



Charging for exhibitions

Response to the CCWLSIR Committee report

In June 2025, the Culture, Communications, Welsh Language, Sport, and International Relations Committee published its report on the potential for charging to contribute meaningfully to the income of museums and galleries. This is the Welsh Government's response to that report.

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1. Foreword

In 2001, free entry to the national museums in Wales was introduced. The aim of this policy, which was introduced ahead of the rest of the UK, is to make sure the national collections are accessible for everyone and to encourage a diverse range of visitors. Thanks to our funding, visitors can continue to enter all seven of Amgueddfa Cymru's sites for free. The incredible experiences the museums offer continues to be recognised, mostly recently with the National Waterfront Museum being shortlisted for a Kids in Museums Family Friendly Museum award.

Our continued commitment to the free entry policy is reflected in the Priorities for Culture, which includes the ambition that 'Culture is inclusive, accessible and diverse'. Whilst admission is free, national museums across the UK can and do charge for the curated experiences, including some temporary exhibitions and special events. As an arm's length body, it is for Amgueddfa Cymru to make decisions on whether to ask for a donation or charge for curated experiences. As a recent example, Amgueddfa Cymru asked visitors to pay a small fee to see the world-famous Van Gogh self-portrait as part of the Art of the Selfie exhibition at National Museum Cardiff.

Amgueddfa Cymru continues to explore and pilot different charging approaches to help it raise additional income which it can re-invest into its sites and collections. Amgueddfa Cymru, led by its Board of Trustees, is responsible for assessing its charging trials. We will continue to work in partnership with Amgueddfa Cymru to ensure that equality of access is protected when generating income from premium experiences.

Many local museums also host exhibitions providing opportunities for communities to celebrate culture and new ways to engage with it. We will continue to work with the local museum sector and Amgueddfa Cymru to enable them to host exhibitions.

I thank the members of the Culture, Communications, Welsh Language, Sport, and International Relations Committee for the report on charging for exhibitions. I have set out my response to the report's individual recommendations below.

Jack Sargeant, Minister for Culture, Skills and Social Partnership

2. Response

In this chapter I have set out my response to the recommendations in the Culture, Communications, Welsh Language, Sport, and International Relations Committee's (CCWLSIR) report. I have carefully considered the five recommendations and have responded to each, setting out whether they have been accepted, accepted in principle or rejected. For each response, I have also set out if there are any financial implications.

Recommendation 1

Recommendation: 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

Response: Accept

Visitors can enter each of Amgueddfa Cymru's seven sites for free and I remain committed to retaining free access to our national collection. The Committee's report highlights the positive impact our free entry policy has had, with visitor numbers doubling and the proportion of lower socio-economic groups visiting expanded to around 30 per cent, as set out in the Thurley Report¹.

Amgueddfa Cymru is the jewel in the crown of Welsh culture and there is much to celebrate in its work. This is why it I am really pleased that our Final Budget for 2025 to 2026 includes an 8.5% increase for Amgueddfa Cymru compared to the previous year's revenue budget. I am under no illusions about the challenges faced by Amgueddfa Cymru and its revenue budget for 2025 to 2026 is a significant step forward, providing a real opportunity to move towards a more secure, sustainable footing.

Our capital spending to help protect and future-proof Wales' cultural and heritage assets is now more than three times that of a decade ago. In 2025 to 2026, Amgueddfa Cymru is continuing to receive £5m capital grant-in-aid and we are also providing an additional £9.2m capital to support priority improvements across its estate. We are also working with Amgueddfa Cymru to explore what capital support we can offer to help it deliver work it has identified that could further deliver against the Priorities for Culture.

Financial implications: This is accommodated within existing budgets. Amgueddfa Cymru's updated grant-in-aid revenue budget for 2025-26 is £27,789,000.

