

Correspondence sent to the Communities, Equality and Local Government Committee re: Proposed Cuts to the Welsh Book Council (Received by e-mail)

Dear Committee Member,

Please find attached a letter to Deputy Minister for Culture, Sport and Tourism Ken Skates AM, registering our dismay and grave disappointment at the recently announced cuts to the Welsh Books Council. The letter has been signed by over 200 Welsh writers, academics and significant figures in the literary field in Wales, as well as writers and academics outside of Wales who wished to register their support and appreciation for books from Wales.

We understand that you will be meeting to consider the budget on 21 January. We therefore felt that it was absolutely essential that you had sight of our letter in protest at the cuts and had time to consider its contents.

Although this particular letter addresses, specifically, English-language impact, we would like to register our awareness of the deleterious impact on Welsh-language publishing, too, and our solidarity with those talented and committed publishers and authors working in the medium of Welsh. We do not underestimate the serious impact these cuts will have for publishers and practitioners working across the two languages. Wales is a small nation, but it is incredibly vibrant, and the publishers of Wales platform an impressive array of distinctive voices; we believe that must be cherished.

Yours sincerely,

Kathryn Gray

Ken Skates AM
Deputy Minister for Culture, Sport and Tourism
Welsh Assembly Government

January 16, 2015

Dear Deputy Minister for Culture, Sport and Tourism

We are writing to express our dismay and grave disappointment at announced cuts to the Welsh Books Council budget, which will significantly impact on the publishing output of Welsh publishers. Under the adjustment, the Welsh Books Council will suffer a reduction of 10.6% in funding, equating to a financial shortfall of £374,000. This shortfall will be carried by publishing houses in receipt of publishing grants. For English-language publishers, this means a cut of £76,500.¹ We note that this latest cut follows a reduction in the budget of the Welsh Books Council which has occurred annually since 2011.

The proposed cuts will have a significant and deleterious impact on a vibrant, bold, and highly acclaimed English-language publishing industry, which, although undeniably small, has proved its merits over the past decade – and which has a wide reach beyond Wales. The achievement in the wider context should not be underestimated. Publishers in Wales and their authors work within a complex and precarious economy. Competing with major commercial presses based in London, and with slight remuneration for both staff and authors for their dynamism and excellence, Welsh publishers, and their authors and titles, have nonetheless achieved great things, against great odds. Books from Welsh publishers are not only remarkable for their content, but also for their stylish and professional presentation, which underscores credibility in the contemporary market. Books from Welsh publishers have also led to a vital reassessment of our heritage – we are thinking here most particularly of the achievements of Honno, which has introduced readers to an array of exceptional female voices through its *Classics* series, and the significance of the Library of Wales series, published by Parthian.

UK and international prize culture should not mean everything in artistic terms, of course, but Welsh and Wales-based authors who publish with Welsh publishers and enjoy such success are ambassadors for our nation. And in prize culture, Welsh publishers certainly punch above their weight. In recent years, Welsh publishers and their authors have been nominated for the Commonwealth Book Prize, The Dylan Thomas Prize, The Betty Trask, the Orange Futures Award, the Journey Prize, the Jerwood Prize, The Stonewall Award, with frequent nominations for the T. S. Eliot and Forward Prizes. Welsh authors publishing through Welsh presses have recently been shortlisted for the prestigious BBC National Short Story Award and the Sunday Times EFG Award. Notably, in 2011,

¹ We further note that the cut to the Welsh-language publishing grant, also set at 10.6%, will amount to £187,000.

Patrick McGuinness was longlisted for the Man Booker Prize for his novel *The Last Hundred Days*, while in 2014, debutant Jonathan Edwards won the coveted Costa Poetry Award for *My Family and Other Superheroes*. These two titles, both from Seren, elegantly demonstrate the commendable breadth of concerns of the English-language literary publishing output – a novel set against the fall of the Ceausescu regime and a poetry collection with its deeply felt roots in the heart of the Valleys.

