

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

We the undersigned are writing on behalf of all Welsh publishers in receipt of funding from the Welsh Government through the Welsh Books Council's (WBC) grant schemes for English language books.

We have been informed by the WBC that funding to the Council will be cut by an unprecedented 10.6 per cent in the coming financial year. We met with representatives of the WBC's English Language Grants Panel earlier this week to discuss the likely impacts of this cut on our businesses and staff. All of us are, of course, aware of the wider context of this cut to Welsh publishing industry funding and understanding of the need for careful consideration of all public spending at such a time. However, we feel strongly that a cut of this depth will have a detrimental impact on the breadth and reach of our work. In real terms, and put together with cuts in previous years, this amounts to a total cut of 21 per cent in the last three years alone. We are also aware that other institutions working with literature and the promotion of Welsh culture – sponsored organisations as opposed to grant-funded organisations – are in receipt of much gentler cuts. Without the output of the publishers in Wales a lot of the work of the likes of Literature Wales and Arts Council of Wales would be seriously undermined – where will those writers they mentor and support find publishers for their work without the Welsh publishing industry? Only outside of Wales. Their contribution to their country's culture and traditions will be recognised only courtesy of an English or global concern.

Welsh Government support has enabled an extremely strong and respected English language publishing culture in Wales to sit alongside the highly valued Welsh language tradition. Without that support it would be increasingly impossible for writers in Wales to be published in Wales to any level of commercial competition with the publishing behemoths in England (corporations which grow larger, more powerful and more international with every year). Funding from the WBC helps to level the playing field and to enable successes such as Seren's publication of Booker longlisted *The Last Hundred Days* by Patrick McGuinness and Costa Poetry Prize winning *My Family and Other Superheroes* by Jonathan Edwards, Honno's Bread and Roses Award winning *Here We Stand* and BBC Radio 4 dramatised *The Mysterious Death of Miss Austen* by Lindsay Ashford, the University of Wales Press' publications by Lord Kenneth O Morgan: *From Revolution to Devolution* and *My Histories* and Parthian's Sunday Times EFG short story prize shortlisted author Rebecca John. Wales may be a small country, but its literary voice is loud and strong and deserving of promotion. Without support from the WBC many of the authors mentored, edited and published in Wales would have lost hope of being published, given the difficulty in being heard by corporate houses in London. Independent Welsh publishers give them the opportunity to choose a house that is local to them and understands their desire to be a Welsh voice speaking of Welsh experience to a world outside its borders. They enable the first foot on the ladder of authors who go on to great things. This is as true of those who write in English as it is of those whose first language is Welsh. Independent Welsh publishers of English language titles are also supportive of the translation of Welsh writing into English, ensuring that the culture and tradition of the Welsh speaking community has international reach in English speaking territories from Australia to India, Canada and the USA, digitally and in print.

The document outlining the Welsh Government's draft budget to its constituents declares that it is committed to 'Growth and Jobs'[1][1] as one of its four priority areas in the 2016-7 budget. At least two of the publishers at this week's meeting with the WBC commented that they would not be able to avoid considering staff cuts in the light of a 10.6 per cent cut to their funding. It is estimated that around 1000 people in Wales are working in publishing and its related trades – based across the whole of the country, north to south – from in-house staff to freelance designers and illustrators, printers and distributors. Cuts to staff and wages will not contribute to a 'prosperous' and 'resilient'[2][2] future for these Welsh men and women or for the industry that employs them. 'A Wales of vibrant culture and thriving Welsh language' is given equal weighting among the seven Wellbeing Goals that the draft budget is to fulfil[3][3], yet the settlement suggested for the Welsh Books Council will ensure that fewer books are published, jobs and paid hours are lost and both Welsh and English language writing from Wales is either lost to publishing houses outside Wales or not published at all in 2016-7 and beyond.

Please take time to reconsider the funding to the Welsh Books Council as proposed in Deputy Minister Ken Skates' budget for the Department of Culture, Tourism and Sport in the light of this letter. Your decision will have an impact that may change the face of publishing in Wales for years to come.

Thanking you for your careful consideration

Yours faithfully

Caroline Oakley, Editor/Publisher, Honno Press

Helgard Krause, Director, University of Wales Press

Penny Thomas, Publisher, Firefly Press

Matthew Howard, Publishing Director, Graffeg Ltd

Mick Felton, Seren Books

Richard Houdmont, Chair, Poetry Wales Press Ltd

Lefi Gruffudd, Director, Y Lolfa

Jan Fortune, Director, Cinnamon Press

Myrddin ap Dafydd, Gwasg Carreg Gwalch

Jonathan Lewis, Managing Director, Gwasg Gomer/Gomer Press

[1][1] *Welsh Government Draft Budget 2016–2017: Fairer, Better Wales – Investing for the Future*, [available at <http://gov.wales/docs/caecd/publications/151208-budget-narrative-eng.pdf>] p. 20

[2][2] *Welsh Government Draft Budget 2016–2017: Fairer, Better Wales – Investing for the Future*, [available at <http://gov.wales/docs/caecd/publications/151208-budget-narrative-eng.pdf>] p. 22

[3][3] *Welsh Government Draft Budget 2016–2017: Fairer, Better Wales – Investing for the Future*, [available at <http://gov.wales/docs/caecd/publications/151208-budget-narrative-eng.pdf>] p. 5