

Charging for exhibitions

June 2025

1. Background

1. Following Draft Budget scrutiny in 2024, the Welsh Government told the Committee:

"...like all our Cultural arm's length bodies, Amgueddfa Cymru is exploring all available fundraising opportunities and options for further income generation. This includes exploring a range of potential future charging options, only one of which is charging for entry to some or all of its museums in the longer term".¹

2. We agreed to examine the implications of this statement in the context of the general Welsh Government policy of free entry to the national museums, which was introduced in 2001. We also decided to explore the potential for charging to contribute meaningfully to the income of museums and galleries. This follows Welsh Government revenue cuts to these areas in the 2024-25 Budget, and repeated statements from the Welsh Government that culture bodies should increase their non-government incomes.²

3. We considered issues such as:

- the contribution charging can make to income generation;

¹ Letter from the Minister for the Economy and Deputy Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism to the Culture, Communications, Welsh Language, Sport, and International Relations Committee – 29 January 2024

² Welsh Government Draft Budget 2024-25: A Budget to Protect the Services which Matter Most to You – December 2023, paragraph 141



- the impact of charging on diversity of audiences;
- the impact of charging on visitor experiences;
- whether and how charging should be targeted at particular groups; and
- Welsh Government assistance for temporary exhibitions.

4. Currently, Amgueddfa Cymru is the only national institution to charge for access to some exhibitions. We were keen to hear from other culture bodies, such as the National Library and independent museums and galleries, to benefit from their insights and hear of any plans they had in this area.

5. Our work was focused on charging for exhibitions, rather than the range of other commercial activities that museums and galleries undertake. This is because these other activities, such as retail, cafes and commercial hire, do not impact public access to culture as directly as exhibition fees. We also considered the issue of Amgueddfa Cymru charging for underground tours at Big Pit National Coal Museum (“Big Pit”). Although the underground tour is not a formal exhibition, charging for the tour raises similar issues about access to culture as those raised by charged-for exhibitions.

Evidence gathering

6. On 6 June 2024, we visited the National Museum Cardiff and held an evidence session in the Senedd looking at charging for exhibitions. Witnesses for this session were:

- Dr Mark O'Neill, Former Head of Glasgow Museums;
- Lisa Ollerhead, Association of Independent Museums;
- Nia Elias, Amgueddfa Cymru/Museum Wales;
- Rhodri Llwyd Morgan, National Library of Wales.

7. We also received follow-up written evidence from the witnesses.³

8. On 13 March 2025, we visited Big Pit in Blaenavon to see the site, experience the underground tour, and engage with the staff. We greatly appreciate the time

³ Letter from the Association of Independent Museums to the Culture, Communications, Welsh Language, Sport, and International Relations Committee - 28 June 2024, Letter from the National Library of Wales to the Culture, Communications, Welsh Language, Sport, and International Relations Committee - 4 July 2024

and insights shared by the staff we met: their knowledge and enthusiasm are a credit to Amgueddfa Cymru.

9. The Committee discussed charging for exhibitions, and Amgueddfa Cymru's proposal to charge for the underground tour at Big Pit, with the Minister for Culture, Skills and Social Partnerships, Jack Sargeant MS. These discussions took place at meetings on 13 November 2024 and 28 November 2024, and in correspondence.

10. We are grateful to all those who contributed to our inquiry.

Funding context and previous comments from the Welsh Government

11. Between 2023-24 and 2024-25, the Welsh Government cut Amgueddfa Cymru and the National Library's revenue budget by 6 per cent, which Amgueddfa Cymru described as the "biggest cuts to Amgueddfa Cymru's budget ever".⁴

12. In April 2024, Amgueddfa Cymru said it expected about 90 staff (out of 600) to take voluntary redundancy. Amgueddfa Cymru's Chief Executive, Jane Richardson, said that the museums would also charge visitors for special events such as tours and exhibitions, and close earlier in the winter.⁵

13. Historic levels of funding for the culture sector are documented in our recent report, *A decade of cuts: Impact of funding reductions for culture and sport*.⁶ This showed that, according to the Welsh Government's own figures, revenue funding for culture and sport has reduced in real-terms over a decade by 17 per cent. Analysis from Senedd Research showed public funding for culture and sport in Wales has now declined to the extent that it is among the lowest in Europe.

