

HK/MLW

29 April 2024

Committee Chair and Members
Culture, Communications, Welsh Language, Sport, and International Relations Committee
Welsh Parliament
Cardiff Bay
CARDIFF
CF99 1SN

Dear Chair and Members of the Culture, Communications, Welsh Language, Sport, and International Relations Committee,

Thank you for your letter of 22 April 2024; we welcome the opportunity to provide further details regarding magazine funding.

I'm pleased to inform you that the tender for the new literary magazine went ahead as planned and was advertised on 4 March 2024 with the closing date on 15 April. We received several applications and are now working through round two of the process. A full English-language Publishing Subcommittee meeting will be dedicated to interviewing and decision-making on 24 July 2024, and we anticipate that we will be able to formally award a tender during the following week.

You asked what consultation was undertaken by the Books Council of Wales with the sector whilst designing the English-language literary magazine tender.

In anticipation of the new magazine tender round for 2023, the independent English-language Subcommittee commissioned an internal review by establishing a panel consisting of four Subcommittee members and two external experts: a digital magazine consultant and an editor who runs a small independent magazine. The panel was supported by the Books Council's Head of Publishing Development and the Publishing Development Officer (English-language).

Whilst we did not hold a formal consultation with franchise holders prior to the new tender round, we are in very regular contact with all grant recipients as they typically apply for non-ring-fenced funding and project funding throughout any given year – which necessitates frequent interaction between BCW and grant recipients themselves. Such recurrent interactions means that we have a detailed understanding of the challenges that magazines in Wales face. During COVID and the cost-of-living crisis we responded to the crisis publishers were facing and secured additional emergency support funding from the Welsh Government.

Alongside this, formal appraisal meetings take place annually which consolidate the insights gleaned through our regular in-year contacts; formal appraisal meetings also give grant recipients the opportunity to feedback and share their views and concerns. The reports and minutes of those meetings were shared with the Magazine Subcommittee and were central to their discussion.

As the decisions of the 2023 tender round left a then £85,000 of unallocated funds, the Subcommittee considered the resultant thematic gaps alongside the points made by the

campaign group regarding sustainable levels of funding. It concluded that one tender for a new literary magazine underpinned by a substantial amount of funding would address these issues. However, due to Books Council budget cuts of 10.5% for 2024/25 the budget for the new tender had to be reduced to £80,000 per annum and was advertised accordingly.

You asked what independent appeals process is in place for unsuccessful applicants. The Books Council's complaints procedure covers this process and states the following:

You can complain if you believe that:

- 'maladministration' has taken place (for example, if we have delayed, made mistakes in or failed to follow the procedures in our formal process);
- we have failed to give you access to information or have given you incorrect advice or information;
- we have not treated you courteously;
- we have not treated you equally and fairly.

If your complaint is about an application for funding, we can only look at your application again if:

- we discover (through dealing with a complaint) that we did not follow the published procedures for assessing your application;
- you can show that we have misunderstood a significant part of your application;
- you can show that we did not take notice of relevant information.

What you cannot complain about:

You may be disappointed if we turn down your application for funding, but you cannot use this complaints procedure to appeal against our decision on giving a grant if we have followed our decision-making process correctly.

The policy in full can be seen here – [complaints policy](#)

We received Stage 2 complaints from *Planet* and *New Welsh Review* following the decision made by the Panel. In accordance with our procedure both were investigated by the Chair of the Magazine Panel and the Head of the Publishing Development Department. Neither of the complaints were upheld and both complainants received detailed replies. Neither complainant decided to escalate their complaint to Stage 3.

You also asked us to elaborate on what 'examining and challenging the power of incumbency' means in practice and to outline to what extent this places those recipients with existing funding at a disadvantage.

The Books Council has a long history of enabling new entrants to benefit from the limited public sector grants it distributes. We believe that this line in our strategic plan makes this existing commitment explicit. Examining incumbency recognises that existing recipients have a distinct advantage in that they have detailed knowledge and experience of the process and of working with the staff administering the applications. Being explicit about this reassures new entrants that any process we run is open, fair and competitive which is vital to avoid inertia. It does not place incumbents at a disadvantage, but rather, encourages them to take stock and rethink their strategic approach to the next franchise period.

For the 2023 franchise round, the Subcommittee considered that grant awards needed to be based on applicants' vision and ability to deliver the proposal; previous track record should only be one criterion to be considered and would be valid in so far as it demonstrated the ability to deliver the future concept for a particular publication.

To outline what this means in practice, I would like to give some examples from previous franchise rounds:

1. *Wales Arts Review* and *The Welsh Agenda* won their first franchise tenders in 2012 and 2015 respectively which led to a reduction in grants to then-existing recipients, *Planet*, *New Welsh Review* and *Poetry Wales*. *nation.cymru* joined the franchise magazines for the first time in 2019.
2. In 2023, *Wales Arts Review* decided not to apply for funding, while all other existing recipients (*Planet*, *New Welsh Review*, *Poetry Wales*, *nation.cymru*, *The Welsh Agenda*) made applications in addition to four new applicants. One of the new applicants *The Paper/Y Papur* was successful and secured funding for the next franchise round alongside three existing recipients: *Poetry Wales*, *nation.cymru* and *The Welsh Agenda*. *Planet* and *New Welsh Review* were unsuccessful in this tender round.
3. On the Welsh-language side, *Taliesin* magazine lost its franchise in 2015 after several decades of funding as it did not meet the requirements of the then tender. A new opportunity was advertised and led to the creation of the magazine *O'r Pedwar Gwynt* the following year and it has been receiving funding since. Other new Welsh-language magazines such as *Cara*, *Lysh* and most recently *Hanes Byw* have joined the group of franchise magazines which include *Golwg* and *Barn* while others such as *Y Traethodydd* have not been successful.
4. On the book publishing side, newer Welsh-language publishers such as Atebol, Rily, Broga and Sebra have joined long-established recipients such as Y Lolfa, Barddas, Gwasg y Bwthyn, Gwasg Carreg Gwalch and Y Dref Wen.
5. In 2022, a new English-language book publisher Lucent Dreaming, the first press in Wales to be run by two editors of colour, was successful in securing programme funding. All other successful applicants were established publishers which have been in receipt of funding for several years and in some cases for decades.

These examples illustrate the fair, balanced and consistent approach our subcommittees have been taking over many years when awarding grants. We believe that our processes, which are based on open and fair competition, enable us to ensure a vibrant, relevant and popular offer for Wales, one that takes into account the changing nature of digital development, readerships, costs and sustainability. They have also enabled us to continue operating effectively in spite of over a decade of standstill funding and most recently a very challenging cut of 10.5% to our budget.

You asked for an outline of the Books Council of Wales's vision for the English-language magazine sector and a copy of the internal review.

Please refer to the tender documents of 2023 which can be found [here](#), the 2024 new magazine tender documents which can be found [here](#), and I attach a copy of the Magazine Subcommittee's report following the internal review of magazines. In that latter document, the external experts' report is referenced. We are unable to share that report as it contains commercially sensitive information; however, all the core information was distilled into the internal report which we are sharing herewith.

I hope this answers your questions, but please feel free to contact us at any time should you have any further questions.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Helgard Krause". The signature is written in a cursive style and is contained within a thin black rectangular border.

HELGARD KRAUSE
Chief Executive