...can be enjoyed by...everyone in Wales." The Deputy Minister added that the gallery would, "...create a new sense of ownership...with the art sector..." and "...will allow a genuinely democratic way of working with local galleries making decisions about works..." relevant to their local communities. The gallery would, "...become instantly recognisable both nationally and internationally, along with the landscapes, people and culture that inspire it".³⁸

Digitisation

44. There was a consensus amongst witnesses that the digitisation project and the launch of the digital platform, Celf ar y Cyd, was a significant achievement,

³⁷ Welsh Government: [National contemporary art gallery Wales: feasibility study](#) – 1 July 2018

³⁸ [Evidence from the Deputy Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism: National contemporary art gallery](#) [PDF 284KB]

and an important element of the NCAGW. We heard about how the website provides:

- access to the national collection, including many items that have never been on public display before,
- an international platform for Welsh art,
- opportunities for enhanced learning through its digital learning programme and flexible resources for educators,
- a shop window for the network of galleries when researching works for display and exhibition.

45. Focus group participants told us that:

"The interactive and immersive side of digital access to contemporary art is really exciting."

"The digital gallery is absolutely brilliant. It's a great idea."

"It is a democratic way of sharing the work and would increase its visibility."

"... it doesn't matter where in the world you are, you can see Welsh art."

"Digital access is really important from a teaching and research perspective, having one centralised, standardised database with images and cataloguing information is really valuable."³⁹

46. Some stakeholders and participants of our focus groups spoke about the challenges of digital poverty restricting access to the digital collection, and of the need to be in the same room as the artwork in order to fully appreciate it. One focus group participant said:

"We're all so au fait with sitting in front of a screen and accessing anything in the world, but to actually go into a physical space and the work in reality is a totally different experience."⁴⁰

³⁹ [Engagement findings: National contemporary art gallery](#) [PDF 455KB]

⁴⁰ [Engagement findings: National contemporary art gallery](#) [PDF 455KB]

Dispersed model

47. We received evidence relating to the strengths and weaknesses of the Welsh Government's proposed dispersed model for the NCAGW.

48. Witnesses and a number of focus groups participants were supportive of the Welsh Government's plans. Many felt that the dispersed model offered multiple opportunities and benefits. These included:

- showcasing something that is innovative and unique,
- enabling the people of Wales to access the national collection,
- the potential for supporting and promoting living Welsh artists, both nationally and internationally,
- the opportunity for galleries and to develop by the sharing of knowledge, ideas, and experience,
- the potential to drive tourism and investment in local areas,
- the beneficial impact of art and art activities on the health and wellbeing of individuals and local communities,
- the potential for partnerships with local schools to nurture creative interests,
- supporting a lower carbon footprint through reduced travel distances.

49. Amgueddfa Cymru told us that the Welsh Government's proposal offers a "fantastic model" and that "...people shouldn't have to travel four to five hours to see the collection in Cardiff".⁴¹ Cultural Freelancers Wales said that the model provides an exciting opportunity to, "...embed a new, equitable and inclusive strategic approach to working with cultural freelancers...".⁴²

50. Some focus group participants felt that there was very little difference between existing processes and the new model being proposed. One participant suggested that this is not a new model, it is an already well-established model

⁴¹ [Record of Proceedings: Culture, Communications, Welsh Language, Sport, and International Relations Committee - 5 July 2023, paragraph 68](#)

⁴² [Evidence from Cultural Freelancers Wales \(CFW\)](#) [PDF 439KB]

found elsewhere. However, it is not usually described as a 'gallery'.⁴³ Another participant said:

"One thing I think is really interesting is that this Welsh model is described as the National Contemporary Art Gallery ... It's simply a model of disseminating collections more effectively throughout a country."⁴⁴

51. When asked about possible weaknesses in the model, the Federation of Museums and Art Galleries Wales raised concerns about the geographical spread of the dispersed network:

"The weaknesses I would pick up on, though, are I think whether or not the network is large enough—geographically, could we have a few other venues involved ... rather than these, if you like, groupings, which are to do with where galleries are at the moment and who are clients of the arts council. It may be that we need to look at a few more."⁴⁵

52. Some participants in our focus groups suggested it will be challenging to ensure good, or even sufficient transport links between the various galleries.⁴⁶

53. The Deputy Minister told us that the proposed model has the flexibility to scale up or scale down, and to plug gaps so there is potential to increase geographical access by expanding the network in the future.⁴⁷