14. Following the cuts in the 2024-25 Draft Budget, the Welsh Government said that "culture bodies will need to explore other sources of income" to meet inflationary pressures.⁷

⁴ *Welsh Government Draft Budget 2024-25: A Budget to Protect the Services which Matter Most to You* - December 2023

⁵ *Amgueddfa Cymru: At least 90 jobs cut and Cardiff building may close* - BBC News, 14 April 2024

⁶ *Culture, Communications, Welsh Language, Sport, and International Relations Committee: A decade of cuts: Impact of funding reductions for culture and sport* - January 2025

⁷ *Welsh Government Draft Budget 2024-25: A Budget to Protect the Services which Matter Most to You* - December 2023, paragraph 141

15. The then Deputy Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism, Dawn Bowden MS, told us in April 2024 that charging for access to Amgueddfa Cymru was “on the table” due to the “critical situation” regarding the budget. She stressed:

“I’m not saying that that’s where we will end up, but it would not be responsible of me to rule that out at this stage or to suggest to the museum that they shouldn’t be exploring that.”⁸

16. The subsequent Cabinet Secretary for Culture and Social Justice, Lesley Griffiths MS, told the Senedd on 17 April 2024:

“Welsh Government is committed to not charging to go into our museums. As I say, I had a very brief discussion with the chief executive yesterday around that, and she assured me that was still the view as well. I absolutely agree. If we [are] going to have that widening of participation in our iconic buildings and in our museums, it is really important that there is no charge.”⁹

17. When the Welsh Government published its 2025-26 Draft Budget in December 2024, it had reversed many of the cuts to culture and sport it implemented in the 2023-24 Budget.¹⁰ However, we were “not yet assured that the allocations are sufficient to improve the situation materially”.¹¹ These small increases since 2023-24 had all been wiped out by inflation, and organisations faced other increased costs, including their contributions to new Welsh Government projects such as the National Contemporary Art Gallery.

18. In the Final Budget, published in February 2025, culture and sport saw an additional revenue increase of £4.6m.¹² That means a real-terms increase for these areas between 2023-24 and 2025-26 of about 1 per cent. Revenue funding for Amgueddfa Cymru and the National Library, excluding non-cash, is now at 2023-24 levels (not adjusted for inflation).¹³ This means a real-terms revenue cut for all these bodies, excluding non-cash, between 2023-24 and 2025-26 of about 2 per cent.

⁸ Record of Proceedings: Culture, Communications, Welsh Language, Sport and International Relations Committee - 17 January 2024, paragraph 154

⁹ Record of Proceedings: Plenary - 17 April 2024, paragraph 183

¹⁰ Welsh Government: Detailed Draft Budget Proposals 2025-26 - December 2024

¹¹ Report of the Culture, Communications, Welsh Language, Sport and International Relations Committee: Scrutiny of the Welsh Government Draft Budget 2025-26 - February 2025, paragraph 30

¹² Welsh Government: Final Budget main expenditure group allocations - February 2025

¹³ Non-cash allocations are ring-fenced and cannot be used to fund day-to-day spending (they can include items such as depreciation).

2. Free entry

19. In 1997, the Labour UK Government committed to reinstate free entry for national museums. The national museums that had adopted admission charges agreed to drop them in return for extra government funding to compensate for lost income from selling tickets. They continued to charge for special exhibitions. The devolved administrations in Scotland and Wales agreed to fund free entry at the national museums which they support, and free entry for all was introduced at all their sites in April 2001.¹⁴

20. In 2017, the Welsh Government published a review into Amgueddfa Cymru by Dr Simon Thurley (“the Thurley Report”). This explained that, since free entry began in 2001, visitor numbers across the seven Amgueddfa Cymru sites had “more than doubled”, although this increase was largely repeat visitors. However, the proportion of lower socio-economic groups visiting had expanded to around 30 per cent of the total, “and this may be directly attributable to free access”.¹⁵

