

Dear Delyth,

I am emailing you in your role as Chair of the Senedd's Culture Committee to alert you to correspondence I have sent to both Vaughan Gething and Lesley Griffiths (copied below) about the immediate crisis taking place at Welsh National Opera. Without an urgent, emergency, bi-national funding package being secured, WNO will be forced to become part-time, which would obviously be devastating, both for those who work for the largest arts organisation that our nation has, and for Wales itself.

Please can I ask you to read the email below, along with the attached open statement, and view the 176 signatories that I have also attached which show the enormity of feeling about this issue, both within Wales, across the UK and further afield.

I do hope that you will be able to raise this issue with the necessary parties in Welsh Government to encourage cross-border discussions with the Culture Secretary in Westminster, and I know that Rhianon Passmore would be pleased to speak to you about this issue as Chair of the Senedd's CPG for Music (of which I am a member). I am copying her in to this email so that you can be in touch.

I would also appreciate it if you could raise the issues at your next Culture Committee meeting. I believe that an urgent inquiry needs to take place into the funding model here in Wales, just as is happening in England right now. In my opinion, there is something seriously wrong with the way the system is working currently and proper scrutiny needs to be given to the decisions being made and the principles being applied when allocating funds.

Thank you for your time, and I hope that you will be able to encourage engagement and cooperation between all parties concerned to ensure that Wales's flagship arts organisation is not dismantled before our eyes.

With best wishes,

Elizabeth Atherton

Begin forwarded message:

From: Elizabeth Atherton

Subject: Welsh National Opera crisis

Date: 5 May 2024 at 17:36:08 BST

To: correspondence.lesley.griffiths@gov.wales, PSCSCSJ@gov.wales

Dear Cabinet Secretary for Culture and Social Justice,

I enclose a formal statement which has been signed by international figures from across Wales, the UK and beyond. It describes the highly perilous position that Welsh National Opera has been placed in due to severe cuts in their funding from both the Arts Councils of Wales and England. The unique nature of the long-standing, bi-national funding agreement for WNO, paired with the difficult financial landscape in Wales, means that urgent intervention is necessary.

An online petition set up by the Orchestra of WNO in conjunction with the Musicians' Union calling for WNO to be retained as a full-time company has also now received over 8,000 signatures.

Without emergency financial assistance, Wales stands to lose its flagship arts organisation, a brand that represents Wales globally and attracts international talent to our shores. This is a situation that simply cannot be ignored.

Please can I urge you to read the statement that I am sending and enter into talks with both representatives of WNO and the Culture Secretary in England to discuss how WNO's cross-border agreement for funding can be honoured and an emergency package be put in place by both administrations to secure the future of the company.

This is far too important an issue to ignore, and in the run-up to a General Election it is imperative that the electorate sees a real commitment to the Arts from our politicians, as a nation which is proudly developing a core-funded National Music Service, and particularly given the importance that the Labour Party in England is attaching to them.

This is a crucial moment, both for WNO, and for the politicians leading us, and the time is right for our leaders to signal that they mean what they say about the importance of the Arts. If this moment is not grabbed, it will be the end of Wales's largest Arts organisation and employer as we know it. Politicians should not simply pay lip service to the Arts in the lead-up to elections - your support right now would be a clear sign to your electorate that our politicians are serious about issues that significantly matter to many who vote for them.

Yours sincerely,

Elizabeth Atherton
Member of the Senedd's Cross-Party Working Group for Music