



Firefly Press
25 Gabalfa Road
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16 October 24

To:

Minister for Culture, Skills and Social Partnership
Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Welsh Language
Cabinet Secretary for Education
Cabinet Secretary for Economy, Energy and Planning
Minister for Mental Health and Wellbeing
Minister for Children and Social Care

Members of the Culture Committee

Members representing South Wales Central and South Wales East and Caerphilly – Firefly Press areas

As well as a copy to the Culture, Communications, Welsh Language, Sport and Internal Relations Committee

Dear Ministers and Senedd Member,

I'm writing to you as the Co-founder and Publisher at the award-winning Firefly Press to put the case for restorative funding for Wales-based publishers, who are facing a critical funding situation.

Firefly Press publishes quality fiction for children and young adults in English and Welsh. It was founded in Cardiff and Aberystwyth in 2013 and now employs seven staff at its office in Caerphilly, and provides work for freelancers across Wales. We were awarded Wales Small Press of the Year at the British Book Awards in 2020, 2021, 2023 and 2024, winning the prestigious Yoto Carnegie Medal for children's writing last year.

I'd like to draw your attention to the following: the grant to publishers through the Welsh Books Council, from which Firefly receives vital support, sustained a deep 10.5% last year, bringing the total cut in the last ten years to 17%. This in an industry that produces top quality books from Wales on a shoestring and had previously been on standstill funding for a decade or more.

Since 2010/11, the Books Council of Wales's annual budget, which supports Welsh and English language publishers in Wales has almost halved in real terms (it now represents just 52.1% of what it was then). Given the rapid rise in costs of raw materials, especially paper due to the energy price rises, and the cost-of-living crisis, combined with the closure of many school and community libraries, the effect of this on authors, illustrators, staff marketing and production budgets has been dramatic.

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As above, last year we achieved the highest accolade in children's and YA publishing by winning the Yoto Carnegie Medal with *The Blue Book of Nebo* by Manon Steffan Ros, first published as *Llyfyr Glas Nebo* by Y Lolfa in 2019. This award received national media attention as the first translated book ever to win the Medal. The success of a micropublisher from South Wales at the premier event of the children's and YA publishing calendar at the Barbican in London, was a wonderful testament to the effectiveness of small grants to small publishers in both languages which make such a huge difference.

At a time when the PISA figures for child literacy are of concern, the importance of a Wales-based children's literature, where children and adults can see themselves reflected in books, and find stories from their own country cannot be under-estimated. Research by organisations such as the National Literacy Trust and Book Trust has shown that literacy and reading for pleasure promote positive mental health and wellbeing, empathy, cultural understanding and, impressively, a child's life chances. **'Reading for Pleasure is the single most important indicator of a child's future success. There is a verified link between reading and escaping poverty.'** Scottish Book Trust.

Firefly has also been instrumental in reaching out to new audiences and bringing books from Wales, and author visits, into to Welsh schools. We have had books selected for the New Audiences Fund, Caru Darllen Schools Love Reading, the Reading Agency's Reading Well Scheme, the Summer Reading Challenge, EmpathyLab, the Book Trust Book Buzz and Letterbox programmes and the Rhyngom project.

As well as the above, Welsh Government support for export trade fairs in London and Frankfurt, also makes a significant difference to our ability to bring books both to children in Wales, and from Wales to the world, and it has been a pleasure to represent Welsh children's publishing this week, with an export deal signed for Australia already. But without a restoration of the small but very significant key funding which underpins the industry, we are not going to be in a position to take advantage of such schemes in the future, and bring in the economic, educational, wellbeing and cultural benefits that we aspire to achieve for our readers and for Wales.

Currently, The Books Council of Wales' annual budget is £1.5 million per annum. Much of this is passed on to publishers as grants, which is a vital support system. **We are therefore requesting that rather than seeing this budget cut further, you consider investing a further £1.4 million per annum to restore the real value of their grant back to the 20010/11 levels.**

Thank you so much for your kind attention. I also attach our most recent catalogue for your information.

All the very best

Penny
Penny Thomas
Publisher
Firefly Press Ltd

23.06.23

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