21. According to Nia Elias, Director of Relationships and Funding at Amgueddfa Cymru, “when we offered free entry then the numbers of visitors doubled”.¹⁶

22. The point that free entry does not, in and of itself, lead to equal socio-economic attendance at museum sites, was made by Dr Mark O’Neil, former head of Glasgow Museums:

“The primary predictor of museum visiting isn't income, and charging isn't the most significant barrier. The greatest predictor of museum visiting is the prior level of education. People with poor or no educational qualifications usually have had a bad experience of school and of learning, they see museums as schooly places that are not for them.”¹⁷

23. The Welsh Government outlined its commitment to free entry to Amgueddfa Cymru sites in a letter to us dated 16 January 2025:

¹⁴ Centre for Public Impact: Universal Free Admission to the UK’s National Museums – May 2016

¹⁵ Dr Simon Thurley CBE for the Welsh Government: Review of Amgueddfa Cymru – June 2017, paragraph 16.7

¹⁶ Record of Proceedings: Culture, Communications, Welsh Language, Sport and International Relations Committee – 6 June 2024, paragraph 40

¹⁷ Record of Proceedings: Culture, Communications, Welsh Language, Sport and International Relations Committee – 6 June 2024, paragraph 114

“This was introduced ahead of the rest of the UK and, thanks to Welsh Government funding, visitors continue to enter all seven of Amgueddfa Cymru’s sites for free. Our continued commitment to this policy is reflected in our draft Priorities for Culture, which include the Ambition ‘Culture is inclusive, accessible and diverse’. I have also emphasised to Amgueddfa Cymru the importance of ensuring the national collection continues to be accessible to all.”¹⁸

24. The Welsh Government’s Tailored Review of Amgueddfa Cymru in 2023 (“the Tailored Review”) recommended:

“That AC [Amgueddfa Cymru] should remain free at the point of access, but WG [the Welsh Government] should advise on the boundaries for income generation from the estate and collections with a view to enabling AC to generate more income in addition to GIA.”¹⁹

25. In a letter to us in November 2024, Amgueddfa Cymru explained:

“ We don’t require any specific permission from the Welsh Government to run temporary exhibitions and appreciate the autonomy to make decisions on charging models ourselves as per our Royal Charter.”²⁰

Our view

26. The Welsh Government’s policy of free entry to national museums has worked to increase access. We think it is a valuable central principle that people should not pay to enjoy our national collections. The national collections belong to the nation, with Amgueddfa Cymru, the National Library, and the Welsh Government as their funder, serving as temporary custodians.

27. Being a custodian of our nation’s history carries responsibility. The Welsh Government has a responsibility to fund our national culture institutions adequately so they can afford to provide free entry.

¹⁸ [Letter from the Minister for Culture, Skills and Social Partnership to the Culture, Communications, Welsh Language, Sport, and International Relations Committee - 16 January 2025](#)

¹⁹ [Welsh Government: National Museum Wales: tailored review - July 2023](#)

²⁰ [Letter from Amgueddfa Cymru to the Culture, Communications, Welsh Language, Sport, and International Relations Committee - 21 November 2024](#)

28. The Welsh Government has not met this responsibility. Over a decade, the Welsh Government has cut public funding for cultural services in Wales to the extent that it is now among the lowest in Europe. It is an indictment of these historic low levels of funding that the previous Deputy Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism told this Committee that charging for entry was an option “on the table”.

29. Whilst the Welsh Government’s 2025-26 Final Budget includes welcome increases in funding for culture, this does not obscure the significant real-term reductions in funding the sector has endured over the past decade. The Welsh Government is yet to fund culture in a way that recognises its intrinsic worth to the nation.

30. Free entry to the national collections, alone, is not enough to ensure equal access. We heard that “the greatest predictor of museum visiting is the prior level of education”, rather than income. This evidence highlights the value of the engagement work done by institutions such as Amgueddfa Cymru and the National Library. This valuable work also requires sufficient funding from the Welsh Government.

Recommendation 1. We recommend that the Welsh Government’s policy of free entry to the national museums is retained. The Welsh Government should provide adequate funding to Amgueddfa Cymru to facilitate this.

