

Sioned Wyn Roberts
76 Plasturton Avenue
Cardiff
CF11 9HJ

sionedwyn.roberts@gmail.com

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To:

Cabinet Secretary for Education: Correspondence.Lynne.Neagle@gov.wales
Minister for Children and Social Care: Correspondence.Dawn.Bowden@gov.wales
Cabinet Secretary for Finance and the Welsh Language: Correspondence.Mark.Drakeford@gov.wales
Cabinet Secretary for the Economy, Energy and Planning:
Correspondence.Rebecca.Evans@gov.wales
Minister for Culture, Skills and Social Partnership: Correspondence.Jack.Sargeant@gov.wales
Minister for Mental Health and Wellbeing: Correspondence.Sarah.Murphy@gov.wales

Also copied to the Culture, Communications, Welsh Language, Sport and International Relations Committee: SeneddCulture@senedd.wales

I am writing to you as an author writer that makes a living writing in Welsh to express my concern about the financial support for the publishing sector in Wales.

The sector is led by the Books Council of Wales, which saw a 10.5% cut in its annual budget from the Welsh Government in 2024-25. This followed years without any increase in its budget – before the cut, the size of the grant had remained unchanged for over 10 years – and did not take into account the effects of inflation. The prospect of a further cut to its budget in 2025-26 is a matter of great concern to me.

The need for government support for the publishing sector in Wales has never been greater:

Literacy - The publishing sector supports literacy at the very time when reading standards among 15-year-old school pupils in Wales are at their lowest ever – a situation exacerbated by the effects of the Covid pandemic. According to the Pisa test results released in December 2023, Wales is the only country in the UK where pupils' reading scores are below the international average.

The Welsh language - The publishing sector supports the Welsh language and has a key role to play in meeting the Welsh Government's target of one million Welsh speakers by 2050. In terms of the use of the Welsh language and its viability, its role is as central as that of Mudiad Ysgolion Meithrin, the National Centre for Learning Welsh and the Coleg Cymraeg Cenedlaethol, three national bodies saved from cuts in 2024-25. In the case of the National Centre for Learning Welsh and the Coleg Cymraeg,

it was decided to maintain 'budgets at 2023-24 levels to cause the least disruption to the Welsh language sector'.¹

The economy - The publishing sector supports the Welsh economy and many publishers employ a number of freelancers, e.g. editors, designers and authors, who live and work in rural Wales.

Diversity - Welsh literature has historically been a lifeline for the voices of diverse communities, and in recent years, it has developed a more inclusive space for readers and writers across the spectrum of sexual identities, nationality, race, religious backgrounds, and various worldviews.

Health and well-being - The publishing sector supports the health of the nation: among its many other benefits, reading has been proven to be beneficial to mental health and well-being. Here is a recent report by the National Literacy Trust, one of several pieces of research that confirm this important point: <https://literacytrust.org.uk/research-services/research-reports/reading-for-mental-wellbeing-in-2023/>

The new Labour Government's Chancellor of the Exchequer pledged there would be no more economic austerity: with the publishing sector in Wales still trying to deal with the devastating impact of the 10.5% cut in 2024-25, we ask that you honour this pledge and ensure that no further cuts are introduced in 2025-26. This would go some way towards trying to ensure that an already extremely challenging situation does not turn into a very real crisis.

Yours sincerely

Sioned Wyn Roberts

Author

¹ *Welsh Government Draft Budget 2024-25 Ministers' written evidence to Senedd scrutiny committees on allocations within each MEG December 2023*, gov.wales, p. 339.