



House of Commons
Welsh Affairs Committee

The Welsh economy and Covid-19: Interim Report

Third Report of Session 2019–21

*Report, together with formal minutes relating
to the report*

*Ordered by the House of Commons
to be printed 16 July 2020*

Welsh Affairs Committee

The Welsh Affairs Committee is appointed by the House of Commons to examine the expenditure, administration, and policy of the Office of the Secretary of State for Wales (including relations with the National Assembly for Wales).

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Powers

The Committee is one of the departmental select committees, the powers of which are set out in House of Commons Standing Orders, principally in SO No 152. These are available on the internet via www.parliament.uk.

Publications

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Evidence relating to this report is published on the [inquiry publications page](#) of the Committee's website.

Committee staff

The current staff of the Committee are Mems Ayinla (Second Clerk), Dr Adam Evans (Clerk), Louise Glen (Senior Committee Assistant), Simon Horswell (Committee Specialist), Kelly Tunnicliffe (Committee Assistant), Tim West (Media Officer) and Rhianon Williams (Committee Specialist).

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1 Introduction

1. Covid-19 has posed one of the greatest economic and social challenges in living memory. The virus has caused tens of thousands of deaths, has affected the lives of everyone in the United Kingdom and has had a devastating effect on businesses.
2. **This interim report seeks to focus attention on the economic impact of the pandemic on Wales to date, the support provided by both the UK and Welsh Governments to businesses and individuals, and the sectors at particular risk during this crisis. We intend to return with recommendations in a further report in the autumn.**¹

¹ We thank all those who have given oral and written evidence to our inquiry to date, a full list of witnesses can be found at the back of this report.

2 Financial support

Access to government support schemes

3. Both the UK and Welsh Governments have provided financial support to help businesses with cash-flow difficulties during this crisis and avoid widespread business failures and redundancies. These include the following UK Government measures which currently apply in Wales:

- **Coronavirus Business Interruption Loan Scheme (CBILS):** this scheme enables businesses with a turnover of up to £45 million to access loans of up to £5 million. The government guarantees 80% of the finance to the lender and pays interest and any fees for the first 12 months. The Coronavirus **Large Business Interruption Loan Scheme (CLBILS)** provides loans of up to £25 million and £50 million for businesses with an annual turnover of over £45 million and £250 million respectively.
- **Bounce Back Loans Scheme:** This scheme provides financial support to businesses across the UK that are losing revenue, and seeing their cashflow disrupted, as a result of the COVID-19 outbreak and that can benefit from £50,000 or less in finance.
- **Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme (CJRS):** This scheme enabled companies to furlough employees by providing cash grants of 80% of salary up to a maximum of £2,500 per month. From 1 July, employers can bring furloughed workers back to work for any amount of time and any shift pattern while still being able to claim the grant for hours not worked. From 1 August, the level of support provided by the scheme will gradually taper down until the scheme closes on 31 October.
- **Self-employment income support scheme (SEISS):** allocates cash grants of 80% of total profits, up to £2,500 monthly over a three-month period from March 2020. The ONS estimates that over 5 million people (15% of the UK workforce) are self-employed. The Government stated that 95% of self-employed individuals will benefit from the scheme, but the Institute for Fiscal Studies estimates that only 62% of the self-employed will be eligible for support.²

4. The Welsh Government has introduced two separate grant schemes, **the £1.4 billion non-domestic rates grant scheme and a £500m Economic Resilience Fund**. The Development Bank of Wales, established by the Welsh Government, has a business loan scheme worth £100 million to support businesses during the outbreak.

5. As of 16 July 2020, the Office for National Statistics business survey found that:

- Wales had the highest percentage of businesses reporting they had less than six month's cash reserves at 44%, compared with 41% in England, 37% in Scotland and 35% in Northern Ireland.

2 A Seely and D Hirst (9 July 2020), [Self-Employment Income Support Scheme](#), House of Commons Library Briefing Paper

- 58% of businesses in Wales have reported a decrease in turnover outside of a normal range, as compared to 62% in Scotland, 58% in England, and 49% in Northern Ireland.
- Of businesses who have not permanently stopped trading, 79% of businesses in Wales had applied for the CJRS, compared with 83% in Scotland, 80% in England, and 77% in Northern Ireland.
- Of businesses who have not permanently stopped trading, 16% of those operating in Wales had not applied for any of these schemes, compared with 18% in England and Northern Ireland and 15% in Scotland.³

6. Analysis conducted by the Wales Governance Centre at Cardiff University, based on data from HMRC and the ONS, suggests that 25.6% of employees in Wales had been furloughed up to 31 May (a lower share than any of the other devolved nations and lower than each of the nine English regions).⁴ Rates of furloughing have varied between the 22 Welsh local authorities, with the highest rates of furloughed employees being found in Conwy (31%), Powys, Pembrokeshire, Gwynedd and Ceredigion (all 29%)—rural areas with the highest reliance on accommodation, food services and tourism related jobs.

