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7 October 2024

To:

Minister for Culture, Skills and Social Partnership; Jack.Sargeant@senedd.wales  
Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Welsh Language; Mark.Drakeford@senedd.wales  
Cabinet Secretary for Education; Lynne.Neagle@senedd.wales  
Minister for Further and Higher Education; Vikki.Howells@senedd.wales  
Cabinet Secretary for Economy, Energy and Planning; Rebecca.Evans@senedd.wales  
Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Climate Change and Rural Affairs; huw.Irranca-Davies@senedd.wales  
Minister for Mental Health and Wellbeing; Sarah.Murphy@Senedd.Wales  
Minister for Children and Social Care; Dawn.Bowden@senedd.wales  
Cabinet Secretary for Transport and North Wales; Ken.Skates@senedd.wales

And to the member representing South Wales East and Caerphilly – Gwasg Rily areas -

Natasha.Asgar@senedd.wales  
Delyth.Jewell@senedd.wales  
Laura.Jones@senedd.wales  
Peredur.OwenGriffiths@senedd.wales  
Hefin.David@senedd.wales

As well as a copy to the Culture, Communications, Welsh Language, Sport and Internal Relations Committee: [SeneddCulture@senedd.wales](mailto:SeneddCulture@senedd.wales)

I am writing to you as a small business owner of Gwasg Rily to bring your attention to the serious situation in the Welsh language publishing industry and to ask for your support in addressing this matter.

The Welsh publishing sector is led brilliantly by the Books Council of Wales but sadly, in 2024/25, they saw a cut in their annual budget by 10.5%. This was a particularly devastating blow to us as all of the other major Welsh language organisation saw no cuts to their annual budget and, indeed in many cases, they saw their funding increase.

Since 2009/10, the Books Council of Wales's annual budget has almost halved in real terms (it now represents just 52.1% of what it was then). These cuts have been against a hard economic backdrop where raw materials and supply chain products have constantly increased and then combined with a cost-of-living crisis choking demand to create a 'perfect storm' of crisis in the sector.

The long period of austerity has meant schools struggle to afford books and libraries have closed – both of which were once significant markets for publishers. Against this difficult background, Government support for the publishing sector in Wales, and particularly for the Welsh language publishing sector, is needed more than it has ever been before.

Currently, the Books Council of Wales has an annual budget of £1.5 million per annum. Some of this is spent on their team and running costs but much of this amount is passed on to publishers as grants. Therefore, I am respectfully requesting that this budget is NOT cut any further. In addition, I am asking for you to consider investing a further £1.4 million per annum to restore the real value of their grant back to the 2009/10 levels. The reasons for this request are outlined in the remainder of this letter.

### **Well-being and mental health**

The core purpose of the grants administered by the Books Council to the publishing industry is to create books that encourage '*Reading for Pleasure*'. Reading is a superpower and a foundational block for our society. If you can read, then you function more productively and contribute to our nation as well as being empowered to be more able to 'help yourself' in times of need.

Senedd research shows that mental health is a huge issue in Wales -

<https://research.senedd.wales/research-articles/a-mentally-well-wales/>

Here are just a few sources of research which show that reading for pleasure can help to boost our mental health – [The University of Cambridge](#) | [The National Literacy Trust](#) | [The Library and Information Association CILIP](#)

As such, books and, by extension, the publishing sector in Wales is vital to supporting the health and well-being of our nation.

### **Economy and Jobs**

My company employs nine people all across Wales from Anglesey, Gwynedd, Carmarthen, Ceredigion, Caerphilly and Cardiff. Most of our team are part-time female professionals and they are able to work flexible hours to fit around the demands of their family. In many rural and north Wales areas, it is extremely difficult to find professional jobs with good salaries that offer the opportunity to provide a creative outlet, offer a good income, and enable them to support their families.

As well as our employed jobs, we work with over fifty freelancers varying from artists, authors, illustrators, graphic designers, translators, creative editors, copy editors to computer programmers, animators and many others who rely on our commissions. The benefits of online and remote working have enabled us to provide work to freelancers in more rural areas; but all of this is dependent on the support we receive from Welsh Government through the Books Council. Without this support – especially given the economic challenges I've noted above – these jobs and benefits would not exist.

Our books are sold in many small, independent, bookshops all over Wales and these small businesses are often the core of communities – bringing people together and supporting the local economy.

As this shows, the reach of the small amount of funding we have is extensive. It stimulates the creative industry, fuels an innovative industry that Wales should be proud of and provides quality professional jobs across Wales.

