

## **Literature Wales – Submission to the Culture, Welsh Language and Communications Committee September 2017**

### **1. Introduction**

An independent review of the Welsh Government (WG)'s support for publishing and literature should have been a timely opportunity to evaluate the vitality of this multifaceted and culturally significant sector. Since its creation in 2011, Literature Wales (LW) has forged an agenda of democratising literature and has long called for a better connected sector. It therefore awaited the findings of this review with anticipation. It is unfortunate that this opportunity has been missed owing to the significantly flawed nature of Professor Medwin Hughes' report.

LW has submitted a full response to the Cabinet Secretary, which has also been shared with the Culture, Welsh Language and Communications Committee (CWLCC). The Cabinet Secretary has asked Professor Hughes and the panel to respond in detail to it – as well as to a submission from the Arts Council Wales (ACW), which draws similar conclusions. LW expects clarification on a considerable number of issues, and corrections to many factual inaccuracies.

LW's concerns over the review relate to the following areas:

- i. The robustness of the evidence base
- ii. The lack of connection between the evidence and the recommendations
- iii. The partisan and inaccurate representation of LW
- iv. The panel's under-researched and under-informed view of the literature landscape
- v. Panel members' conflicts of interest
- vi. The fact that the report's Terms of Reference were not addressed

In the light of the public debate since the publication of the review, it is wholly appropriate that the CWLCC hold an inquiry into the process that led to this flawed and partial report and look at ways in which Welsh Government support for the literature and publishing sectors can safeguard the expertise and experience that currently exist and also enhance the sector's connectivity.

In this present submission, LW clarifies its position and offers analysis of the potential effects should the Cabinet Secretary accept the report's recommendations.

### **2. LW's Remit, Mission and Strategic Areas**

#### **2.1 Remit and Mission**

LW is the national company for developing literature in Wales and is a member of ACW's Arts Portfolio Wales. As such, LW's remit is to develop literature as an artform by supporting writers and encouraging more people to engage creatively with the written and spoken word on multiple platforms.

As stated in our Business Plan<sup>1</sup>, LW's mission is founded on the belief that literature belongs to everybody and can be found everywhere and that, by working with others in a wide range of communities, LW can make literature a voice for all. Working over five strategic areas (Participation, Writer Support, Children & Young People, International, and Digital Creativity), LW builds relationships within and beyond the culture sector to enable people to develop sustainable local literature programmes, enhance skills, address issues of social disadvantage and promote Wales's writers within and beyond its borders.

With the aim of demonstrating LW's and the Welsh Books Council (WBC)'s complementary programmes, it is useful here to identify how LW's remit and established expertise are different from that of WBC. WBC state in their Strategic Plan (June 2016) that their mission is 'to promote and develop the publishing industry in Wales' by supporting Wales-based publishers and booksellers. The focus of the WBC is therefore to *support publishing as a commercial industry*. This is where their experience lies. LW's expertise is very different. Over the years, LW has pioneered in the field of writer development, creative engagement and literary participation, encouraging experimentation and supporting the diversification of literature as an artform.

## 2.2 Participation Strategy

Each year, LW's expert and specialist staff develop projects and initiatives with over 200 partners from different sectors and reaches around 160,000 participants. These projects aim to address barriers to participation and target groups who would otherwise have limited access to the arts. Through a network of partnerships, LW facilitates workshops in prisons, projects with the Gypsy Roma Traveller community, comic-making workshops with NEETs young people and writing with dementia sufferers. LW's longstanding partnership with HMP & YOI Parc won the **Arts, Business and the Community Award at the Arts & Business Awards<sup>2</sup> in June 2017**.

It has taken years to develop trust and a working relationship with our partners and audiences. Many of the latter represent the most vulnerable members of society. If the Cabinet Secretary were to move funding from LW to WBC, this complex and delicate work could disappear.

