



## REPORT OF THE MAGAZINES SUBCOMMITTEE – JULY 2022

### 1 MEMBERSHIP

The Magazines Subcommittee was chaired by the Vice Chair of the English language Grants Subcommittee who was joined by three other members of the English-Language Grants Subcommittee. Participating from the Books Council of Wales were the Head of Publishing Development and the Publishing Development Officer. Invited as external consultants from the small magazines industry were a digital magazines consultant and an editor of an independent magazine.

### 2 SUPPORTING DOCUMENTS

External consultants' report.

### 3 PURPOSE

The Magazines Subcommittee was appointed by the English-Language Grants Subcommittee to review the funding process for magazines before the next tender period in Summer 2023. Included in the Subcommittee's review of current funding models was examining the eligibility, criteria, and rationale for funding magazines; funding levels; working conditions at funded magazines; publishing formats; and readership accessibility. Also included in the Subcommittee's scope was to improve fair representation of diverse backgrounds and experiences at funded magazines, following the BCW's report on this area. The Magazines Subcommittee's remit did not include commenting on specific magazines, but to make recommendations on how the BCW could better support the industry to make it fairer and more diverse.

### 4 WORKING PATTERN

The Magazines Subcommittee convened in February at Wrexham Glyndwr University to identify issues preventing fair representation of Welsh voices in the content and infrastructure of magazines. Following the first meeting, the external consultants met to research the sustainability of the magazine industry and presented their findings at the second meeting in April at Glyndwr University. Using their research, the Subcommittee discussed solutions to the issues identified in February and finalised recommendations to be presented to the Grants Subcommittee in May.

### 5 EXTERNAL CONSULTANTS' REPORT

The external consultants' report made a number of crucial comments that fed productively into the Subcommittee's discussion and recommendations. In general terms, going forward we would suggest that the following should be noted:

#### 5.1 Key criteria for awarding grant funding

- Having a strong Welsh identity
- Serving a clear cultural or community need
- Supporting the development of the magazine publishing ecosystem and associated skills in Wales
- Meeting the standards for a 'quality' publication
- Not rewarding incumbency

## 5.2 Consultants' recommendations

Funding should continue for print magazines, but that previously print-only publications should be expected to have a digital strategy.

A digital strategy would:

- Increase the visibility and accessibility of the magazine globally.
- Increase the economic sustainability by providing a website that can host ads and act as an e-commerce site.

The consultants noted that digital-only publications can be regarded as magazines if they meet the criteria and aims of the BCW's 5 Year Strategic Plan. The consultants noted that a YouTube channel could not qualify as a magazine. However, they recommended periodicals utilising digital mediums to increase visibility and generate multiple streams of income should be supported.

## 5.3 Incumbency

In their report, the consultants stated: 'we think consideration of publication quality, organisational efficiency and uniqueness of proposition are crucial to any decisions made about grant allocation'.

## 5.4 Revenue mix

The consultants noted a revenue strategy should be subjective to a magazine's profile but suggested that a mixed revenue is vital to sustainability. Revenue streams included:

- Advertising Sponsorship
  - Print
  - Digital – web, affiliate, email, podcasts
  - Events – virtual and in-person
- Reader revenues
  - Single copy sales
  - Subscriptions
  - Memberships
  - Article sales
  - Event attendance
- Ecommerce
  - Merchandise
  - Affiliate sales

## 5.5 Enhancement of Skills

Alongside grant funding, the consultants recommended training should be made available to publishers and start-up publishers. Alongside specific training requests from publishers, basic training should include:

- How to launch a magazine
- How to develop a multi-channel publishing strategy
- How to develop a mixed revenue strategy
- How to grow your audience
- How to introduce new formats – podcasts, newsletters, virtual events

In the context of the consultants' report, we draw the BCW's attention to the brief impressions that we noted regarding our current stable of funded periodicals.

## 6 RECOMMENDATIONS

As a Subcommittee, we propose the following recommendations should be integrated to the new franchise period and should be reflected in the guidelines, applications process and, ultimately, decisions on which periodicals should be funded.