Welsh publishers understand the demands of the modern age and a changing relationship to books, and they have developed their commitment to digital publishing accordingly: over 1,500 ebooks are now available through gwales.com. An impressive number by anyone's measure. Beyond literary titles, Welsh publishers also platform popular biographies, sports books, and, crucially, children's books – enabling reach across a spectrum of interests and enthusiasms.

The impact of cuts will mean that publishers must now publish fewer books. This is the reality of what the cuts mean to the industry. This presents Welsh publishers with agonizing pressure – on top of pressure which already exists – and agonizing choices. Fewer titles annually mean fewer chances for the possibilities of commercial breakthrough, critical acclaim, and prize culture, all of which consolidates brand. Fewer titles mean that talented authors may be denied breakthrough and the benefits of working with a small but supportive team of staff with high editorial and production standards, since publishers have to negotiate these cuts alongside forthcoming titles from those established authors already on their lists. There is a fear that many vital voices of the future may turn to commercial houses and that, over time, there may be a gradual erasure of Welsh subject matter, as up-and-coming authors 'neutralize' their output to better fit the template of metropolitan publishers. This latter point, particularly if cuts continue at this rate, is particularly concerning, because they will undoubtedly lead to a loss of cultural distinction and an erosion of Wales's clear artistic place within the wider UK firmament. Cuts will also mean marketing for authors and author advances – already at critical level – will likely be affected. As writers, readers, and those committed to the advancement of literature, we would also like to emphatically register our solidarity with those working in the Welsh publishing industry and our very real fear that jobs are imperiled by these cuts.

Welsh publishing houses offer a vital space for Welsh authors to interrogate the matter of nation and heritage, to explore the increasingly complex notion of identity in the twenty-first century, and to understand themselves both home and away. For readers, Welsh publishing houses offer the opportunity to enjoy high-quality titles which may often reflect their own domestic concerns, even as such titles frequently promote Wales within an internationalist scheme. We believe the health of a nation can be measured by its commitment to its writers and to those who seek to platform artistic talent with passion and skill. Wales has a long and deserved reputation for achievement in its literary endeavour. Dylan Day would seem to make little sense in a context which sees the contemporary output of great writing from Wales so undermined and apparently

undervalued by its custodians. Great writing from Wales speaks of cultural pride and ambition, which are the twin markers of any confident nation. We therefore strongly urge you to reconsider these cuts and the impact they will have – not simply over the immediate years ahead, but as a long-term political legacy. We understand that we live in a time of austerity, but believe that in such challenging times this most vulnerable but crucial platform for artistic enterprise should be especially protected. The publishing industry of Wales is now facing a cut that is approximately double that of other prominent bodies which provide services to the culture of Wales. This is unjust and amounts to self-sabotage.

Your Sincerely,

Kathryn Gray, poet and editor
Gillian Clarke, National Poet of Wales
Menna Elfyn, poet and President Wales PEN Cymru
Gwyneth Lewis, poet and writer
Professor Patrick McGuinness, poet, novelist, memoirist, and translator
Rachel Trezise, novelist
Malcolm Pryce, novelist
Carolyn Jess-Cooke, poet and novelist
Jonathan Edwards, poet
Dr Zoë Brigley, poet and academic
Dr Kate North, poet, novelist, and academic
Dr Francesca Rhydderch, novelist and academic
Professor Philip Gross, poet, novelist, playwright, and academic
Helen Lederer, writer, comedienne, and actress
Carly Holmes, poet and novelist
Dr Martyn Colebrook, independent scholar
Peter Finch, poet, novelist, psychogeographer, and editor
Sian Melangell Dafydd, novelist, poet and editor
Bethany W Pope, poet and novelist
Dr Carrie Etter, poet and fiction writer
Dai George, poet and novelist
Samantha Wynne-Rhydderch, poet
Robert Harper, poet and editor
Dr Jasmine Donahaye, writer
Annie Freud, poet
Clare Pollard, poet and playwright
Emily Hinshelwood, poet
Angharad Blythe, editor
Pascale Petit, poet
Sarah Corbett, poet
Paul Henry, poet
Katherine Stansfield, poet and novelist
David Towsey, novelist
Jo Mazelis, novelist and short-story writer
P. C. Evans, poet and literary translator
Andrew Neilson