3. Value of charged for exhibitions

31. Witnesses explained that the income they raised from charged-for exhibitions was, in the words of Nia Elias at Amgueddfa Cymru, “relatively modest”.²¹ However, they explained that these exhibitions had additional benefits, including improving diversity of provision, and therefore audience diversity, as well as increasing secondary spend, for example in shops and cafes.

32. Although the National Library does not charge for temporary exhibitions, or plan to do so, the Chief Executive of the National Library, Rhodri Llwyd Morgan explained to us the benefits of hosting temporary exhibitions on visitor numbers and commercial income:

“So, compared with May of last year, we've not just doubled but quadrupled the number of visitors to the national library during the month in which the exhibition has been open.[...] As compared with the same period last year, there's been a 51 per cent increase in the income of the cafe and a 67 per cent increase in the income of the shop, and that is because of the great interest in this particular exhibition.”²²

33. Dr Mark O’Neil, told us that he had experienced “some big successes with charging for touring temporary exhibitions”, but equally, “very expensive disasters”.²³ He said that “no temporary exhibition we've ever run returned a profit if you included staff time.”²⁴

34. The Thurley Report noted that “very few temporary shows make an absolute profit”. “Treasures: adventures in archaeology” was a charged-for exhibition held by the National Museum Cardiff in 2016. Once income (£116,000, including a Welsh Government grant of £45,000) had been subtracted from operating costs (£301,000), it cost Amgueddfa Cymru £185,000 to put on. This was less than the

²¹ Record of Proceedings: Culture, Communications, Welsh Language, Sport, and International Relations Committee – 6 June 2024, paragraph 75

²² Record of Proceedings: Culture, Communications, Welsh Language, Sport, and International Relations Committee – 6 June 2024, paragraph 18

²³ Record of Proceedings: Culture, Communications, Welsh Language, Sport, and International Relations Committee – 6 June 2024, paragraph 28

²⁴ Record of Proceedings: Culture, Communications, Welsh Language, Sport, and International Relations Committee – 6 June 2024, paragraph 71

projected cost, demonstrating that Amgueddfa Cymru's intent was to subsidise the cost of the exhibition with entry charges, and not to turn a profit.²⁵

35. In 2024-25, the National Museum Cardiff hosted an exhibition, Art of the Selfie, based around a loaned Van Gogh self-portrait on a “pay what you can” basis, with a minimum charge of £1, and an exhibition about the miners’ strike, Streic! 84-85 strike!, on the same charging basis.²⁶

Our view

36. The primary benefit of running charged-for, temporary exhibitions does not seem to be commercial. Witnesses were clear that they provide “modest” income streams and are as likely to lose money as generate a profit.

37. We note the finding of the Thurley Report in 2017, that “very few temporary shows make an absolute profit”. Following the continued reduction in visitor numbers caused by Covid, and the effect on household finances of the cost-of-living crisis, it seems unlikely that this observation has changed in subsequent years.

38. Rather than being primarily commercial prospects, charged-for temporary exhibitions are ways to subsidise a diverse and varied offer. This improves the experience for current visitors, attracts new visitors, and maintains the international reputation of our national institutions.

39. Our national institutions show Wales to the world, whilst also bringing the world to Wales. Temporary exhibitions help with both of these functions. International visitors learn about our history through dynamic exhibitions, such as Amgueddfa Cymru’s “Streic! 84-85 Strike!”. People in Wales can also explore other cultures through temporary exhibitions, such as Amgueddfa Cymru’s “Art of the Selfie”. A high-quality roster of temporary exhibitions in our museums and galleries therefore enhances the international standing of our institutions, and Wales itself.

40. Rather than temporary exhibitions being a solution for a shortage of public funding, a lack of temporary exhibitions is a consequence of it. Exhibitions cost money to put on. Ticket income raised will more typically subsidise this cost rather than generate a profit. The Welsh Government should therefore be wary of

²⁵ [Dr Simon Thurley CBE for the Welsh Government: Review of Amgueddfa Cymru - June 2017](#), paragraph 16.14

²⁶ [Letter from Amgueddfa Cymru to the Culture, Communications, Welsh Language, Sport, and International Relations Committee - 21 November 2024](#)

pointing to exhibitions as an answer to the problems caused by the Welsh Government's underfunding of Amgueddfa Cymru.

