

A Manifesto for Museums in Wales

Museums in Wales play a vital role in society and are a focal point for their local communities. Since Devolution they have supported the delivery of critical Welsh Government and Local Authority objectives ranging from supporting informal and formal learning to enhancing health and wellbeing and tackling social injustice, as well as bringing countless social and economic benefits to our nation. Museums are central to the drive for cultural democracy and cultural rights across Wales and are world-leading in much of this work, as demonstrated by St Fagans National Museum of History being awarded Art Fund Museum of the Year in 2019 and the Dylan Thomas Centre winning the Museums Change Lives Award for Best Small Museum Project 2020.

Austerity, Brexit and the pandemic have divided communities and are impacting our museums. More than ever before people need museums and their collections to help make sense of the world around us and provide opportunities to learn, engage and shape their futures. During the Covid-19 emergency museums have supported local communities through inclusive initiatives such as NHS Staff Decide: Art in Hospitals, Virtual Classrooms, activities for those at risk of isolation while under lockdown and by working with communities to process and represent their experiences of the pandemic for future generations. [See here for more information](#) on how museums have worked with their communities.

However, as the Government-commissioned Expert Review of Local Museum Provision in Wales (2015) found, there has been structural historic underinvestment in museums that has led to run-down services that now might not survive the loss of income from reduced visitor numbers, further lockdowns and austerity.

Museums in Wales are highly valued by their communities but also highly vulnerable. We are asking politicians to imagine what could be achieved with a modest amount of investment to secure the cultural and creative future of the nation.

As we rebuild our society museums will have a unique role, including:

- supporting local communities
- growing civic pride in place, identity and environment
- regenerating the local and national economy
- increasing awareness of our shared heritage and the importance of the stories of Wales' diverse communities to our history
- developing participatory learning experiences and resources for the new curriculum

- fostering physical and mental health and wellbeing
- tackling poverty and creating opportunities for those most at risk of socio-economic exclusion
- encouraging green tourism and ‘staycations’ by ensuring local areas have a varied offer to attract domestic tourists throughout the nation
- raising public awareness of the climate emergency, and the actions we can all take as citizens to achieve change
- supporting the growth of the Welsh Language, in line with Cymraeg 2050.

By working with their diverse communities, museums will be able to deliver tangible social benefits and contribute to the sustainable and cultural recovery of the nation. But to achieve this they need a strategic lead from Welsh Government and investment in the following areas.

- **An ambitious new Cultural Strategy for Wales:** A national framework to ensure that museums, working alongside the arts, environmental organisations and the sports and tourism sectors, support the Welfare State in Wales and play a central role in the healing and recovery of the nation.
- **Capacity building:** Investment in a strong, expert, and fully staffed Museums, Arts, Archives and Libraries Division (MAALD), with additional investment in capacity for the Federation of Museums & Art Galleries of Wales, so they can work together to develop the national infrastructure of museums.
- Implement the recommendations of the Welsh Government’s Expert Review into Local Museum Provision in Wales including:
 - The regional working to deliver services locally, achieved by establishing a small number of regional bodies.
 - The plans for a distributed national collection.
 - Focus capital spending on ensuring that our local museums can work with and welcome their local communities as thriving civic spaces where everyone can use and enjoy both national and regional collections.
 - Digital infrastructure, capacity and skills development. During the lockdowns museums across Wales have engaged with communities on-and off-line, supporting home learning and providing resources to support families and communities. Coordinated investment in digital infrastructure and skills will enable museums to create a sustainable hybrid model of real and online events, programming and engagement for the future.
- **Fund the Welsh Museums Festival:** to attract visitors back to museums and support domestic tourism.
- Continue to support free entry to all of Wales’ national museums.