

Senedd Cymru / Welsh Parliament

Pwyllgor Diwylliant, y Gymraeg a Chyfathrebu / Culture, Welsh Language and Communications Committee

Ymchwiliad i'r achosion o COVID-19 ac effaith y feirws ar ddiwylliant, y diwydiannau creadigol, treftadaeth, cyfathrebu a chwaraeon / Inquiry into the COVID-19 outbreak and its impact on culture, creative industries, heritage, communications and sport

CWLC COV06

Ymateb gan Conffederasiwn GIG Cymru/ Response from The Welsh NHS Confederation



	Welsh NHS Confederation response to the inquiry into the COVID-19 outbreak and its impact on culture, creative industries, heritage, communications, and sport
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Date:	29 May 2020

Introduction

1. The Welsh NHS Confederation welcomes the opportunity to respond to the Culture, Welsh Language and Communications Committee's inquiry into the COVID-19 outbreak and its impact on culture, creative industries, heritage, communications, and sport from the Welsh NHS perspective. The Welsh NHS Confederation represents the seven Local Health Boards, three NHS Trusts and Health Education and Improvement Wales (HEIW).

Summary

2. Since the beginning of March our priority has been supporting and representing our members to respond to COVID-19. Our engagement with members has focused on the active support of Executive Director Peer Groups' response to COVID-19, with over 150 meetings in the past two months, including significant support to Assistant Medical Directors Peer Group meetings and the Workforce and Organisational Development (W&OD) Directors' Peer Group, facilitated by NHS Wales Employers.
3. In addition to supporting members, we have been working closely with our partners in other parts of the health and care system to ensure we can provide a 'whole system' perspective. Throughout this time, we have continued to work with our stakeholders, including Royal Colleges, third sector and social care organisations, to respond to the pandemic so that we can highlight any issues and offer potential solutions to the Welsh Government. We have held bi-weekly meetings with members of our Policy Forum, made up of over 60 health and care organisations, to keep them informed of the most up to date developments and share information and intelligence so that the sector is aware of the key issues and priorities.
4. The challenges posed by COVID-19 are considerable and over the last two months we have been experiencing unprecedented demand on all our health and care services. NHS organisations have shown flexibility and innovation throughout this

period by delivering a remarkable response to COVID-19. Since receiving the first coronavirus patient in early March, NHS Wales has developed and enabled sufficient critical capacity in the system to deal with the anticipated surge in demand. It is a huge credit to our health and care services in Wales, and to the response by the public to the measures put in place, that we have not exceeded NHS capacity throughout the COVID-19 pandemic so far. The measures put in place by Health Boards and Trusts, working with partners, has been one of the outstanding success stories as we all continue to fight this virus.

5. The response to COVID-19 could not have happened without the excellent partnership working across Wales with local government, the voluntary sector and the private sector. Our briefings, [Partnership working across Wales to support the response to COVID-19](#) and [community spirit and resilience](#), highlight just some of the partnership working, from providing increased services digitally to support people to stay at home, to working with local government and the private sector to increase bed capacity across the system, and the donations of personal protective equipment (PPE). In particular, throughout the pandemic there has been close partnership working and co-operation between the NHS and social care to ensure critical connections are in place to support patient pathways.
6. In addition to working closely with health and social care colleagues, we have also raised awareness of the significant positive impact that the arts and creative activity can have on people's health and wellbeing. In May 2020, we published a briefing on [how the arts are supporting the Welsh health and social care response](#) to COVID-19. Over recent years, Wales has led the way in developing arts and health initiatives which enhance the lives of the most vulnerable in society, keeping people healthy and close to their communities for longer.
7. In September 2017 the Welsh NHS Confederation signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the Arts Council of Wales. The aim of the MOU, through briefings like this one, is to raise awareness of the benefits that the arts can bring to health and wellbeing. The outbreak of COVID-19 could have undone the progress we have made, but the NHS and artists have come together across Wales to make sure we do not lose this momentum.
8. The response to this inquiry is based off our latest briefing, which highlights initiatives undertaken by Health Boards, Trusts and the broader arts community to support local populations, frontline staff, and key workers to maintain physical and emotional wellbeing.

What has been the immediate impact of COVID-19 on the sector?

Digital delivery

9. The introduction of social distancing, self-isolation, and lockdown policies have meant that many, if not all, arts practitioners in Wales have had to change the way they provide their services. Members of the public can no longer attend their dance classes, theatre rehearsals or visual arts classes in person due to restrictions in place to reduce transmission rates of COVID-19. Therefore, the art and creative sector had to rapidly establish new ways of working.
10. Many arts organisations and practitioners have switched to delivering services online and have, at pace, been able to implement digital service techniques such as online classes through platforms such as Zoom, YouTube, and various social media channels. This has proven to be an effective way to ensure people remain connected to each other and still engage in artistic, creative activity. Studies have demonstrated the many physical and mental health benefits of participation in the arts, which is especially critical during times of social isolation.
11. Arts practitioners across Wales have been embracing the use of digital technologies. Some examples of digital delivery include:
 - [Span Arts](#), a community arts charity based in Narberth, Pembrokeshire, have moved programmes online and are developing a series of unique projects to keep people signing during these times.
 - [Ballet Cymru](#) has lots of exciting work on their social media channels including morning tutorials each weekday where professional dancers coach an exercise a day. They have interviews, pointe classes, stretching and relaxation and strength exercises to work on those core muscles through isolation.
 - [Jukebox Collective](#), based in Cardiff, have announced some exciting updates and projects to ensure students and the public can stay active, healthy, and creative at home by offering online street dance classes on Instagram Live and Zoom.