### 6.1 Incumbency

The BCW's 5 Year Strategic Plan clearly states that in supporting projects it will 'examine and challenge the power of incumbency'. For the next franchise period, award must be based on an applicant's vision and their ability to deliver their proposal. Previous track record should be only one criterion to be considered and is only valid in so far as it demonstrates the ability to deliver the future concept for a particular publication.

### 6.2 Diversity

A major recommendation moving forward is in respect of all aspects of inclusion, production and distribution. Important elements are:

- As a foundation for building structural equality, periodical publications must implement a formal policy for commissioning underrepresented writers, diversifying their Board membership, and broadening the range of individuals contributing to the production of a magazine.
- Publishers should implement schemes which enhance the involvement of underrepresented groups (including those from disadvantaged and working-class backgrounds) through 'temporary' board membership, and opportunities in design and contributor writing.
- The BCW should consider offering a training day for all existing and potential applications on unconscious bias; all applicants would be required to participate in BCW ongoing training programme

### 6.3 Payment

Our consultants explored the pattern of remuneration in small magazine sectors. Their research revealed significant variations and all-too-frequently staff members working well beyond their contractual paid hours. The implementation of a blanket policy of remuneration may, for many journals, be prohibitive; however, this must be balanced against the fact that for many potential and talented contributors it would be impossible for them to contribute without fair financial compensation. (This is particularly important in respect of the issues raised in Section B above).

The Subcommittee recommends that funded magazines should pay their contributors; however, we felt unable to make recommendations on actual rates.

### 6.4 Revenue mix

The relevant quotation from the consultants' report makes clear the healthy mix of income sources that a magazine needs to be financially sustainable. In addition, in a much-changed environment, any application should specifically justify all elements of expenditure, e.g. is stand-alone office space necessary; each and every staff post should be essential to the magazine's operation.

We recommend that applicants for the new franchise must demonstrate how they will improve the ratio of dependency on a BCW grant to other sources of income.

### 6.5 Accessibility of Magazines

We identified several aspects in regard of this concern, namely:

- Accessibility and reach were severely limited, particularly in more rural and less densely populated areas of Wales. These areas were also left out in the

commissioning of contributions and selection of contributors in published articles and stories (class inequality was a major issue in this context).

- Ability to see and purchase copies. The imaginative use of print/online formats to circulate material and potentially attract new audiences, particularly younger age groups, is potentially important. This area of concern also impacts the inclusion of diverse and underrepresented voices. We recommend that all applicants would need to demonstrate an action plan to address issues of accessibility and reach.

## 6.6 Format

In the light of our discussions and the evidence presented to us, we recommend that: submitted business plans should utilise a range of formats; and that publishers utilise targeted social media interventions between issues to enhance their overall impact.

## 6.7 Subject Coverage

The Subcommittee put forward several interest areas for which there may be an appetite for a Wales magazine, namely:

- Welsh history – a useful comparison was made to the successful *The Scots Magazine*
- Environmental and Climate Change – interestingly the BCW has awarded a grant for a pilot issue of such as journal, *Modron*.
- Children’s publications – potentially not at the mass contribution end of the market but that occupied by magazines such as *The Weekly Junior*, *Anorak Magazine* and *Aquila*.

## 6.8 Support Mechanism

In addition to the training programmes suggested in the ‘enhancement of skills’ section from our consultants, BCW and Literature Wales need to explore how an up-to-date database of writers and designers can be created to encompass underrepresented group experiences and backgrounds.

## 6.9 Relationship between magazines and book publishers

Any such link (whether ownership, presumed personal etc.) must be declared at the time of application and updated in each annual report submitted by the successful journals.

## 7 IMPACT

We would highlight two particular elements, namely:

- How can the publisher and the BCW efficiently measure the impact of a funded journal?

Traditionally, success would be measured through website ‘hits’ and circulation figures, which often, perhaps, have been exaggerated following the assumption that a single copy is read by multiple readers. Future applicants might, revealingly, be asked to suggest how their proposal should be judged.

- All applicants should demonstrate how their process of creation will help ‘foster and develop a publishing ecosystem and associated skills industry in Wales’.

Officers may want to consider whether in the light of our recommendations they wish to amend the proforma for the annual narrative report from our supported magazines.