54. Stakeholders acknowledged that the NCAGW would not provide significant access to the nation's historic collection of Welsh Art, although there was curatorial flexibility for galleries to display historical pieces of contemporary relevance. The National Library of Wales said:

"... it doesn't establish a national art gallery that also includes contemporary art. Ideally, that's what we would have seen: a national gallery that would provide a platform for contemporary art but would

⁴³ Engagement findings: National contemporary art gallery [PDF 455KB]

⁴⁴ Engagement findings: National contemporary art gallery [PDF 455KB]

⁴⁵ Record of Proceedings: Culture, Communications, Welsh Language, Sport, and International Relations Committee - 5 July 2023, paragraph 68

⁴⁶ Engagement findings: National contemporary art gallery [PDF 455KB]

⁴⁷ Record of Proceedings: Culture, Communications, Welsh Language, Sport, and International Relations Committee - 14 September 2023, paragraph 26

also provide a platform for our historical artworks, which are hugely important and of great quality.”⁴⁸

Anchor site

55. We also reviewed the merits of the Welsh Government’s proposal for an anchor site to support the dispersed network of galleries.

56. Participants in our focus groups raised concerns about the recent developments around the anchor site. We heard about the need for clarity around the purpose of the anchor site, and of a lack of information about this ‘strand’ of the project. Some participants highlighted the inconsistent use of terminology by the Welsh Government. They noted that the anchor site had been described as a flagship building and an anchor site, which are two very different ideas.⁴⁹

57. The need for clarity was highlighted to us by other witnesses. For example, the Contemporary Arts Society Wales told us:

“... I’m still not clear about how the anchor will work, whether it’s a purpose-built gallery, whether it’s an add-on or whether it’s an administrative hub. And, as I’ve talked to different people, people have come back with different responses.”⁵⁰

58. Some participants in our focus groups questioned the need for an anchor site, preferring instead to invest in existing assets given the financial difficulties faced by arts organisations. Few participants in our focus groups were in favour of having the national collection housed in one building. One participant said:

“Personally, it feels like a bit of a cop out to be honest ... we really do need a contemporary art gallery in one building, and we need the Welsh Government to do it!”⁵¹

59. When asked about the criteria for choosing the anchor site, the Deputy Minister said:

⁴⁸ Record of Proceedings: Culture, Communications, Welsh Language, Sport, and International Relations Committee - 5 July 2023, paragraph 25

⁴⁹ Engagement findings: National contemporary art gallery [PDF 455KB]

⁵⁰ Engagement findings: National contemporary art gallery [PDF 455KB]

⁵¹ Engagement findings: National contemporary art gallery [PDF 455KB]

“What we have done is we've set out the high-level policy, and the high-level direction. We've made it very clear that the delivery partners for this are the National Museum and the National Library and the Arts Council of Wales. And they will be the ones that will develop the detail around this.”⁵²

60. In contrast to the Deputy Minister’s comments, the Delivery Partners told us that the Anchor site fell outside of the scope of the work it had been asked to undertake as that part of the project was, “... led directly by the Government”.⁵³

Our view

61. From the evidence we considered, it is clear that aspects of the project have merit. In particular, there is generally warm support for the digital platform.

62. On the other hand, not everyone agreed with the Welsh Government’s proposed model for the NCAGW. For example, we heard about a lack of clarity regarding elements of the dispersed model and not everyone was persuaded that it offered anything innovative or new.

63. We discuss our comments on individual aspects of the project in the remainder of this chapter.

Digitisation

64. We commend the progress that has been made on the digitisation of the national collection and the successful launch of the Celf ar y Cyd website in June 2023. The ability to browse some 30,000 new images and to see works that are so fragile and sensitive, that they have never been on public display, is a significant achievement.

65. However, the digital platform also has its limitations. In our view, there is no substitute for viewing artworks in person. The experience of seeing pieces at first hand cannot be replicated online. Further, the platform provides little benefit to a significant minority in Wales who are digitally excluded. Therefore, whilst the Celf ar y Cyd website is a substantial and important resource, it should be seen as one

⁵² Record of Proceedings: Culture, Communications, Welsh Language, Sport, and International Relations Committee - 14 September 2023, paragraph 142

⁵³ Record of Proceedings: Culture, Communications, Welsh Language, Sport, and International Relations Committee - 14 September 2023, paragraph 96

element in ensuring the accessibility of the national collection, and not the solution to it.

Dispersed model

66. There is a divergence of opinion amongst the Committee on the merits of proposed model for the NCAGW. Some Members think the collective elements of the proposal, if fully realised, will have the potential to create a progressive institution that will enhance the cultural offer across Wales.