7. According to HMRC, as of 30 June 2020, 108,000 individuals in Wales had claimed for support under SEISS, a take-up rate of 77% of those eligible to apply for the scheme.⁵

Employment support

8. There has been a marked increase in demand for Universal Credit in Wales. Citizens Advice Cymru told us that, in the first four weeks of the lockdown, they saw a “47% increase in people coming to us for help with Universal Credit compared to the same period 6 months ago”.⁶ According to the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) there were 122,160 applications for Universal Credit in Wales between 1 March–12 May.⁷ As the graph below illustrates the surge in Universal Credit applications arose after lockdown began.

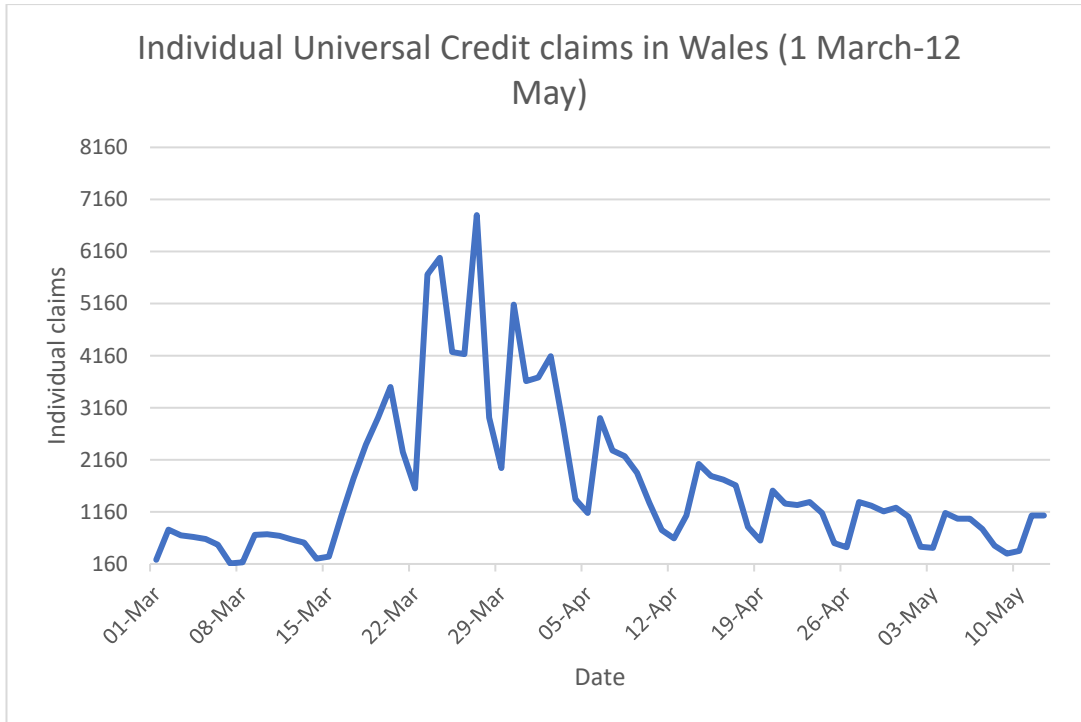
3 [Office for National Statistics Coronavirus and the economic impacts on the UK: 16 July 2020](#)

4 This is a reflection of the sectoral composition of the Welsh economy. As Cian Sion of the Wales Governance Centre explains, “a higher share of Welsh employees are employed in parts of the economy most associated with the public sector (public administration and defence, education, and health and social work), which have a very low, or no share of employments furloughed across the UK” (Cian Sion (22 June 2020), [Covid-19 and the Welsh economy—what the latest indicators tell us](#), Thinking Wales (Cardiff University)).