### **Literacy – Schools and Libraries**

Reading and books are core essentials when addressing our literacy problem in Wales. PISA data and post-covid literacy level surveys combine to highlight the frightening gap in the literacy skills of our

young people. The years of austerity have created a desperate situation where libraries are closing and reducing in number. Schools are having to use their budgets on retaining staff and paying energy bills rather than on buying books. Our children and young people deserve more.

Gwasg Rily publishes books for children, [www.rily.co.uk](http://www.rily.co.uk) and publishes a free, digital magazine for young women, [www.lysh.cymru](http://www.lysh.cymru). We have even developed reading books that children have demonstrated they love; but schools can't afford to buy them. We have been commissioned to produce books that schools have actually asked for; and they then never bought them because their budgets were cut. So, we now have an excess of books in our warehouse, just sitting there doing no one any good.

Books should not be a luxury product, but an essential resource in the fight to improve the literacy standards of our next generation. Whether rich or poor, it is imperative that all children across Wales should have access to books and reading; and the publishing sector in Wales is vital to supporting the schools, libraries and the drive to improve literacy standards in our nation.

## Welsh language

The Welsh Government has committed towards achieving one million Welsh speakers by 2050, but unfortunately, there is no commitment to the Welsh language publishing industry in the Cymraeg 2050 strategy. We have seen government's ongoing support to The Urdd, The Eisteddfod, The National Library of Wales and Cylch Mudiad Meithrin and this is to be commended. However, the Welsh language publishing industry has not seen any such commitment, indeed the cut in the Books Council's funding of 10.5% for 2024/25 means that Welsh publishers get less grant support than ever before and that impacts negatively on people, jobs, productivity, well-being, and so much more.

If we are to prevent the continued decline of the Welsh language and reach the strategy's target, it is essential that the publishing industry is supported. After all, it will not be possible to create favourable conditions for the language if the Publishing Industry withers. To provide the stated increase in Welsh educational resources and the infrastructure for the language to grow, Welsh Publishers are a key partner; and yet we are not mentioned in the strategy.

The publishing sector in Wales supports our culture, and our right to communicate in our own language of Welsh. We want that to continue and for our Welsh heritage to thrive.

We, therefore, respectfully request the following:-

**No more cuts.** That the Books Council of Wales's funding is 'ring fenced' in 2025/26 and in future years, in a similar way to those Welsh organisations that are in the 'cultural' portfolio.

Although publishing sits in the 'Creative Industries' portfolio, we provide vital Welsh language resources for both children and adults. We strongly believe that our provision should be treated uniquely as a matter of importance not only to safeguard our culture and heritage, but also for all of the economic reasons detailed above. Please do not impose any further cuts on our small grants. We simply will not be able to continue to operate.

Reading for pleasure is a campaign that the UK publishing industry is urging the UK government to embrace and to offer more financial support. Publishers at the Bookseller's recent Children's Conference called on the Prime Minister to "*make a cross-government commitment to prioritise the*

*role of reading for pleasure for children. This would be an investment in the well-being, social mobility and life chances of our children and the prosperity and success of the UK". (Please see attached their Open letter to the Prime Minister).*

However, in Wales, we have already identified the importance of 'reading for pleasure' by making this the core driver of the charity organisation, The Books Council of Wales. Sadly, since 2009/10, the real value of their funding, including the grant support they pass on to the Welsh publishing industry has almost halved in real terms. This has meant that so much of the excellent work they were able to do to promote the language and invest in skills has fallen by the wayside – to the detriment of both the language and the industry.

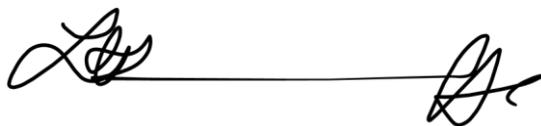
We therefore implore you to **invest now in this foundational industry and in our language by reinstating the real value of their funding** in a similar manner to the way that has been done for nurses and doctors in the NHS. Their real value of their grant in 2009/10 is now calculated to be £2.9 million and funding at this level would help us turn back the tide of decline and allow the language to grow.

Their current budget is £1.5 million and the £1.4 million required to restore the real value of the grant provides excellent value for money. Such funds would support many jobs directly as well as innumerable freelance workers. That funding would also create important products and would support well-being and mental health, the economy, rural communities, literacy, education, the Welsh language and the government's commitment to achieving the one million Welsh speakers by 2050. Please ask yourself what other industry could provide as much benefit for such a relatively small investment?

Our priority is to **prevent any further cuts**, but fundamentally, our industry is heading towards a tipping point, and **restorative investment** would empower our industry and would support many of the goals of the Government.

Please invest now to preserve and kickstart our industry and give hope to the many people who work for us and desperately need to see change put into action.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Lynda Tunnicliffe', written over a horizontal line.

Lynda Tunnicliffe  
**Director of Gwasg Rily**