High-profile projects such as Roald Dahl 100 Wales,<sup>3</sup> Reading Friends<sup>4</sup> and regional literature development initiatives<sup>5</sup> demonstrate the value other agencies clearly recognise in Literature Wales. Some of these organisations in England see Wales as a UK benchmark of excellence in engaging audiences with literature. The fact that LW has over the years developed and sustained writer development in specialist areas – e.g. working with vulnerable young adults – means that we have a strong consortium of writers of all backgrounds in both languages who can work in these areas. LW's aim over the next 2–3 years is to enhance this specialist training and development further.

The discussion of this area of work is one of the most manifestly deficient areas of the Hughes Report. It offers no analysis of the social impact of LW's work or its success in delivering Welsh

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<sup>1</sup> [https://issuu.com/lencymru-litwales/docs/literature\\_wales\\_business\\_plan\\_2016](https://issuu.com/lencymru-litwales/docs/literature_wales_business_plan_2016)

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.aandbcymru.org.uk/arts-business-and-the-community-2017/>

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.roalddahl100.wales/invent-your-event/>

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.literaturewales.org/our-projects/reading-friends/>

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.literaturewales.org/our-projects/south-wales-literature-development-initiative/>

Government targets identified through Fusion and the Well-being of Future Generations Act. Nor does the Report identify any ambitions for the future. This leads to flawed recommendations which would seriously compromise the strides made in this area and impact negatively on Wales' position as a UK-wide leader in this field.

### **2.3. Children and Young People Strategy**

It is alarming that in the area of Children and Young People the Hughes Report again presents no analysis of current strategic activity before going on to recommend potentially detrimental changes. As seen in our Participation Strategy, LW's expertise in working with children and young people is in forging new partnerships and enabling organisations and individuals from backgrounds outside the traditional arts to engage with literary activity in multiple forms.

Each year, LW works with partners to engage around **60,000 children and young people** in literature activities. This is done through directly delivered programmes like the Young People's Laureate<sup>6</sup> and Bardd Plant Cymru<sup>7</sup> and by supporting schools, youth clubs, young carers' groups, young offenders' institutes and others to find creative ways of working with writers and artists to engage young people.

LW also leads the way in developing performance opportunities for children and young people, which can improve confidence, self-expression and communication skills. In 2015 LW brought the hugely popular Slam Poetry competition to Wales. The focus of Slam Poetry is to encourage political debate and social activism among young people. LW's ambition is to enable a bilingual team from Wales to compete at the world Slam championships in USA.

This strategic, developmental work is not something that can be easily transferred. It is a complex, collaborative structure, built on strong partnerships forged and networked by LW.

### **2.4. Writer Support Strategy and the definition of literature**

The first difficulty here is in the Hughes Report's definition of literature. The report presents an outdated concept focused on *published* work, which is emphatically out of touch with current activity – a view so limited that the report cannot sufficiently analyse the contribution LW makes to literature.

Whereas the Hughes report defines literature merely as the precursor to publishing, literature in Wales in the twenty-first century is something far more dynamic, creative and engaging. What the report disregards is the spoken word, rap, cross artform practice, digital, the graphic novel, lyric-writing and gaming commentary – all of which are part of how we connect with the written and spoken word every day. LW's broad range of activity is able to support literature in all its forms: funding for festival programming; commissioning digital projects; bursaries for creators of graphic novels; and literature and technology projects. This far-reaching spectrum of activity and the underpinning expertise that drives it could be lost if the recommendations of the Hughes Report were accepted.

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<sup>6</sup> <http://www.literaturewales.org/our-projects/young-peoples-laureate-wales/>

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.literaturewales.org/our-projects/bardd-plant-cymru/>

Starting from such a limited view of literature means that the Hughes Report is unable to appreciate the range of authors with whom LW works to develop a number of skills. There are performers and artists who develop their work in other, less traditional settings – whether through creating Instapoetry, spoken word output, or through delivering life-changing workshops in communities across Wales.

Writers are central to the LW workforce. Each year, LW works with over 500 writers and invests 25% of its budget in individual writers, meaning that over £300,000 goes directly to writers living and working in Wales.

LW aims to support every aspect of a writer's development, by giving a new writer that first boost through a Writers' Bursary to write their first novel or by training them to lead creative writing workshops with young carers or young offenders.

