

Cynulliad Cenedlaethol Cymru / National Assembly for Wales
Pwyllgor Diwylliant, y Gymraeg a Chyfathrebu / The Culture, Welsh Language and Communications Committee
Independent Review of Support for Publishing and Literature in Wales
Ymateb gan Marry-Ann Constantine, Canolfan Uwchefrydiau Cymreig a Cheltaidd Prifysgol Cymru, Llyfrgell Genedlaethol Cymru / Evidence from Marry-Ann Constantine, University of Wales Centre for Advanced Welsh and Celtic Studies, National Library of Wales.

I am writing to add my voice to those of fellow writers and colleagues who have expressed their deep concern about the recently-published Hughes Report into Literature and Publishing in Wales. I understand that you are currently reviewing material presented by Literature Wales refuting many of the claims in the report, and respect your recent statement regarding the need to keep matters as neutral as possible while this process is completed.

I would simply like to note that I have benefited greatly from LW (initially Academi) support, having been the recipient of two bursaries which bought time – and created space – to focus on a collection of short stories and later a novel, both published by Seren. The sums involved were not huge, but the sense of having someone not known to me, in an office far from Aberystwyth, say *yes, do keep going with this* was a huge boost to my motivation and resolve. Knowing that this was public money, and not easily won, kept me focused on my writing. As you well know, creative writing is not a straightforward process of ‘production’: LW staff understand this and were unfailingly positive and a pleasure to work with.

I was also invited to read my work and talk to residents during a Tŷ Newydd course last summer. The group I met came from a wide range of backgrounds and ages, and were all deeply committed to their individual projects; it was also clear they were receiving intensive attention from their equally committed tutors. I do not recognize the ‘retired hobbyists’ described in the report.

I also had the pleasure of inviting Ifor ap Glyn, our National Poet, to perform his verse at a day-school/conference I organized at Wrexham in connection with an exhibition about travel writing. Many attendees from outside Wales had never heard Welsh spoken, much less performed with such passion and energy, and were profoundly moved. I would therefore reiterate Gillian Clarke’s point that the ambassadorial role of National Poet is a valuable one in bringing Welsh culture to the wider world.

One further point: the report’s underlying assumption that all authors writing in English in Wales are ultimately aiming at a London market (‘just up the road’ !)

seems to me depressingly reductive. Many of us actively choose to publish with the smaller Welsh presses. Successful English regional presses such as Bloodaxe (Newcastle) and Comma (Manchester) have shown that high quality work from smaller publishers can galvanise an entire field and bring on a whole new generation of writers. These inspiring regional models are not, as far as I can see, referenced in this report.

Some aspects of the report are commendable: the perennial problem of marketing and selling Welsh books within and beyond Wales really does require radical rethinking. It was heartening to hear that Waterstones are considering a Welsh section, and that the panel saw opportunities for more discussion of Welsh literature on television and other media outlets. But I must say I struggled to read the report as a whole – it lacks structural and intellectual clarity, is full of typos and non-sequiturs. Above all it feels crammed with undigested, or partially-digested material – much of it the opinions of other people, stacked up in no particular order. This makes it very hard to discern its overall direction until one hits the surprisingly virulent attack on LW and the final recommendation to absorb most of its functions into the WBC.

As an academic I was also baffled and slightly concerned by the lack of clarity over the panel's remit – having firmly explained that (due to the obvious conflict of interests of some panel members and Chair) they were not going to tackle the urgent question of academic publishers in Wales, they still produced several paragraphs discussing the crisis (it is nothing less), included material from the Diamond report relevant to the debate, and pointed out that UWP requires a 'relatively small subsidy' to keep afloat. I believe that a really comprehensive review of Literature and Publishing in Wales *should* have included the academic press in its remit (indeed the lines are not always clear – the successful Parthian series of re-editions of Welsh classics might be a case in point). But a better qualified, more independent and larger panel would be needed for such an undertaking.

In brief, I have serious concerns about the neutrality of this report and would urge the government not to act on any of its recommendations until further evidence has been heard.