Tamar Yoseloff, poet
Alan Kellermann, poet
Simon Harris, playwright
Joe Dunthorne, novelist and poet
Katy Evans-Bush, poet and essayist
Professor Matthew Francis, poet, novelist, short-story writer, and academic
Susan Richardson, poet, nature writer, playwright, and editor
Claire Hougue, editor and writer
Emily Trahair, editor
Andy Ching, poet
Jayne Bowden, research student
Dr Mary Chadwick, academic
Julia Bird, poet
clare e. potter, poet and non-fiction writer
Professor Daniel Williams, academic
Kerry-Lee Powell, poet, novelist and editor
George Murray, poet, Poet Laureate of St John's, Newfoundland
Jean Mead, novelist
Michael Oliver-Semenov, poet and author of creative non-fiction
Dr Nerys Williams, poet and academic
Cerys Jones, editor
Professor Daniel Westover, academic
Andrew Oldham, poet
Dr Zoë Skoulding, poet, translator, and academic
Kaite O'Reilly, playwright
James Lloyd, writer
Dr Bethan Jenkins, academic
Rhys Milsom, writer and poet
Professor Richard Gwyn, poet, novelist, author of creative non-fiction, and academic
Gwen Davies, editor and translator
Alix Nathan, novelist
Dr Alyce von Rothkirch, academic
Dan Tyte, novelist
Mike Parker, travel writer and broadcaster
Kristian Evans, poet
Rhian Elizabeth, novelist
Ben Gwalchmai, writer and editor
John Harrison, travel, history and fiction writer
Anna Lewis, poet and fiction writer
Sharon Morgan, actress and writer
Nicholas Murray, poet, novelist, literary biographer, editor, and publisher
Matthew David Scott, novelist
Nia Davies, poet and editor
Chris Paul, writer
Josh Robinson
Rebecca Parfitt, writer, poet, artist and editor
Professor Christopher Meredith, poet, novelist, and academic
Ifor Thomas, poet

Mike Jenkins, poet, novelist, and editor
Anna Kiernan, editor, academic and poet
Dr Sarah Morse, Senior Executive Officer, The Learned Society of Wales, and
Treasurer, AWWE
Fiona Owen, poet and prose writer
The Hours Bookshop, Brecon
Tom Bullough, novelist
Niall Griffiths, novelist
Caroline Stockford, translator and Chair of the Translation, Linguistic Rights and
Writers in Prison Committee, Wales PEN Cymru
Romy Wood, novelist
Jane Lloyd Francis, producer and performer
Dr Jeni Williams, poet, critic, and academic
John Barnie, poet, essayist, editor
Kathryn Simmonds, poet and novelist
Jessica Mordsley, editor
Rob Morgan
Calum Gardner, PhD student
Rosalind Hudis, poet
Professor Deryn Rees-Jones, poet, literary critic, and academic
Professor Stevie Davies, novelist and academic
Professor Jeremy Hooker, poet, critic, academic
Dr Kirsti Bohata, academic
Keely Laufer, poet
Mab Jones, poet
Lucy Llewellyn, editor
Elzbieta Wojcik-Leese, translator
Bronwen Williams, finance/arts administrator and PhD student
Damian Gorman, poet and playwright
Professor Angela V. John, biographer and historian
Sioned Puw Rowlands, Director, Wales Literature Exchange
Angela Topping, poet
Hazel Manuel, writer
Jackie Biggs, Chair, PENfro Book Festival
Tristan Hughes, novelist
Gary Owen, playwright
Huw Lawrence, short-story writer
Professor Richard Marggraf Turley, poet, novelist, and academic
Neil Evans, historian
Dr Shelagh Weeks, novelist and academic
Professor Ian Gregson, poet, novelist, literary critic, and academic
Alexandra Büchler, Director, Literature Across Frontiers
Sally Baker, Director, Wales PEN Cymru
Megan Farr, Freelance Book PR and Project Manager
Rhian Ivory, novelist
Kieron Smith
Dr Claire Flay-Petty, academic
John Boaler, research student
Penny Thomas, editor