Recommendation 2. We recommend that any income from exhibitions should not replace the need for the Welsh Government to fund Amgueddfa Cymru adequately.

4. Charging for underground tours at Big Pit

41. Big Pit in Blaenavon, Torfaen, is one of the seven museums that make up Amgueddfa Cymru. Big Pit is situated on a former working coal mine that operated from 1860 until its closure in 1980. In 1983, Big Pit was opened to the public as a museum, enabling visitors to experience the life of a coal miner. In 2005, Big Pit won the prestigious Museum of the Year Award.

42. The site offers underground tours led by former miners and apprentices, allowing visitors to explore the original mine shafts and see the machinery and tools used in coal extraction. Above ground, the museum features exhibitions on mining history, social and industrial heritage, and the impact of coal mining on the local community and environment.

43. The Tailored Review in 2023 agreed that entry to the national museums should remain free, but concluded that examination of options to increase commercial and charitable income would be beneficial. Such options included:

“The ability to charge for special exhibitions and “visitor experience” elements such as going underground at Big Pit. We commend the practice at the National Coal Mining Museum Wakefield, whereby visitors going underground are asked to pay a £5 deposit for a token. Over 90% of visitors do not reclaim the deposit. The “JobaKnock” scheme at Big Pit which charges £5 to book a slot for an underground ticket has seen good take up. Such schemes also enable planning of visits to avoid disappointment and provide visitor data for AC to develop its services.”²⁷

44. Between 1 October and 3 November 2024, Amgueddfa Cymru ran a trial charging for underground tours at Big Pit. Tickets for the underground tour had to be either purchased in advance with an £8 Job-A-Knock timed slot ticket or, a £5 ticket available on the day of a visit, which did not guarantee a time slot.

45. Amgueddfa Cymru’s Chief Executive, Jane Richardson, discussed the charging trial with the Committee on 11 December 2024. She said:

“The feedback on the underground tour charging at Big Pit is very positive. Ninety-eight per cent of the people who

²⁷ Welsh Government: National Museum Wales: tailored review – July 2023, paragraph 13.82

responded, and there were over 600 people who responded, said they would be happy to pay that or pay more.”²⁸

46. She also drew a distinction between charging for underground tours and free entry to the permanent exhibitions at Big Pit:

“In terms of the public purse, there is a difference between the four walls of a museum and allowing entrance into it so that you can see a collection, and when you have to maintain the machinery of a lift and the mine workings, et cetera. That gear goes beyond the traditional free entry model for a museum. It is a very labour-intensive process and offer that you’re putting on.”²⁹

47. She explained that Amgueddfa Cymru was finding “that people welcome the opportunity to be able to make a contribution”, and that she was “staggered” by how positive the evaluation of the trial was.

48. Amgueddfa Cymru wrote to us in April 2025, explaining that the miner-guided tours are “highly labour intensive”:

“To stay open to the public, the site must meet stringent safety regulations, including mine safety, visitor safety, fire safety, public liability, and machinery safety. Each underground tour requires six staff members—winder, fitter, banksman, electrician, deputy, and pitman—and it takes six months to train a mine guide. Whether they are a former miner or newly qualified, each guide offers a personalised tour, sharing histories, answering questions and providing a bespoke experience not found at other museums. All of this comes at a cost.”³⁰

49. Amgueddfa Cymru’s Chair, Kate Eden, told us in December 2024 that the Minister for Culture, Skills and Social Partnership (“the Minister”) “was quite clear”

²⁸ Record of Proceedings: Culture, Communications, Welsh Language, Sport, and International Relations Committee - 11 December 2024, paragraph 65

²⁹ Record of Proceedings: Culture, Communications, Welsh Language, Sport, and International Relations Committee - 11 December 2024, page 74

³⁰ Letter from Amgueddfa Cymru to the Culture, Communications, Welsh Language, Sport, and International Relations Committee, 15 April 2025

that the decision whether to charge for underground tours is “a decision for the governing body of Amgueddfa Cymru.”³¹