5 HMRC, [Self-Employment Income Support Scheme statistics: July 2020—data tables](#)

6 [Citizens Advice Cymru \(COV0039\)](#)

7 [Letter from the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions](#), 21 May 2020



9. On 8 July, the Chancellor's Economic Statement outlined proposals for a £2 billion Kickstart Scheme which will subsidise six month work placements for people aged 16–24 who are claiming Universal Credit. The scheme will apply in England, Scotland and Wales.⁸

10. The UK Government will also spend £111 million as part of a programme to provide 30,000 new traineeships in England for 16–24 year olds, with firms given £1,000 for each new work experience place they offer. It is expected that £21 million of funding will be made available to Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.⁹ The Welsh Government currently provides its own traineeship programme, alongside apprenticeships and its Jobs Growth Wales programme funded by the Welsh Government and EU structural funds.¹⁰

The role of the banking sector

11. Witnesses to the inquiry and those submitting written evidence have generally criticised the financial support provided during the crisis by the commercial banks in Wales. The criticisms of the banks can be broadly grouped into three themes: (i) a lack of understanding of local businesses, (ii) delays and unresponsiveness, and, (iii) excessive risk aversion.¹¹ The evidence has been markedly more positive about the support provided by the Development Bank of Wales, a wholly owned subsidiary of the Welsh Government.¹²

8 HM Treasury, (8 July 2020), [A Plan for Jobs 2020](#)

9 BBC News (6 July), [Sunak to give firms £1,000 cash bonus to hire trainees](#)

10 Careers Wales, [Jobs Growth Wales](#)

11 FSB Wales (COV0055); Menter a Busnes (COV0029); Isle of Anglesey County Council (COV0034); Qq4–22 (12 May)

12 [Summary of seminar with FSB Wales \(COV0072\)](#); Q14 (12 May)

3 Impact on the Welsh economy

12. Prior to the pandemic, statistics published by the Welsh Government had shown that Wales ranked 11 out of the 12 UK nations and regions for Gross Value Added (GVA) per head (£20,738) and for Gross Disposable Household Income (£17,100), was in eighth place for employment (Wales's employment rate was 74.4%) and for its poverty rate (23%).¹³

13. According to the Centre for Towns, Wales, with the second highest levels of employment in the most affected sectors in the UK, faces particular difficulties as a result of the pandemic.¹⁴ Their research suggests that many towns in Wales are likely to be amongst the hardest hit.¹⁵

Impact on seasonal sectors

14. The Covid-19 crisis has already dealt a sharp blow to seasonal industries in Wales, like agriculture, tourism and hospitality, that rely on the spring and summer months for their revenue. For such sectors, the pandemic is said to have created a “year of three winters”.¹⁶

15. Tourism is a particularly significant sector of the Welsh economy, generating an estimated £6.2 billion in visitor spend in 2019 and providing 130,000 jobs. The impact on the tourism sector has been substantial, with the pandemic resulting in “the immediate shutdown of 97% of businesses with 80% of staff being furloughed. The figures are higher in comparison to any other economic sector”.¹⁷

16. On 8 July 2020, the Chancellor announced, as part of his Summer Economic Statement, that VAT would temporarily be reduced from 20% to 5% for food and non-alcoholic drinks purchased from restaurants, pubs, bars, cafés and similar premises across the UK, as well as for accommodation and admission to attractions across the UK. The temporary discount will apply from 15 July 2020 to 12 January 2021.¹⁸ The Chancellor also announced the creation of a ‘Eat Out to Help Out’ scheme, running during August, and which would offer a 50% reduction, up to a maximum of £10 per person, to all diners who eat and/or drink-in in participating restaurants and other dining establishments.

Impact on other sectors

17. The scarring effect of the pandemic is likely to extend beyond seasonal, service sector jobs to key sectors of the Welsh economy such as aerospace, higher education, steel, retail, the creative arts including journalism and automotive manufacturing. The automotive sector, which employs over 13,000 people in Wales, and which was already facing significant challenges, has seen production during the pandemic dwindle—resulting in only 197 vehicles being produced across the UK this April as compared to the 100,000 that would normally be expected.¹⁹

13 Welsh Government (30 June 2020), [Welsh economy in numbers: interactive dashboard](#)

14 These are accommodation, retail, food and drink, and arts and leisure. These sectors provide 21.7% of Welsh jobs. Wales is behind only South West England in its reliance on them. See Centre for Towns [The effect of the COVID-19 pandemic on our towns and cities](#) April 2020, p.18