67. However, some Members feel that the proposal is limited in its scope and ambition. Whilst acknowledging the merits of a proposal that will increase local access to the national collection, it will not deliver a national brand.

Anchor Site

68. Presently, various flexible elements of the NCAGW model are being explored by the Welsh Government and the detailed business cases and supporting plans are still in development. As a Committee, we do not yet have enough information to form a consensus view on the merits of the proposed model, before the Welsh Government has formed a more detailed plan. However, we are agreed that the proposed model is made better as the sum of its component parts, with each of the four elements complimenting and supporting the other. We are concerned that, without a firm commitment to capital funding for an appropriate anchor site, the strength of proposal is significantly compromised.

69. We will therefore maintain a watching brief over developments and return to the Welsh Government's proposal in the new year when the business cases have been submitted and a more complete financial picture is known.

Recommendation 4. The Welsh Government should return to the Committee early in the parliamentary summer term of 2024, with an update and more detailed plans. In particular, the Welsh Government should clarify the net amount of new gallery space that is to be created.

5. Delays

70. The Feasibility Study recommended that the Advisory Panel to the Welsh Government should appoint a collaborative director to develop and drive the concept forward.⁵⁴

71. We heard concerns from stakeholders and participants in our focus groups about the lack of progress and information about anticipated timescales for the project's completion. Some were pleased that the plans for the NCAGW seem to have gained momentum during recent months.

72. The Contemporary Arts Society for Wales told us that the project had, "...been brewing for a long time..." and that the timescales involved are still not clear. Visual Arts Group Wales agreed, noting that the scheduling had been, "...a really, really long time in the making". However, they did tell us that the recent progress was really exciting.⁵⁵

73. The Delivery Partners said that while a lot of work has been done, there is still a lot left to do. They added that:

"... following correspondence with the Deputy Minister, we've also identified over the next two years what we need to be doing in terms of the work agenda. There are specific targets that have been set.... We are strengthening the project group in terms of the scrutiny function and regulation."⁵⁶

Pandemic impact

74. In written evidence, the Welsh Government said that, during the Covid-19 pandemic, much of the work on the NCAGW was curtailed while the focus shifted to supporting the sectors.

75. The Delivery Partners acknowledged that there had been delays, primarily due to the Covid-19 pandemic. However, changes of leadership at Amgueddfa Cymru and the National Library were also noted to be a contributory factor. The Delivery Partners told us that they could have undertaken the GIS audits for the

⁵⁴ Welsh Government: [National contemporary art gallery Wales: feasibility study](#) – 1 July 2018

⁵⁵ [Record of Proceedings: Culture, Communications, Welsh Language, Sport, and International Relations Committee - 5 July 2023, paragraph 235](#)

⁵⁶ [Record of Proceedings: Culture, Communications, Welsh Language, Sport, and International Relations Committee - 5 July 2023, paragraph 49](#)

different galleries sooner, however this was the only work that was currently behind schedule.⁵⁷

Staffing appointments

76. We asked the Deputy Minister why it had taken five years to advertise for a project director and independent chair to lead the Project Board. She said that the decision to appoint an independent chair had only been taken this year.

77. In addition, the Deputy Minister told us that:

“... one of the delivery partners, the Arts Council of Wales, did come to us and say that they felt that, in addition to an independent chair, they needed a project director. That was a decision that was taken relatively recently as well, and that person has only recently been appointed.”⁵⁸

78. The Welsh Government said that, in the few weeks the project director and the creative director had been in place, they were, “...providing a different level of momentum and [it] was sorely needed”.⁵⁹

Our view

79. Although the plans for the NCAGW are still evolving, the Welsh Government does now appear to be making positive progress with its plans and arrangements for delivery. Considerable work has been done to develop the distributed model and put in place the necessary structures to take the project forward.

80. That said, we remain concerned about the slow pace of progress to date and consequent lack of a detailed project plan outlining key timescales, priorities and deliverables. This is something we would expect to see with any project, and this is all the more true of a project of this scale and ambition.

81. Whilst we are sympathetic to the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic, we are not satisfied that this fully accounts for the slow pace of progress on delivery of the NCAGW to date. For example, the Delivery Partners told us there were delays,

⁵⁷ Record of Proceedings: Culture, Communications, Welsh Language, Sport, and International Relations Committee - 5 July 2023, paragraph 48

⁵⁸ Record of Proceedings: Culture, Communications, Welsh Language, Sport, and International Relations Committee - 14 September 2023, paragraph 49

⁵⁹ Record of Proceedings: Culture, Communications, Welsh Language, Sport, and International Relations Committee - 14 September 2023, paragraph 50

due to lack of impetus on their part, with the GIS work required for the galleries. Other delays were partly because of vacancies in key leadership roles.