50. We asked the Minister for his views on charging for underground tours at Big Pit during a scrutiny session in November 2024. He said:

“I’m not suggesting that’s the right way or the wrong way to do things. What I would be concerned about is if that did have an impact on access to culture. I’d be keen to understand if that is the case.”³²

51. We subsequently sought clarification of the Welsh Government’s policy relating to the introduction of charges for curated experiences such as talks, tours, and exhibitions at Amgueddfa Cymru. The Minister explained:

“In line with the arm’s-length principle, it is for Amgueddfa Cymru to make decisions on whether to ask for a donation or charge for such curated experiences.”

52. He went on to say that:

“All the data gathered will help Amgueddfa Cymru evaluate how any change to charging models conforms with our policy on free access to the permanent collections and its underlying ethos.”³³

53. From April 2025 to July 2026, tickets for the underground tour at Big Pit must be purchased with either a Job-A-Knock timed slot ticket for £8 per person, bookable in advance prior to your visit or, a £5 or £3 concession ticket available to purchase on the day of the visit. Tickets bought on the day of purchase do not guarantee a time slot and are limited in availability.

54. Amgueddfa Cymru have adopted the following concessions:

³¹ Record of Proceedings: Culture, Communications, Welsh Language, Sport, and International Relations Committee – 11 December 2024, paragraph 94

³² Record of Proceedings: Culture, Communications, Welsh Language, Sport, and International Relations Committee – 13 November 2024, paragraph 65

³³ Letter from the Minister for Culture, Skills and Social Partnership to the Culture, Communications, Welsh Language, Sport, and International Relations Committee – 16 January 2025

- Open concessions that will allow individuals and families to self-select the lower charge of £3 with no requirement for evidence and no questions asked. clear
- Free for all days for the community with additional events.

55. In April 2025, Amgueddfa Cymru provided further information about its charging trials at Big Pit.³⁴ It said, since implementing the charging trials, they have discovered that:

- 98 per cent of visitors at Big Pit were happy with the amount they paid.
- 40 per cent noted they would have been willing to pay more.
- 94/100 achieved this outstanding Net Promoter Score from a survey of 575 visitors.
- 86 per cent of site visitors participated in underground tours, consistent with 84 per cent during the same period in 2023.
- As before, most tickets for the 'Job-a-knock' specific time slot underground tours were bought by new visitors to the site, rather than return visitors.

56. It explained that:

"Based on data from the charging trials, satisfaction levels, visitor numbers, and conversion rates [the number of visitors to the site who also take the underground tour] have all remained consistent. This suggests that the introduction of charging has not significantly affected audience diversity. This is especially relevant for local communities, as most of our visitors on the underground tours are first-time or one-off visitors."

57. We asked Amgueddfa Cymru, if they were not to receive the income generated from charging for underground tours, what mitigation would need to be considered for operations to continue on current income levels. It said:

"Amgueddfa Cymru is already optimising existing revenue streams such as retail, catering, car parking, corporate hire and filming rights, in addition to funding streams such as donations"

³⁴ Letter from Amgueddfa Cymru to the Culture, Communications, Welsh Language, Sport, and International Relations Committee, 15 April 2025

and grants. There are very few other readily available revenue streams which would allow operations to continue at current income levels."

Our view

58. We do not think that Amgueddfa Cymru should charge for underground tours at Big Pit. We believe that the underground tours are a unique and integral part of Big Pit, which provides an invaluable insight into the central role of coal mining in Welsh history. People should not have to pay to gain this insight into their own past.

59. We think that the principle of free entry to the Amgueddfa Cymru sites should extend to the underground tours at Big Pit. We have struggled to find clarity from the Minister as to whether he agrees with this statement. He told us that "data gathered will help Amgueddfa Cymru evaluate how any change to charging models conforms with our policy on free access to the permanent collections and its underlying ethos". We think this is a question of principle, and not a question of data.

60. The Welsh Government's general policy on free entry does not include caveats that this policy can be suspended if data supports its suspension. Accordingly, we think underground tours at Big Pit should remain free as a point of principle, and free entry should not be abandoned based on the data gathered from charging trials.