Eluned Gramich, author and translator
Malachy Doyle, children's author
Professor Katie Gramich, academic and editor
Malachy Doyle, children's author
Professor David Lloyd, poet, fiction writer, critic, and Director of the Creative Writing Program, Le Moyne College, Syracuse
Dr Melinda Gray
Dr Clare Morgan, academic and Director, MSt in Creative Writing, Oxford University
Dr Liz Jones, Humanities Co-ordinator, Lifelong Learning, Aberystwyth University
Kat Ellis, author of YA fiction
Dr Alice Entwistle, academic
Alexandra Jones, Fellowship Officer, The Learned Society of Wales, and PhD candidate
Clare Davies, PhD student
Dr Linda Ruhemann, academic
John K Bollard, scholar and translator
Sarah Todd Taylor, children's author
Professor Margaret Lloyd, Springfield College, Massachusetts
Angela Graham, broadcaster and writer
Jon Gower, writer, broadcaster, and editor
Meirion Jordan, poet
Dr Michelle Deininger, academic
Jamie Harris, PhD researcher
Frances Presley, poet
Dr Stephen James, academic
Dr Matthew Jarvis, Anthony Dyson Fellow in Poetry, University of Wales, Trinity St David
Richard Lewis Davies, novelist, playwright, publisher, and editor
Matthew Plumb, poet
Marta Klonowska, PhD Student
Kathy Miles, poet
Dawn Kurtagich, author of YA fiction
Jenny Sullivan, children's author
Sharon Marie Jones, children's author
Dic Edwards, playwright, poet, and editor
Malcolm Ballin, independent researcher
Dr Sarah B. Campbell, CAs Writing Program, Boston University
Eloise Williams, YA and children's author
Wendy Lloyd Jones, editor of Y Wawr
Professor Jane Aaron, academic and editor
Alan Cliff, children's author
Dr Barbara Prys-Williams, academic
Dr Llion Wigley, Commissioning Editor, University of Wales Press
Professor Bill Jones, Co-director, Cardiff Centre for Welsh American Studies, Cardiff University
Dr John Harris, bibliographer, biographer and editor
Dr Steve Thompson, academic

Emily Underwood-Lee
Robert Walton, poet and tutor in creative writing
Professor Johan Schimanski, Department of Literature, Area Studies and
European Languages, University of Oslo
Professor John S. Ellis, Department of History, University of Michigan
Merryn Williams, poet
Molly Ker Hawn, literary agent
Angharad Penrhyn Jones, writer and editor
Tyler Keevil, novelist
Laura Sheldon, children's author
Catherine Merriman, short-story writer, novelist, and editor
Lindsay Ashford, novelist
Huw Davies, children's author
Nicholas K. Alderton, research student
Dr Karolina Rosiak, academic, Centre of Celtic Studies at Adam Mickiewicz
University, Poznań, Poland
Dr Aidan Byrne, academic
Lucy Gough, playwright and writer for television, film and radio
Ruth Bidgood, poet
Jessica Lewis, PhD student
Dr Mary-Ann Constantine, academic and author
Dr Charles Mundye, academic
Maria Grace, YA author
Chantel Mathias, arts education
Catherine Beard, PhD Student
Peter Stevenson, illustrator, storyteller, and writer
Debra John, storyteller
Ellen Bell, artist and writer
Kathryn Eastman
Dr Charlie Louth, academic
Dr Lisa Sheppard, research associate
Helen Reeves-Howard, storyteller
Hannah F. Lawson, writer
Helen Aileen Davies, novelist and short story writer
Dominic Williams, poet
Julie Ann Pritchard, performance poet, creator of Poetry at the Capel Bargoed,
and Chair of Rhymney Family Lit and Art Fest
Colin Thomas, author
Kate Hamer, author
Rebecca F. John, Author
Professor Helen Fulton, FSA FLSW
Gareth Williams
Steven Lovatt (Teaching Fellow, University of Bath, and Teacher and Language
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