

Cynulliad Cenedlaethol Cymru / National Assembly for Wales
Pwyllgor Diwylliant, y Gymraeg a Chyfathrebu / Culture, Welsh Language
and Communications Committee
Blaenoriaethau ar gyfer y Pwyllgor / Priorities for the Committee
CWLC(5) PFC02: Ymateb gan NUJ Cymru / Evidence from NUJ Wales

As Wales and its institutions strive for and achieve greater influence and autonomy, it becomes incumbent on us all to preserve, protect and promote a critical, professional and curious media.

The National Union of Journalists (NUJ) represents around 30,000 members in the UK, Ireland and continental Europe, across multiple professional sectors including broadcasting, newspapers, public relations and communications, new media and books.

In Wales, approximately 1,000 members are further represented by the elected Welsh Executive Council (WEC) which meets four times a year to discuss union policy in Wales, trends and developments in the Welsh media, representation of media professionals, liaising with opinion formers and legislators and communicating with members in various ways, including through its regular newsletter Pendragon.

With all of the main political parties in Wales acknowledging a diminution in the provision of quality media and journalistic coverage in the nation and the consequent dangers of an escalating democratic deficit, we believe a laissez-faire approach to media policy is unsustainable.

Public figures and decision-makers, while increasingly accepting there is a need to tackle today's progressively unsatisfactory and uncomprehensive coverage of Welsh life, need to understand there is now a need for going further through intervention to overturn this media crisis in and about Wales.

We are witnessing a grand failure of the market to meet Wales' media needs. Further, we do not believe that arbitrary and ill-thought-through cuts to national broadcasters such as the BBC and S4C are any answer.

Also, despite moves to online models of reporting, traditional print media operations are shrinking and moving further away from the communities they serve and the concentration of newspaper titles in the ownership of so few companies leaves them at the mercy of short-term commercial, rather than social or cultural, considerations.

Titles that might have a future in the hands of alternative proprietors, cooperative or community enterprises must be protected from closure and new and alternative local news providers have to be encouraged to fill gaps that emerge in regional news coverage.

A strong Wales needs a strong media and the people of Wales require a multiplicity of outlets that are in touch with their lives, localities and needs.

A strong media can act as voice, conscience and consciousness and it remains the most effective means by which a nation of three million people can converse, the best means by which we can shape the future together.

We therefore would ask the committee to examine ways to promote and achieve the following:

Broadcasting

- A strong, publicly-owned, licence fee-funded BBC and greater oversight and scrutiny of public service broadcasting in Wales by the Welsh Government and Assembly.
- A vibrant and properly-resourced S4C, funded and managed in Wales, and overseen by the Welsh Government and Assembly.
- Broadcast media outlets that continue to challenge, question and investigate with news and current affairs at the heart of the output offered by public service providers such as the BBC, ITV Wales and S4C, across all platforms.

Print media

- Newspapers, websites and outlets based in the communities they serve.
- An exploration through research of what constitutes a minimum acceptable level of news provision for local communities if a Welsh democratic deficit is to be addressed.
- Protection against closure for historic newspaper titles where alternative proprietors can be identified through devices such as the UK-wide Localism Act 2011.
- Consider whether the employment of BBC-funded reporters to plug a public interest journalism shortfall is appropriate and practicable
- Plurality of regional media ownership.

New start-ups

- Grant support from an independent or arms-length Welsh Government

funding body for new news start-ups in areas with limited or no local news coverage that demonstrate a sustainable editorial and business case.

- A minimum or agreed quota of statutory notices to be published through new print and online outlets.
- Business and journalistic training and support for potential start-up entrepreneurs or community concerns.