61. The Vulcan pub opened in St Fagans National Museum of History in 2024 after it was moved from its previous site in Cardiff. It opened as a functioning pub, where visitors can buy drinks, or explore the building for free. We think this approach exemplifies how Amgueddfa Cymru should approach generating revenue: visitors should not pay for access. We see the underground workings at Big Pit as an integral part of the national collection and as a national asset that everyone should be able to access for free. The nature of this asset is such that visitors must be guided to have access. This is not an optional extra to be charged for.

62. We appreciate that it is expensive for Amgueddfa Cymru to provide access to the underground workings at Big Pit. However, we think this is an argument for the Welsh Government to provide an adequate level of funding, not for Amgueddfa Cymru to charge for access. We acknowledge the imperative Amgueddfa Cymru faces to raise additional income, given years of underfunding

from the Welsh Government. We are concerned that Amgueddfa Cymru feels compelled to introduce charges due to budgetary pressures and reiterate our call for the Welsh Government to increase its funding for culture, including for Amgueddfa Cymru.

63. We note the very high satisfaction scores gathered after the previous charging trial at Big Pit (98 per cent of visitors at Big Pit were happy with the amount they paid, and 40 per cent noted they would have been willing to pay more). This score is a testament to the hard work and skill of the tour guides and the staff who maintain the mine. But, we do not think that this justifies introducing charging. It would seem sensible, and within our interpretation of the free entry principle, for Amgueddfa Cymru to seek to increase donations from those taking the tour, given this willingness to pay.

Conclusion 1. Amgueddfa Cymru should seek to increase voluntary donations from those visitors taking the underground tour at Big Pit to maximise income generation.

Recommendation 3. We recommend that the Welsh Government should make it clear that the principle of free entry to the national museum sites extends to the underground tour at Big Pit.

5. The impact of hosting temporary exhibitions

Cost

64. As explained earlier in this report, temporary exhibitions are not guaranteed commercial successes. More typically, ticket income subsidises the exhibition rather than generating a profit. Witnesses explained the costs involved in hosting temporary exhibitions.

65. Following the 2024-25 Final Budget, when the Welsh Government cut revenue funding for culture and sport by 7.7 per cent, Amgueddfa Cymru said:

“Temporary exhibitions are expensive to host, which restricts what we can produce. [...] The recent budget cuts will mean that Amgueddfa Cymru will produce fewer exhibitions in the future to protect their high quality with fewer resources available.”³⁵

66. The Association of Independent Museums raised the issue of insurance for loaned objects in temporary exhibitions. It said:

“Non-national museums in the UK can access the Government Indemnity Scheme which indemnifies object loans when conditions are met, giving institutions the confidence to agree loans of valuable objects; however, national museums are not eligible for this scheme and are expected to cover any damages or losses themselves.”³⁶

67. The National Library emphasised the importance of the Welsh Government providing support for hosting temporary exhibitions:

“In particular, this is key for facilitating and supporting – and in some circumstances, financially supporting – the essential arrangements associated with very significant and/or high-value loans.”³⁷

³⁵ Letter from Amgueddfa Cymru to the Culture, Communications, Welsh Language, Sport, and International Relations Committee - 9 July 2024

³⁶ Letter from the Association of Independent Museums to the Culture, Communications, Welsh Language, Sport, and International Relations Committee - 28 June 2024

³⁷ Letter from the National Library of Wales to the Culture, Communications, Welsh Language, Sport, and International Relations Committee - 4 July 2024

Access to culture

68. Witnesses explained how they balanced inclusivity with raising incomes when charging for exhibitions. Amgueddfa Cymru explained how they felt these two aims were not necessarily in conflict, but could complement each other:

*"In fact, the exhibition [Art of the Selfie] contains artworks from artists from a broad range of different demographics which are accessible to the public for as little as £1 (recommended £5), which means we can achieve both income generation and audience engagement objectives."*³⁸

69. Dr O'Neil explained that the relationships between charging for access and inclusivity was not as straightforwardly oppositional as it may at first appear:

*"Sociologically, the primary predictor of museum visiting isn't income, and charging isn't the most significant barrier. The greatest predictor of museum visiting is the prior level of education. People with poor or no educational qualifications usually have had a bad experience of school and of learning, they see museums as schooly places that are not for them. The kind of programmes that Nia has been talking about, in-depth work with communities over years, is what it takes to break down those barriers. [...] Those psychosocial barriers are much more important, I think, than charging for a particular exhibition."*³⁹

Our view

70. As explained earlier in this report, temporary exhibitions are not guaranteed commercial successes. This means that rather than being an answer to a shortage of public funding, a diverse and varied roster of temporary exhibitions is a reason for increasing public funding.