¹ www.gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2019-04/review-of-amgueddfa-cymru.pdf

Recommendation 2

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

Response: Accept

I am supportive of Amgueddfa Cymru seeking to increase its financial sustainability through appropriate income generation in addition to its grant-in-aid. This is one of the key deliverables set out in its term of government remit letter². Charging is often used for limited-run, larger-scale exhibitions, due to their ability to generate income. There are numerous other benefits to Amgueddfa Cymru of holding exhibitions. Exhibitions create opportunities across the year to celebrate culture in all its variety, creating new opportunities for people to participate and engage with culture as well as benefit from Amgueddfa Cymru's expertise and enthusiasm. Importantly, they also provide opportunities for communities to decide what counts as culture and involve them in decision-making. In line with the arm's-length principle, it is for Amgueddfa Cymru to take a curatorial decision on the amount and types of exhibitions it holds at its sites and through its partnerships.

Financial implications: This is accommodated within existing budgets. Amgueddfa Cymru's updated grant-in-aid revenue budget for 2025-26 is £27,789,000.

Recommendation 3

Recommendation: 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.

Response: Reject

It is important we provide Amgueddfa Cymru with the time it needs to gather further data so it can take an evidenced-based decision on how it's charging proposals can best contribute to financial sustainability whilst protecting equality of access.

As is the case at other national museums in the UK, Amgueddfa Cymru can choose to charge for the tour as a premium experience. There is no power in the

² www.gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2022-01/national-museum-wales-remit-letter-2021-to-2026.pdf

Royal Charter for Welsh Ministers to direct Amgueddfa Cymru on its policy in this regard.

The need for Amgueddfa Cymru to become more financially sustainable was highlighted in the final report of the tailored review panel³. Charging for underground tours, which require an additional investment of time, resources and expertise, allows Amgueddfa Cymru to reinvest the income generated back into the museum sites, to further improve the wider visitor experience.

During the extended trial at Big Pit, Amgueddfa Cymru will continue to offer free tickets to Hynt members, Amgueddfa Cymru members and school groups as well as open concessions for individuals and families. Amgueddfa Cymru is also developing free days and events for the local community.

Financial implications: None

Recommendation 4

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

Response: Accept

Through Celf (the dispersed National Contemporary Art Gallery for Wales) we are helping make the national collection of contemporary art at Amgueddfa Cymru and the National Library of Wales more accessible than ever before. The development of Celf has been a key priority within our Programme for Government, receiving nearly £7.5m investment during this Senedd term. Through an extensive loans programme, people in Wales will be able to explore the collections locally, within the nine venues that are members of the network of galleries. With the support of the project, the galleries can expand their exhibition programme, offering a wider variety of contemporary art for their visitors, as well as bringing fresh and diverse pieces to share with their audiences.

Our ongoing investment in the redevelopment of the National Slate Museum will help create increased exhibition spaces, allowing Amgueddfa Cymru to tell the internationally significant story of the UNESCO slate landscape. We are also investing in our local museum sector through our Capital Transformation Grant. During the last four years, we have invested nearly £7m in local museums, archives and libraries. Part of this funding has supported local museums to improve their exhibition spaces as well as to support them to implement wider upgrades of their facilities. Eligible costs for the new Priorities for Culture Capital

³ www.gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2023-07/national-museum-wales-tailored-review.pdf

Grants scheme for local museums, libraries and archives also include improvements to interpretation, access and exhibition spaces.

Through the Government Indemnity Scheme (GIS) we provide an alternative to commercial insurance, enabling art and cultural objects to be borrowed from private lenders or non-national institutions for display or research purposes. This scheme is available to both national and non-national museums, enabling loans of objects for exhibitions that might not otherwise have been possible due to prohibitive insurance costs.

In our role as sector development agency, we work with Amgueddfa Cymru and the local museums sector to share good practice, skills development, access to the national collection for exhibitions and to Amgueddfa Cymru's expertise. We will continue to work with the local museums sector and Amgueddfa Cymru to explore what further support for exhibitions it and the local sector may need.

Financial implications: This is accommodated within existing budgets.

Recommendation 5

Recommendation: 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

Response: Accept

The GIS enables art and cultural objects to be borrowed from private lenders and non-national institutions for display and/or research purposes. It is an alternative to commercial insurance and provides cost-free indemnity cover for loss or damage when items are on loan. To clarify, any publicly accessible institution (including Amgueddfa Cymru) is eligible to apply for indemnity cover.

The Culture Division administers the GIS in Wales and is in regular contact with Amgueddfa Cymru in terms of arranging cover for their eligible loans.

Financial implications: This is accommodated within existing budgets.