

14 October 2024

Delyth Jewell  
Welsh Parliament  
Cardiff Bay  
Cardiff  
CF99 1SN

Dear Ms Jewell,

## **Publishing in Wales**

I am writing to you as a leading book publisher in Wales and a founding director of Cyhoeddi Cymru | Publishing Wales, the association of publishers in Wales, to bring your attention to the serious situation in the Welsh publishing industry and to ask for your support in addressing this matter.

The Welsh publishing sector is led brilliantly by the Books Council of Wales but sadly, in 2024/25, they saw a cut in their annual budget by 10.5%. This was a particularly devastating blow, as other major Welsh language organisations saw no cuts to their annual budget, in many cases, they saw their funding increase.

Since 2009/10, the Books Council of Wales's annual budget has almost halved in real terms (it now represents just 52.1% of what it was in 2009/10). These cuts have been against a hard economic backdrop where raw materials and supply chain products have constantly increased and then combined with a cost-of-living crisis choking demand to create a 'perfect storm' of crisis in the sector.

The long period of austerity has meant schools struggle to afford books and libraries have closed – both of which were once significant markets for publishers. Against this difficult background, Government support for the publishing sector in Wales, and particularly for the Welsh publishing sector, is needed more than it has ever been before.

Currently, the Books Council of Wales has an annual budget of £1.5 million per annum. Some of this is spent on their staff and overheads, but much of this amount is passed on to publishers as grants. Therefore, I am respectfully requesting that this budget is **NOT CUT** further. In addition, I am asking you to consider investing a further £1.4 million per annum to restore the real value of their funding to 2009/10 level at £2.9 million. The reasons for this request are outlined as follows.

## **Well-being and mental health**

The core purpose of the grants administered by the Books Council of Wales to the publishing industry is to create books that encourage '*Reading for Pleasure*'. Reading is a superpower and a foundational block for our society. If you can read, then you function more productively and contribute to our nation as well as being empowered to be more able to 'help yourself' in times of need.

As such, books and by extension, the publishing sector in Wales is vital to supporting the health and well-being of our nation.

## **Economy and Jobs**

My company employs ten people across South Wales from Llanelli and Cardiff. In many rural and South Wales areas, it is extremely difficult to find professional jobs with good salaries that offer the opportunity to provide a creative outlet, offer a good income, and enable them to support their families.

As well as our employed jobs, we work with over 100 freelancers varying from artists, authors, illustrators, translators, creative editors, copy editors and software developers, animators and many others who rely on our commissions.

The benefits of online and remote working have enabled us to provide work to freelancers in more rural areas; but all of this is dependent on the support we receive from Welsh Government through the Books Council. Without this support – especially given the economic challenges I've noted above – these jobs and benefits would not exist. Our books are sold in many small, independent, bookshops all over Wales and these small businesses are often the core of communities – bringing people together and supporting the local economy. Many of our books are sold throughout the UK and Ireland. Graffeg sell rights to our books throughout the world: USA and Canada, China, Japan, France Italy, Germany, Romania, Turkey, Albania, Sweden and Denmark.

As this shows, the reach of the small amount of funding we have is extensive. It stimulates the creative industries in Wales and produces earnings from international markets.

## **No more cuts.**

The Books Council of Wales's funding should be 'ring fenced' in 2025/26 and in future years, in a similar way to those Welsh organisations that are in the '**Culture**' portfolio.

Although publishing sits in the 'Creative Industries' portfolio, we provide vital Welsh language resources for both children and adults. We strongly believe that our provision should be treated uniquely as a matter of importance not only to safeguard our culture and heritage, but also for the economic reasons detailed above. Please do not impose any further cuts on our small grants. We simply will not be able to continue to operate.

Reading for pleasure is a campaign that the UK publishing industry is urging the UK government to embrace and to offer more financial support. Publishers at the Bookseller's recent Children's Conference called on the Prime Minister to "**make a cross-government commitment to prioritise the role of reading for pleasure for children**. *This would be an investment in the well-being, social mobility and life chances of our children and the prosperity and success of the UK*".

However, in Wales, we have already identified the importance of '**reading for pleasure**' by making this the core driver of The Books Council of Wales. Sadly, since 2009/10, the real value of their funding, including the grant support they pass on to the Welsh publishing industry has almost halved in real terms. This has meant that so much of the excellent work they were able to do to promote the language and invest in skills has fallen by the wayside – to the detriment of both the language and the industry.

We therefore implore you to **invest now in this foundational industry and in our language by reinstate the real value of their funding**. The real value of The Books Council of Wales funding in 2009/10 is now £2.9 million in real terms. Funding at this level

would help us secure the future of publishing in Wales and turn back the tide of decline over recent years and allow publishing to grow.

The Books Council of Wales current budget is £1.5 million - the additional £1.4 million required to restore the real value of the grant will provide excellent value for money. The funds would sustain jobs in publishing in Wales as well as 100's if not 1000's of freelance workers.

The sustainable funding would also create important new publishing products, in print, digital and audio books, and support well-being and mental health, the economy, rural communities, literacy, education, the Welsh language and support the government's commitment to achieving the 1 Million Welsh Speakers by 2050.

Please ask yourself what other industry could provide as much benefit for such a relatively small investment?

Our priority is to **prevent any further cuts**, but fundamentally, our industry is heading towards a tipping point, and **restorative investment** would empower our industry and would support many of the goals of the Government.

Please invest now to preserve and kickstart our industry and give hope to the many people who work for us and desperately need to see change put into action.

Yours Sincerely,

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