71. Persistent low levels of public funding for the culture sector mean that museums and galleries will be able to host fewer exhibitions. This will have a

³⁸ Letter from Amgueddfa Cymru to the Culture, Communications, Welsh Language, Sport, and International Relations Committee – 9 July 2024

³⁹ Record of Proceedings: Culture, Communications, Welsh Language, Sport, and International Relations Committee – 6 June 2024, paragraph 117

detrimental impact on diversity of audiences, visitor experiences, and the international reputation of these institutions.

72. The Welsh Government should therefore look to see how it can help organisations run temporary exhibitions. This help could take the form of specific funding, such as it provides for other events in Wales, or help with insurance. The best support is sufficient levels of grant-in-aid funding, which it has failed to provide in recent years.

Recommendation 4. We recommend that the Welsh Government should explore how it can help organisations host temporary exhibitions.

Recommendation 5. We recommend that the Welsh Government should clarify how the terms of the Government Indemnity Scheme relate to national institutions borrowing items for temporary exhibitions.

73. There is a risk that charging for exhibitions increases barriers for those on low incomes accessing culture. Even with suitable concessions in place, there is a risk that the act of charging increases psychological barriers to access. Institutions must therefore ensure, not only that suitable concession schemes are in place, but also that these are well-advertised. Pay-what-you-can schemes, as used recently by Amgueddfa Cymru, seem a good way to raise ticket income without stigmatising those who can pay less.

74. National institutions must ensure that charging for exhibitions does not create a two-tier experience, where those who can pay more, get more. The best guardrail against this is the policy of free entry, with clear parameters, and robustly defended by the Welsh Government and the institutions themselves. This is why we have called elsewhere in this report for the underground tours at Big Pit to remain free. We believe this should be part of the core offer, not an optional, charged-for extra.

Annex 1: 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
06 June 2024	Nia Elias - Director Relationships and Funding, Amgueddfa Cymru Rhodri Llwyd Morgan - Chief Executive Officer, National Library of Wales Lisa Ollerhead - Director, Association of Independent Museums Dr Mark O'Neill - Former Head, Glasgow Museums
13 November 2024	Jack Sargeant MS - Minister for Culture, Skills and Social Partnership, Welsh Government Paul Kindred - Deputy Director Culture, Welsh Government Ruth Meadows - Director Tertiary Education, Welsh Government Steffan Roberts - Deputy Director Arts and Sport, Welsh Government
11 December 2024	Jane Richardson - Chief Executive, Amgueddfa Cymru Kate Eden - Chair, Amgueddfa Cymru

Annex 2: List of written evidence

The following people and organisations provided written evidence to the Committee. All additional written information can be viewed on the Committee's website.

Additional Information

Title	Date
Letter from the Association of Independent Museums to the Culture, Communications, Welsh Language, Sport, and International Relations Committee	28 June 2024
Letter from the National Library of Wales to the Culture, Communications, Welsh Language, Sport, and International Relations Committee	04 July 2024
Letter from Amgueddfa Cymru to the Culture, Communications, Welsh Language, Sport, and International Relations Committee	09 July 2024
Letter from Amgueddfa Cymru to the Culture, Communications, Welsh Language, Sport, and International Relations Committee	21 November 2024
Letter from the Minister for Culture, Skills and Social Partnership to the Culture, Communications, Welsh Language, Sport, and International Relations Committee	16 January 2025
Letter from Amgueddfa Cymru to the Culture, Communications, Welsh Language, Sport, and International Relations Committee	15 April 2025