15 Centre for Towns [The effect of the COVID-19 pandemic on our towns and cities](#) April 2020

16 [Wales Tourism Alliance \(COV0064\)](#); [Farmers Union of Wales \(COV0046\)](#); [Transcript of session on 12 May 2020](#)

17 [Wales Tourism Alliance \(COV0064\)](#)

18 HM Treasury, (8 July 2020), [A Plan for Jobs 2020](#)

19 [Q115](#)

Aerospace

18. The Aerospace industry is a source of high-value employment in Wales, with approximately 23,000 workers employed in more than 160 companies (including Airbus, BAE Systems, GE, Nordam, Babcock and British Airways). In his evidence to our inquiry, John Whalley from Aerospace Wales warned that 7,000 or 8,000 jobs in this sector risked being lost as a result of the pandemic.²⁰

19. On 20 May 2020, BBC News reported that up to 1,000 British Airways jobs in South Wales were under threat, while on 24 June it was reported that 240 jobs could be lost at Magellan Aerospace's factory in Wrexham.²¹ On 2 July 2020, Airbus confirmed that 1,435 jobs would be lost at their site in Broughton, North Wales.²²

Higher Education in Wales

20. Higher Education (HE) is another important pillar of the Welsh economy which is facing significant pressures as a result of Covid-19. HE in Wales generated over £544 million of export earnings in 2015/16, contributes 35.2% of research and development spending in Wales, and employs 17,300 full-time members of staff and spending by students and visitors supports an estimated 50,000 jobs across Wales.²³

21. The vulnerability of Welsh universities arises from their greater dependence (54.7%) on tuition fee income than universities across the UK more generally (50.2%).²⁴ Universities Wales warned of "large scale financial challenges" facing the sector and the damaging knock-on effect that losses could have on the local, regional and the national Welsh economy.²⁵

Steel

22. According to the House of Commons Library, in 2016 the steel industry employed around 9,000 workers in Wales.²⁶ The industry has not been immune to the effects of the pandemic and significant employers in Wales, such as Tata Steel and Celsa Steel have sought financial assistance from the government. Celsa, which employs 800 workers in Wales, secured a £30m emergency loan from the UK Government in addition to a £2.9m loan and £690,00 emergency resilience fund payment from the Welsh Government.²⁷ Tata Steel, which employs around 8,000 workers across the UK, including in Port Talbot, has reportedly sought a rescue package worth around £500m from the UK Government.²⁸

20 Q4 (12 May)

21 BBC News, [British Airways: Hundreds of South Wales jobs under threat](#), 20 May 2020

22 ITV News (2 July 2020), [Airbus confirms 1,435 jobs will be cut from its plant at Broughton](#)

23 Cian Sion (May 2020), [Briefing Paper: Covid-19 and the Higher Education Sector in Wales](#), Wales Fiscal Analysis (Cardiff University); [Universities Wales \(COV0050\)](#)

24 Cian Sion (May 2020), [Briefing Paper: Covid-19 and the Higher Education Sector in Wales](#), Wales Fiscal Analysis (Cardiff University), p.4

25 [Universities Wales \(COV0050\)](#)

26 C. Rhodes (2 January 2018), [UK steel industry: statistics and policy](#), House of Commons Library Briefing Paper

27 BBC News (2 July 2020), [Coronavirus: 800 jobs 'secure' as Celsa Steel gets £30m emergency loan](#)

28 BBC News (24 June 2020), [Coronavirus: Tata Steel in government talks amid bailout reports](#)

Retail

23. According to the British Retail Consortium (BRC), prior to lockdown Wales was already experiencing some of the worst vacancy rates in the UK—around 16% of shops were vacant. During April, the first month of lockdown, retail destinations saw 85% less footfall, “around 14% of BRC had shut down their operations entirely, even if they’ve got an online operation, and around 70% of our non-food members have said that, that their sales have been significantly impacted over this period”.²⁹

Concluding comments

24. **The pandemic has revealed vulnerabilities in the structure of the Welsh economy and Wales faces a real risk of the worst effects of the pandemic falling on those who are least able to afford it.**

25. **Covid-19 has created a perfect storm for key sectors of the Welsh economy. For some of Wales’s most important employers, the short term impacts of the pandemic have converged with longer term challenges to restructure to deliver sustainable growth.**

26. **The impact of Covid-19 risks undoing much of the progress achieved in recent decades in raising employment levels in Wales.**

27. **We intend to return in the autumn with recommendations on how the UK and Welsh Governments may work together to mitigate the risks of the pandemic and build a successful and sustainable economic recovery for Wales.**

Formal minutes

Friday 17 July 2020

After consulting all Members of the Committee, the Chair was satisfied that the Report represented a decision of the majority of the Committee and reported it to the House.

