

Communities, Equality and Local Government Committee

Inquiry into the Welsh Government's Historic Environment Policy

Response from The Federation of Museums and Art Galleries of Wales

The Federation of Museums and Art Galleries of Wales is the strategic body for museum and art gallery professionals in Wales, advocating for the highest standards of museum provision throughout Wales. We represent all types of museums – National, local authority, university and independent, - and their staff whether paid or volunteer. The Federation promotes good practice in museums and galleries and provides support, advice and a forum for discussion of museum issues affecting members.

Important note.

The Federation has had some difficulty in responding to this consultation as the consultation provides is no definition of 'Historic Environment'. It is essential, in our view, that the historic environment includes portable objects and the intangible heritage but we suspect that these are being ignored. **We would therefore recommend that the committee ensures that there is a clear statement of what is included within the historic environment.** This is particularly important in terms of the Heritage Bill, which we know, from the Federation's conversations with the Minister, is intended to cover objects (portable heritage) and stories (intangible heritage) that reflect the wider heritage of Wales. The role of museums in preserving and interpreting this heritage is a vital element in any legislation.

Consultation Questions

- *How appropriate and successful are the current systems employed by the Welsh Government for **protecting** and **managing** the historic environment in Wales?*

We need a definition of the historic environment before we can respond in detail. If it includes portable objects and the intangible heritage, museums play a vital role. They are supported through grant aid from CyMAL. The Welsh Government's Museum Strategy for Wales 2010–15 provides a clear statement of the valuable role museums play in this regard, and a direction for developing this role within a wider strategic context.

- *How well do the Welsh Government's policies **promote** the historic environment in Wales (for instance, in terms of interpretation, accessibility, attracting new audiences and tourism)?*

The Museum Strategy has clear policies to promote the heritage of Wales through displays and activities in museums. Museums in Wales are fortunate to have this strategy in place.

- *How well do the policies for the historic environment **tie in with wider Welsh Government policy objectives** (such as the regeneration of communities)?*

Museums are at the heart of their local communities and many have made a significant contribution to regeneration in their areas by providing a community focus for heritage, as well as empowering people through education and inspiration. Museums often work with a wide range of different communities especially those who have difficulty in accessing the historic environment otherwise. The work of museums in promoting access to the historic environment (in all its forms) can link to the Welsh Government's objective to eliminate child poverty. There is a need to ensure that all this work is recognised in wider policy development for the historic environment.

- *What would be the advantages and disadvantages of **merging the functions** of the Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical*

Monuments of Wales with the functions of other organisations, including Cadw?

We appreciate that there could be administrative savings from a merger, and the work done by the Royal Commission might have a higher profile within Government from such a move.

We however are concerned that not all functions are proposed for merger with the potential loss to the heritage sector especially in the field of research. There is also the potential for the loss of expertise, and in access to expertise, if the functions of the Royal Commission are submerged with a larger body, especially if this is in one location. The Royal Commission, and its work, is currently very accessible via a range of methods. If a merger does take place it will be important that the current functions of the Royal Commission are allowed to develop and continue to be sustained. A merger should not be the excuse to quietly dispense with some valuable activities which support the wider historic environment in Wales.

- *What role do **local authorities** and **third sector organisations** play in implementing the Welsh Government's historic environment policy and what support do they receive in this respect?*

Local museums whether run by local authorities or by the independent sector have a vital role to play in implementing such policy, but there needs to be a realisation within Welsh Government that the historic environment does include tangible portable artefacts and the intangible heritage which considerably enhances social interaction with heritage. Even with limited funding there is more capacity locally to promote the historic environment respecting local needs and engaging fully with local communities. There are many good examples of museums doing this.

Rachael Rogers
President

On behalf of The Federation of Museums and Art Galleries of Wales.