

By email to:

Bethan Sayed MS
Chair
Culture, Welsh Language and Communications Committee
Senedd Cymru

SeneddCWLC@senedd.wales

9 February 2021

Dear Chair

Thank you for the invitation to contribute to the legacy report of the Culture, Welsh Language and Communications (CWLC) committee in the Fifth Senedd.

As I know you are aware, the area of the IWA's strategy which most closely relates to the CWLC's remit is our ongoing work on media and democracy in Wales. Indeed our 2015 Media Audit called explicitly for a committee within the Senedd to undertake this crucial work and we were pleased to see this committee set up in June 2016.

During the Fifth Senedd, we have been particularly pleased to see the CWLC undertaking inquiries into Journalism in Wales, the future of S4C, the impact of COVID-19 on the media industry in Wales, and the devolution of broadcasting. The IWA has long sought to highlight the democratic deficit Wales faces as a result of an increasingly under-resourced media, which relies heavily on a number of large providers who must continually cut provision in response to changes in the market, and to UK Government policy.

COVID-19 has brought these issues into even sharper focus, as the divergence in regulations and resulting complexity initially fell foul of a news infrastructure that was ill-equipped and not used to treating policy divergence within the UK as normal, routine, and democratically justified. Coverage then improved, and improved quickly, but not before highlighting the serious consequences of getting this wrong.

Even if we were not currently living through a global public health crisis, the growth of online disinformation and misinformation is reason alone to view good quality, independent, well-resourced news provision as more important than ever. Yet the forthcoming IWA 2020 Media Audit report shows that the headline picture of news provision in Wales has not shown a step change improvement since we last undertook detailed work on this topic.

We believe that the Sixth Senedd must retain a committee with a remit to focus on broadcasting and news in Wales, and that sitting these issues within a remit to look at the health of the wider creative economy remains a wise approach.

We would advocate for the next CWLC to consider undertaking inquiries into the following matters:

- A strategy to grow Wales' creative economy. With the inception of Creative Wales being widely welcomed by stakeholders at the IWA's 2021 Media Summit, we believe there is a case for the organisation being given an expanded role, underpinned by a more ambitious and targeted strategic approach. The CWLC could help steer the development of such an approach with an inquiry which identified opportunities and gaps in Wales' creative economy.
- A follow up to your 2018 inquiry into News Journalism in Wales, with a focus on scoping how the next Welsh Government could increase funding support for news in Wales. This inquiry should explore what structures are appropriate to ensure the independence of those news providers, and that the funds are available on a contestable basis, in line with a clear strategy, and transparency around how funding is awarded.
- An inquiry into the role of social media in the 2021 Senedd elections. We know that social media platforms are increasingly used as part of election campaigning, and that this use can lack transparency, be based on disinformation, and even illegal use of people's personal data. It would be wrong to assume that Wales, as a small nation, will not have similarly questionable or illegal practice play a part in its elections. Regardless of the election result, or of the actual impact of questionable activities, the Senedd should be committed to ensuring we understand whether election interference is taking place in Wales, and what can be done to address it.

In your letter you ask about future ways of working, and I would like to draw your attention to the IWA's 2020 report '[Missing Links](#)'. The report explores the neglected topic of inter-parliamentary relations, and the missed opportunity for both improved scrutiny of inter-governmental relations within the devolved UK, and opportunities for knowledge sharing between parliaments. We believe there is a strong case for a formal inter-parliamentary body within the UK, but that in the meantime individual committees should commit to actively seek opportunities to collaborate with their equivalent committees in the other parliaments of the UK. Given the CWLC's remit clearly cuts across the lines of what is and is not devolved, we believe there is a particularly strong case for it to seek opportunities to collaborate with the Digital, Culture, Media and Sport Committee in particular.

Thank you again for the opportunity to feed into this report. I hope this letter makes clear the IWA's support for the valuable work of the Culture, Welsh Language and Communications Committee, and our firm view that a similar committee must be formed during the next Senedd.

Yours sincerely,



Auriol Miller
Director, IWA

cc: [REDACTED]