82. Despite all this, the Welsh Government did not identify to us that there had been any difficulties. Neither did it seek to intervene at an earlier time to make improvements (such as identifying the need for a director as set out in the Feasibility Study). All this combined does not provide us with assurance that responsibility for leadership and oversight of the overall NCAGW project is being adequately prioritised. We sincerely hope that the recent appointment of an independent chair will improve matters urgently.

83. To ensure that the delivery of the NCAGW remains on track, we would welcome regular progress updates from the Welsh Government.

Recommendation 5. The Welsh Government should provide this Committee with progress updates every six months on the delivery of the NCAGW. This should include whether key timelines and milestones are being met.

6. Engagement and transparency

84. The Feasibility Study was informed by a consultation exercise and guided by a range of stakeholder interviews and workshops. It recommended the establishment of an Advisory Panel involving a wide range of stakeholders to co-develop the vision, concept, and models for the NCAGW.⁶⁰

85. In contrast, some stakeholders and participants in our focus groups told us that they had not been involved in the process of developing the current plans for the NCAGW. The Federation of Museums and Art Galleries Wales told us that:

“... as an organisation, we've had absolutely no contact with anybody about this until we were invited along to this meeting..., the museums would have liked to have been more engaged ...”⁶¹

86. One participant in our focus groups said:

“Artists feel out of the loop. To be honest, the galleries have felt out of the loop for quite a long time as well.”⁶²

87. Some participants in our focus groups with experience of the process said that it was more ‘top down’ than they had hoped.

88. Participants in our focus groups also spoke of their concern about a lack of information about the plans for the NCAGW. One participant told us:

“More knowledge would be helpful. We're having to guess, almost hoping what this might be.”⁶³

Our view

89. The initial recommendations made in the Feasibility Study in 2018, were informed by a wide consultation and engagement. However, the current model proposed by the Welsh Government is materially different in a number of aspects.

⁶⁰ Welsh Government: [National contemporary art gallery Wales: feasibility study](#) – 1 July 2018

⁶¹ [Record of Proceedings: Culture, Communications, Welsh Language, Sport and International Relations Committee - 5 July 2023, paragraph 227](#)

⁶² [Engagement findings: National contemporary art gallery](#) [PDF 455KB]

⁶³ [Engagement findings: National contemporary art gallery](#) [PDF 455KB]

For example, there is no commissioning budget for 50 first artworks across the country to create a 'National Canvas'. Further, there are no plans to develop new capital structures at each venue in the dispersed network to extend the cultural tourism offer. Therefore, we are concerned by the evidence that the Welsh Government has not engaged widely during the formative stages of the current proposals' development and design. We are also concerned about poor communication of the plans and the lack of transparency in its decision making.

90. It seems to us that the Welsh Government has only heard the voices of those stakeholders who have a direct interest in the current proposal. As a result, there is a danger that decisions relating to the NCAGW are not being taken in the best interests of the wider visual arts community, or in the national interest. In our view, the Welsh Government must take steps to address this. This includes undertaking meaningful engagement with a wide range of stakeholders and ensuring they can shape the remaining aspects of the NCAGW.

Recommendation 6. The Welsh Government should develop a clear communications plan to encourage sector wide support and advocacy for the NCAGW.

Recommendation 7. The Welsh Government should produce a clear plan for widening engagement with the visual arts sector, including public, third and private sector providers to ensure that the widest range of views and experience are considered in the planning and design of the remaining elements of the NCAGW.

7. Branding and marketing

91. A number of stakeholders noted the importance of recognisable branding across the venues to the success of the NCAGW project.

92. The Deputy Minister told us that, much like Amgueddfa Cymru, it was important to have a brand that people will recognise, "...as being...part of the national, contemporary art gallery. So, not just the signage, but what it looks like, what it feels like, what it's displaying".⁶⁴

93. The Visual Arts Group Wales said it was a potential weakness not to enforce the NCAGW brand enough across the venues, and that this needed to be carefully

⁶⁴ Record of Proceedings: Culture, Communications, Welsh Language, Sport, and International Relations Committee - 14 September 2023, paragraph 166

planned to sit alongside current branding for each of the venues in the distributed network.⁶⁵

