

Senedd Cymru / Welsh Parliament

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

Adroddiad Etifeddiaeth / Legacy Report

CWLC LEG04

Ymateb gan Prifysgol De Cymru / Response from University of South Wales

Thank you for contacting me, as a part of your legacy inquiry. I appreciate my inclusion on your list of relevant stakeholders. As you will be aware, I have actively supported the Welsh community radio sector for a number of years and regularly attend WCRN Cymru (Wales Community Radio Network) meetings, in accordance with my role, as Community Radio Tutor, at the University of South Wales. I am therefore, responding from that perspective.

I'd like to begin by thanking the members of the Culture, Welsh Language and Communications Committee for their efficient responses to my correspondence, over the last few years. I have consistently emphasised the immense value of community radio, for Wales and the particular, significant challenges that the sector faces. I particularly appreciate the willingness of the committee, to attend the very useful Community Radio in Wales: stakeholder event, in June, 2019.

Sadly, the Welsh community radio sector is, in my opinion, at a crisis point, as it continues to battle against enormous, at times, insurmountable difficulties with very limited, scarce funding support. Right now, two of our very small band of stations are on the verge of folding. Another station has handed back its licence before even going on air. Wales has an ever declining breadth of indigenous news provision. The community radio stations with their healthy focus on hyper-local, community news, provide an invaluable and often overlooked service for the citizens of Wales. Operating on a charitable, non-profit making basis, they are challenged to engender 'social gain' for their local communities whilst balancing their need to achieve resolute, independent levels of sustainability. It is an almost impossible to sustain, endless fight against the odds.

I recently co-wrote an article with Paul Atkins, from University College Birmingham (<https://www.iwa.wales/agenda/2020/10/welsh-community-radio-rising-to-the-coronavirus-challenge/>). We portrayed the incredible local news output from the community radio stations of Wales and described the significant impact of Covid-19 on the community radio sector in Wales. I am personally staggered by the response of the unpaid community radio volunteers, in Wales, despite the lack of financial support. We outlined how community radio stations often 'fall between the cracks', in terms of eligibility criteria for sources of financial support. We also highlighted the fact that very few Welsh stations benefit from Ofcom's UK-wide Community Radio Fund. The funding for the Independent Community News Network, is very welcome, as is support for plurality of news provision, in Wales and elsewhere. I would argue, however, that our Welsh community radio stations and its countless, unpaid volunteers are, at least, equally worthy of support.

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Without urgent support, the Welsh community radio sector will continue its decline and Wales will lose indigenous news provision, diversity and routes of progression, in some of the most economically bereft, parts of Wales. This really does matter. Once a community radio licence has been rescinded it does not return. When the licences for local communities in Wales disappear, so do opportunities for democratic participation and delivery of pluralistic news provision for Wales. This cannot continue to reach the highest political tier and then be discounted. The communities of Wales deserve so much more than that.