

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

Dear Chair,

Welsh Government Budget 2016/17

I am writing on behalf of the Board of Poetry Wales Press Ltd (which publishes under the prize-winning Seren imprint).

Welsh Government support has enabled the publishing industry to achieve far-reaching results in both English and Welsh over the last few years. It has contributed to a vibrant, professional and constantly-developing industry that sustains in the region of 1,000 jobs across the sector from authors to publishers, freelance editors, designers, illustrators, printers, booksellers and many others. The titles produced have an important economic, educational and cultural impact.

Support for English-language publishers in Wales is especially necessary in a global market dominated by large companies from England and America. We also face stiff competition from small publishers in England who are in receipt of very generous support from the Arts Council of England. The Welsh Government's support, via the Welsh Books Council, contributes towards a 'level playing field', allowing us to compete by publishing attractive, high-quality titles from Wales and promoting those titles using innovative cost-effective marketing to a wide readership.

The grants generally support a wide range of titles, from literary, cultural and classic texts, to popular biographies, sports books and children's books, ensuring that readers from Wales and beyond have access to titles from Wales that are relevant to them. Support for the industry helps to ensure the existence of a distinctive literature from Wales and provides a platform for Welsh culture on an international level. As such they are an essential element of the Government's cultural tourism strategy.

Seren has been especially active in promoting authors from Wales, English-language publishing in Wales and Welsh culture. Our authors regularly feature as winners or shortlisted candidates for major literary prizes. Seren helps Wales to sparkle on the literary map. We distribute our books throughout the UK and globally, selling publishing rights and translation rights. We also contribute to the translation culture of Wales and the UK.

We have been quick to embrace digital publishing and our titles are amongst the 1,500+ ebooks from Wales available to buy on gwales.com, with material available in English and Welsh. We have invested heavily in our web site ensuring that it is responsive (mobile compliant) and fit for the future, but the payback time for such investments is over many years.

Whilst every publicly-funded body understands that the Welsh Government's own budget has been severely cut by the UK Government and that we have a duty to identify areas in which efficiency gains can be made, it is of serious concern that the Welsh Books Council and the publishing industry in Wales faces a cut that is approximately double that of other prominent

bodies providing services to the culture of Wales. The cut of 10.6% (£374,000) to the Welsh Books Council's grant will have a serious impact on English-language publishers in Wales and ultimately will be counter-productive by reducing our ability to compete on the World stage potentially increasing our need for financial support.

Financially weak publishers will find attracting authors more difficult, and we fear that you will see an increased flow of Welsh authors having their books published in London, contributing still further to the economic imbalance of the United Kingdom. There will be a serious risk to skilled jobs in Wales and to maintaining, let alone developing, the English-language culture of Wales.

I understand that you will be meeting the Deputy Minister, Ken Skates, next week and in that meeting I urge you to ask the Deputy Minister to consider the impact of the proposed cuts and consider a more equitable solution.

Richard Houdmont

Chair, Poetry Wales Press Ltd (t/a Seren Books)