(Order of the House of 24 March 2020).

Witnesses

The following witnesses gave evidence. Transcripts can be viewed on the [inquiry publications page](#) of the Committee's website.

Thursday 11 June 2020

Luned Whelan, Executive Manager, TAC (Independent Television Wales); **Caroline Norbury**, CEO, Creative Industries Federation; **Lynn Pamment**, Chair, Welsh Sports Association [Q81–108](#)

Tim Williams, Chief Executive, Welsh Automotive Forum; **Claudia Currie**, Associate Transport Planner, Chartered Institute of Highways and Transportation; **Avril Lewis MBE**, Managing Director, Technology Connected [Q109–131](#)

Thursday 25 June 2020

Rebecca Evans MS, Finance Minister, Welsh Government; **Ken Skates MS**, Minister for Economy Transport and North Wales, Welsh Government [Q132–189](#)

The following oral evidence sessions were held in private, and reported as written evidence:

Tuesday 12 May 2020

Ifan Glyn, Wales Director for the Federation of Master Builders, **John Whalley**, CEO of Aerospace Wales, **David Chapman**, Executive Director in Wales for UK Hospitality, **John Davies**, President of the National Farmers Union Wales, and **Dr Nick Fenwick**, Head of Policy at the Farmers Union of Wales [Q1–45](#)

Thursday 21 May 2020

David Cooksey, Senior Energy Advisor, DTA Energy Action Group, **Andrew Campbell**, Chairman, Wales Tourism Alliance, **Tim Thomas**, Policy Officer for Wales, National Residential Landlords Association, **Sara Jones**, Head of Policy, British Retail Consortium [Q46–80](#)

Published written evidence

The following written evidence was received and can be viewed on the [inquiry publications page](#) of the Committee's website.

COV numbers are generated by the evidence processing system and so may not be complete.

- 1 Airbus ([COV0077](#))
- 2 Alpine Travel (Mr Chris Owens, Managing Director) ([COV0011](#))
- 3 Anglesey Tourism Association (Victoria Roberts, Director/Chair) ([COV0045](#))
- 4 Arts Council of Wales/Wales Arts International ([COV0065](#))
- 5 Association of Convenience Stores (Mr Steve Dowling, Public Affairs Manager) ([COV0036](#))
- 6 Betting and Gaming Council (Miss Camilla Toogood, Government Relations Manager) ([COV0031](#))
- 7 Bevan Commission (Dr Robert Royce, Senior Research Officer) ([COV0026](#))
- 8 Bevan Foundation ([COV0070](#))
- 9 Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council ([COV0027](#))
- 10 Bristow, Professor Gillian and Healy, Dr Adrian, Cardiff University ([COV0038](#))
- 11 Cardiff Airport (Cassie Houghton, Head of Marketing and PR) ([COV0033](#))
- 12 Cardiff Capital Region ([COV0060](#))
- 13 Citizens Advice Cymru (Gwen Hardy, Senior Policy Officer) ([COV0039](#))
- 14 City & County of Swansea (Mr Rowlands, Strategic Delivery & Performance Manager) ([COV0035](#))
- 15 Clybiau Plant Cymru Kids' Clubs (Ms Jane O'Toole, Chief Executive Officer) ([COV0023](#))
- 16 ColegauCymru / CollegesWales (Amy Evans, Policy Officer) ([COV0018](#))
- 17 Comisiynydd y Gymraeg | Welsh Language Commissioner (Meinir Jones, Comisiynydd y Gymraeg | Welsh Language Commissioner) ([COV0049](#))
- 18 Community Housing Cymru ([COV0062](#))
- 19 Community Transport Association ([COV0071](#))
- 20 Confederation of Passenger Transport Wales ([COV0068](#))
- 21 Creative Industries Federation ([COV0075](#))
- 22 Cymorth Cymru (Mr Oliver Townsend, Policy and External Affairs Manager) ([COV0051](#))
- 23 Cynnal Cymru (Sarah Hopkins, Director) ([COV0019](#))
- 24 Development Trusts Association Wales (Peter Williams, Director) ([COV0053](#))
- 25 Equality and Human Rights Commission Wales (Rev Ruth Coombs, Head of Wales) ([COV0024](#))
- 26 Equine Marketing Limited T/A Welsh Country (Mr Ian Mole, Director) ([COV0016](#))
- 27 Evidence session 21/05/20, Transcript ([COV0061](#))
- 28 EYST Wales (Ginger Wiegand, Research, Policy & Influencing Officer) ([COV0037](#))