94. Many participants spoke in our focus groups spoke of the challenge for all venues involved to keep their own identity as individual sites, as well as being a part of the NCAGW. Other participants spoke of the need for the NCAGW to have its own clear and consistent identity, so that people understand what is meant by the gallery itself. Participants suggested that it will be challenging to make sure that the project is viewed as a whole, and venues should not be seen as separate ‘strands.’⁶⁶

95. The Feasibility Study noted that there were insufficient tourism materials promoting Welsh contemporary art and this was likely to have an impact on visitor numbers and visitor types. Further, there was, “...a striking lack of alignment...” between cultural tourism and Visit Wales’s branding and marketing campaigns.⁶⁷

Our view

96. We agree that a cohesive and distinctive brand identity is needed with which the NCAGW venues and visitors can identify. We consider, however, that a more marked emphasis on marketing and tourism campaigns (which promote and “position” the arts) are also needed to attract increased visitor numbers. In our view, early involvement of the branding and marketing teams with the tourism sector is needed to ensure that there is an integrated approach, in addition to developing a strong brand identity for the NCAGW. We would welcome more information relating to the plans in development to address this when they become available.

Recommendation 8. The Welsh Government should take steps to ensure that the branding and marketing teams and the tourism sector work closely to align plans for the NCAGW and ensure it is embedded into tourism campaigns.

⁶⁵ Record of Proceedings: Culture, Communications, Welsh Language, Sport, and International Relations Committee - 5 July 2023, paragraph 250.

⁶⁶ Engagement findings: National contemporary art gallery

⁶⁷ Welsh Government: National contemporary art gallery Wales: feasibility study – 1 July 2018

8. Environmental impact

97. Some stakeholders highlighted the potential environmental impact of touring collections across Wales. Cultural Freelancers Wales told us:

“... in the face of the climate crisis, environmental impact will be a critical consideration. The dispersed model will require transporting artworks across the country, which is a significant environmental cost. The environmental impact should be carefully considered and informed by expert advice before any decisions are made to ensure that the cultural and social benefits are not pursued at the expense of the environment.”⁶⁸

98. Many participants in our focus groups mentioned the issues of transporting the national collection to venues across Wales and raised concerns about carbon footprint.⁶⁹

99. Amgueddfa Cymru told us:

“Perhaps one of the questions—and I wouldn't say it's a weakness; it's a challenge for us—is about the sustainability, in terms of us moving collections to different parts of the country and how we manage that in a way so that we do minimise our carbon footprint. So, we are looking into that and looking at things. They sound basic, but they're important—about sustainable packaging materials, looking at the types of vehicles. So, I think that is a challenge, and that's something we are grappling with.”⁷⁰

Our view

100. We share the concerns we have heard about the potential environmental impact of the NCAGW. We are clear that the NCAGW has the potential to improve the social and cultural fabric of Wales, but less so how the gallery will improve the environmental wellbeing of the nation. It would be concerning if the anticipated

⁶⁸ Evidence from Cultural Freelancers Wales (CFW) [PDF 439KB]

⁶⁹ Engagement findings: National contemporary art gallery [PDF 455KB]

⁷⁰ Record of Proceedings: Culture, Communications, Welsh Language, Sport, and International Relations Committee - 5 July 2023, paragraph 83

gains of reduced visitor travel created by the dispersed model were substantially offset by the need to transport the national collection around the country. Given the sustainable development duty placed on the Delivery Partners (as publicly funded bodies) by the Wellbeing of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015, we would welcome more information on the plans in development to address this, when they become available.

Recommendation 9. The Welsh Government should provide further information to this Committee relating to the plans to provide assurance that the NCAGW is environmentally sustainable.

Annex 1: Formal evidence

List of oral evidence sessions.

The following witnesses provided oral evidence to the committee on the dates noted below. Transcripts of all oral evidence sessions can be viewed on the

Committee's website.

Date	Name and Organisation
5 July 2023	Dafydd Rhys, Chief Executive, Arts Council of Wales Pedr ap Llwyd, Chief Executive and Librarian, National Library of Wales Dr Kath Davies, Director of Collections and Research, National Museum Wales Chris Delaney, Development Officer, The Federation of Museums and Art Galleries of Wales Alfredo Cramerotti, Co-Chair, Visual Arts Group Wales Dr Sandra Harding, Chair, Contemporary Arts Society Wales (CASW)
14 September 2023	Dawn Bowden MS, Deputy Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism Welsh Government Ian Williams, Deputy Director Culture & Sport, Welsh Government Marcus Hill, Head of Capital Projects, Welsh Government

Written evidence

All written information can be viewed on the **Committee's website.**