Many recipients of Writers' Bursaries go on to publish their work, and many get book deals with publishers outside Wales – which can lead to significant book sales. The Hughes Report could not sufficiently analyse sales for books published in Wales owing to a lack of data available. However, LW is proud to have supported many writers who have gone on to achieve critical and commercial acclaim. One example is Kate Hamer who received a Writers' Bursary of £5,000. Her novel *The Girl in the Red Coat* has since sold 75,911 copies, generating £400,252 (Nielsen BookData on UK sales).

LW supports writers from Wales, whether they aim to publish or not, whether they publish in Wales or beyond. WBC's mission is to support the publishing industry *within* Wales, and has few established relationships and limited expertise in the context of the UK-wide industry. Were the Cabinet Secretary to accept the Report's recommendations, there is a risk that writers who publish outside Wales could lose out.

### **3. Governance, Management and Structures**

The Hughes Report's non-evidenced criticisms of LW's governance structures are wholly contrary to our funders' and regulators' views. LW's structures and financial reporting are monitored closely by its own Board, as well as ACW, independent auditors, the Charity Commission and Companies House. LW has the expertise, experience and management structures to deliver and monitor its full remit of activity successfully. LW has challenged the authors of the Report to prove otherwise.

LW's inclusive approach is part of its core ethos, which is to promote equality of opportunity and access, together with a dynamic and open-minded way of working. To achieve change in Wales, LW believes that this should start with the organisation itself. LW is proud that these values are reflected in the composition of its Management Board and staff. Directors<sup>8</sup> represent a range of linguistic and ethnic backgrounds and the majority are women. There is still more work to be done, however, in ensuring that the arts are accessible to all.

LW is also working with Chwarae Teg on its Employers' Programme on an Equality and Diversity Strategy, further enhancing its Strategic Equality Plan. It has also supported many members of staff to undertake management training as part of the Agile Nation 2 programme.

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<sup>8</sup> <http://www.literaturewales.org/about/2623-2/>

#### **4. Economic impact**

The funding LW receives from the Arts Council of Wales enables LW to deliver a core programme of activity and also leverage a significant amount of additional income.

Since 2011/12, the income LW raises from other sources has increased significantly. In 2011/12 the ACW revenue grant represented 74% of LW's income. By 2015/16, this had reduced to 61%. In this period, the additional funding and income LW receives beyond its core grant has increased 122%.

Also, following recent renovations and conservation works at Tŷ Newydd Writing Centre, income from venue hire has risen from £815 in 14/15, to £8,085 in 2015/16, with a projected £23,097 in 2017/18.

In addition to direct expenditure through the annual budget, LW activity generates additional investment and significant added value. For every £1 invested in LW by the Arts Council of Wales, an additional £2.50 is generated. This equates to £1.8m each year, based on 2015-17 figures, and includes an additional £114,000 created through Writers on Tour partnerships and an additional £326,000 created through the Tŷ Newydd Writing Centre in commercial income as well as participants' spend in the local area. Further details in appendix ii.

As a national organisation, LW has staff based in the Tŷ Newydd Writing Centre in Llanystumdwy, Gwynedd and in the Wales Millennium Centre, Cardiff. LW's initiatives are delivered across Wales, and some roles work across Local Authority areas – for example our regional literature development officers.

#### **5. Strategic Ways forward**

The Hughes Report simply and crudely suggests a “dump” of activities, with no thought given to the practicality, timescales, manifest risks and financial implications of such a transfer. As stated above, LW believes that a more dynamically connected sector, in which current expertise is preserved and enhanced, would better serve the people of Wales. Centralisation would threaten the arms' length principle – a principle we should all stand by in a mature democratic nation. LW would embrace the opportunity to work strategically with all key stakeholders to develop a forward plan that deploys established expertise in a more concerted way. The diagram in appendix i illustrates the current roles of LW and WBC, and offers positive and practical areas of greater collaboration.

This will build on the vision that literature belongs to everybody, and ensure the future vitality of our unique culture of words.

*Literature Wales, September 2017*