- 29 Farmers' Union of Wales (Dr Nicholas Islwyn D. Fenwick, Head of Agricultural Policy) ([COV0046](#))
- 30 Federation of Small Businesses Wales ([COV0055](#))
- 31 Food Sense Wales, WWF Cymru, RSPB Cymru, Sustainable Places Institute, Cardiff University, Slade Farm, Oxfam Cymru, and Land Workers Alliance Cym (Katie Palmer) ([COV0052](#))
- 32 Growing Mid Wales ([COV0063](#))
- 33 Hybu Cig Cymru - Meat Promotion Wales ([COV0067](#))
- 34 Industrial Communities Alliance Wales (Mr Peter Slater, Director) ([COV0013](#))
- 35 Institute for Fiscal Studies (Mr David Phillips, Associate Director) ([COV0028](#))
- 36 Isle of Anglesey County Council (Dr Trefor Jones, North Anglesey Programme Manager) ([COV0034](#))
- 37 The Landworkers' Alliance (Cymru Branch) (Holly Tomlinson, Policy & Campaigns Coordinator (Cymru)) ([COV0054](#))
- 38 Lewis-Jones, Mrs Ella ([COV0042](#))
- 39 Menter a Busnes (Mr Alun Jones, CEO) ([COV0029](#))
- 40 Mudiad Meithrin ([COV0058](#))
- 41 The National Centre for Learning Welsh (Efa Gruffudd Jones, Chief Executive) ([COV0006](#))
- 42 National Hair & Beauty Federation ([COV0030](#))
- 43 National Residential Landlords Association (Mr. Tim Thomas, Policy Officer) ([COV0022](#))
- 44 National Theatre Wales (Mr Lorne Campbell, Artistic Director/Chief Executive) ([COV0044](#))
- 45 New Quay Marine Tourism Boat Trip Grouping ([COV0074](#))
- 46 NFU Cymru (Mr Huw Thomas, Political Adviser) ([COV0007](#))
- 47 Nifty Kids Childcare Services (Mrs Nicola Varney, Proprietor) ([COV0008](#))
- 48 Office of the Secretary of State for Wales (Simon Hart, Secretary of State) ([COV0056](#))
- 49 RenewableUK Cymru ([COV0066](#))
- 50 Roberts, Mr Tegid ([COV0003](#))
- 51 Royal Welsh Agricultural Society ([COV0017](#))
- 52 RSPB (Mr Dylan Underhill, Senior Parliamentary Officer) ([COV0032](#))
- 53 S4C (Catrin Hughes Roberts, Director of Partnerships) ([COV0069](#))
- 54 Social Farms and Gardens (Ms Lucie Taylor, Community Land Advisory Service Cymru Coordinator) ([COV0025](#))
- 55 Social Firms Wales (San Leonard, C.E.O.) ([COV0043](#))
- 56 South Wales Chamber of Commerce (Paul Slevin, President) ([COV0040](#))
- 57 Summary note of webinar with Ben Cottam and Dr Llyr ap Gareth, FSB Wales, held on 4 June 2020 ([COV0072](#))
- 58 Teledwyr Annibynnol Cymru (TAC) ([COV0073](#))
- 59 Transcript of oral evidence session 12 May 20 ([COV0012](#))

- 60 Universities Wales (Rob Simkins, Policy Officer) ([COV0050](#))
- 61 Wales Co-operative Centre (Mrs Catherine Evans, Policy and Communications Manager) ([COV0048](#))
- 62 Wales Council for Voluntary Action (David Cook, Policy Officer) ([COV0020](#))
- 63 Wales Environment Link (Mrs Karen Whitfield, Joint Director) ([COV0041](#))
- 64 Wales Tourism Alliance ([COV0064](#))
- 65 Wales TUC ([COV0076](#))
- 66 Welsh Government ([COV0059](#))

List of Reports from the Committee during the current Parliament

All publications from the Committee are available on the [publications page](#) of the Committee's website. The reference number of the Government's response to each Report is printed in brackets after the HC printing number.

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Second Special Report	City Deals and Growth Deals in Wales: Government Response to the Committee's Second Report of Session 2019	HC146