Addressing those that cannot access digital services

12. While many services are moving to online delivery as an effective method of connecting people, there is the potential to increase the digital divide for those who do not have access to the required infrastructure, technology, or skills. This poses a more acute risk to those that are experiencing higher levels of isolation such as those that are shielding, the elderly or disabled, and or those living in remote locations.

13. To address this, many organisations have been shifting their services to include non-digital ways of engagement. The sector recognises the importance of maintaining the 'traditional' ways of engagement which many people are still reliant on within the existing public health policies.
14. Some examples of non-digital delivery of services include:
- Head4 Health, one programme of [Head4 Arts](#), has been working with voluntary community organisations to offer creative experiences remotely for those most in need, such as those who do not have access to the internet. This includes offering "craft packs" included in doorstep drop-offs and communicating with older people by post and telephone to continue work on a heritage project in Blaenavon.
 - [Impelo @ Home](#) in Powys offers care homes and day care centres who cater to adults with disabilities DVDs to address problems with accessing services online. This programme was launched directly from community feedback saying they wanted to dance with the practitioners doing similar classes to the ones they attend in real life.
 - Lost in Art – a project for people living with dementia created by [Denbighshire Leisure Ltd](#) – offers those living in the community with dementia a materials pack delivered to their doorstep, a weekly tutorial film emailed to them, and offers two phone calls a week – one landline and one 'FaceTime' WhatsApp call to support the members in their creative practice.

Arts within Welsh NHS organisations

15. Health Boards have continued to work with their Arts Co-ordinators as well as working with commissioned artists throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. These relationships have played an especially vital role to ensure a strong connection with the arts is maintained for both recovering patients and frontline staff.
16. Some examples of how arts teams in NHS organisations have responded to COVID-19 include:
- [I'm thinking of you Cymru](#) is a virtual postcard project started in Aneurin Bevan University Health Board to support young people, Gwent communities and key workers. A different artist is commissioned each day to create a bespoke postcard with different artforms around the 5 ways of wellbeing (connect, give, take notice, keep learning and be active) to respond to the world as it is today in partnership with the community. They offer ideas of how people can stay connected, encouraged, and comforted when asked to stay at home.

- Several Health Boards have been extensively involved in commissioning and installing artwork in field hospitals. For example, artwork in Swansea Bay University Health Board depicts Welsh plants and supportive, positive words in English and Welsh have been installed around the outside of temporary mortuary areas and inside the hospitals, while Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board received applications from over 200 artists who wanted to donate their work for the pop-up Enfys hospital sites at Bangor, Llandudno and Queensferry.
- An artist in Residence with Swansea Bay University Health Board has created a free Photography for Well-Being eBook. [Stuck in the House](#) contains four photography activities. Two of the activities are for when people are *Stuck in the House* and need of inspiration, and two are for a short exercise period, to be undertaken out of the house as a means of supporting people to maintaining their balance, which can reduce the risk of injuries from slips and falls..

The arts supporting the frontline health and social care workforce

17. The sector has also strongly expressed its gratitude to frontline workers, including those in the health and social care sector. From portraits to murals to poems, communities have come together through artistic mediums to demonstrate their thanks to those on the frontline.
18. Just some of the many examples of how the arts are showing their support are outlined below:
 - Cwm Taf Morgannwg University Health Board is working with '[Sixty Six Ninety Nine](#)' social enterprise in producing an online gallery of artwork and poetry as support to the NHS and the Health Board during the pandemic.
 - Through collaboration with Cardiff and Vale University Health Board, one poet is providing a [weekly 'Poetry Prescription'](#) for the Health Board and community, in response to COVID-19. Since starting them in mid-March 2020, they have become a great weekly addition to the programme. The Health Board has received many comments and shares of praise from the community over social media platforms and their website.
 - Cardiff and Vale University Health Board has also worked closely with a [local artist](#) for a piece to be printed onto large scale banners and posters. 'NHS Thank You' is made up of over 200 selfies of NHS staff workers who sent in their photographs after a call-out on social media. With these selfies, the artist created a digital portrait collage of a staff member wearing a mask with the words, Thank You, underneath. These large-scale artworks can be seen by hospital staff

members when they enter the hospital sites and act as a message of thanks and appreciation.

What will the likely long-term impacts of COVID-19 be on the sector, and what support is needed to deal with those?

19. The long-term impact of COVID-19 on the sector will largely depend on the duration of social distancing measures.
20. As indicated earlier, much of the artistic and creative sector has been able to establish new ways of working by either embracing technology for digital delivery or determining how more traditional methods can still be delivered to those most in need in the safest possible way.
21. The pace and agility of the sector to change and adapt its delivery structure has been demonstrated. However, the longer lockdown policies are maintained, the more support will be needed from Welsh Government and other organisations to continue to provide these essential services.

What lessons can be learnt from how the Welsh Government, the UK Government, arms-length bodies and the sector have dealt with COVID-19?

22. Like many other sectors, the ability to make changes at pace and in an agile way should be taken forward. The COVID-19 pandemic has demonstrated the ability of organisations to work together in a way that shapes services to be provided to those that need them most and, importantly, in the way that is most accessible to them.
23. The pandemic has also underlined the importance of partnership working across different sectors, such as arts and health and social care. COVID-19 has impacted all sectors of public life, and it is important therefore that Wales' adopts a cross-sector, joined up response. Our existing MOU with Arts Council Wales has enabled us to produce agile publications that highlight and encourage examples of good practice across Wales and acts to cement the importance and connectivity between arts and health.

How might the sector evolve after COVID-19, and how can the Welsh Government support such innovation to deal with future challenges?

24. Digital technology will play an essential role in how services are delivered in the future. However, while most communities can acquire and share the required skills and infrastructure, this should not be taken as a 'one size fits all' approach.
25. The Welsh Government should continue to support the sector and encourage innovative ways for artistic and creative programming to be delivered across Wales.