



MWT/HK/MLW

24 October 2017

Bethan Jenkins AM
Chair
Culture, Welsh Language and Communications Committee
National Assembly for Wales
Cardiff Bay
CARDIFF
CF99 1NA

Dear Bethan Jenkins,

I would like to take this opportunity to thank you for giving the Welsh Books Council the opportunity to discuss the Medwin Hughes Report with you and your colleagues on 21 September and to follow up as suggested on a number of different points which could not be discussed further due to time.

Whilst it is understandable that much of the Committee's and indeed the media's focus has been on the process of how the review was conducted, it is regrettable that the majority of the review's recommendations have attracted little discussion, as indeed have the achievements of the sector in term of social, cultural and economic values.

I am also concerned at the possibility of the substantial body of evidence submitted to the Panel by writers and publishers working across Wales in both languages being overlooked. As Professor Hughes emphasised when he appeared before your Panel, it is of the very first importance, as it demonstrates how very well founded – contrary, of course, to the assertions of some parties concerned to undermine the Report's credibility – were the recommendations that concluded the Hughes Report and that are currently being considered for implementation by the Cabinet Secretary. Of equal relevance, as you will no doubt already be aware, is the important review of the performance of Literature Wales conducted internally recently by the Arts Council of Wales.

WBC welcomed the review as yet another opportunity to reflect upon and improve its services and it was gratifying to note that WBC had in fact already pre-empted some of the recommendations before the review's findings were published. That is not to say that there aren't any areas for further improvement particularly in relation to a potentially enlarged remit of WBC.

WBC's recently appointed Chief Executive joined the organisation from outside long established sector networks, indicating that the need for a different skill set was acknowledged at the highest level and preceded the publication of Professor Hughes's report by almost one year. With one of the most experienced publishing professionals in Wales at its helm, WBC is ideally placed to take on new challenges, particularly in digital sphere. In so doing it will be building on the crucial enabling service for digital development within Wales' premier publishing houses that it instigated several years ago. (See accompanying documentation for further information.)



As for Helgard's potential contribution in the digital field, one only needs to look at the transformation of digital engagement at University of Wales Press, where a new website was launched, backlist titles were digitised and social media marketing was transformed during her tenure as director. Since her arrival in February this year, WBC has experienced a 17% increase in the number of social media followers; a scoping exercise with regards to IT systems requirements, with a particular emphasis on user engagement, digital presence and service offer is nearing completion and will be discussed with the Cabinet Secretary shortly. The senior management team at WBC has been enlarged recently in recognition of the additional challenges the sector faces as a whole and in anticipation of the possible changes following Medwin Hughes's recommendations.

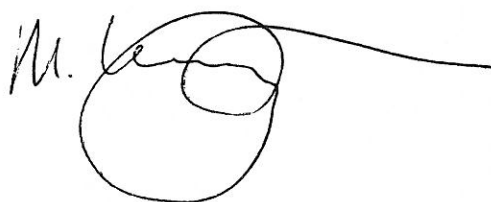
It is our belief that the recommendations mirror and relate directly to the strengths of the organisations they affect and that their implementation will benefit the sector on many different levels: bursaries, mentoring and author tours are, in effect, already functions carried out by WBC, albeit through slightly different channels, and the case for transferring them is logical due to existing synergies, the level of expertise evident amongst staff and the WBCs demonstrable track record of delivering outcomes that offer good value and services which are conceived in consultation with stakeholders and executed collaboratively.

Equally, there is clear evidence that Literature Wales is the organisation best placed to continue with major events and community based activities that allow for the broadest definition of literature; they play to their strengths and also complement the performance arts remit of their funder, Arts Council of Wales. (Sentence cut here.)

The WBC enthusiastic response to the main recommendations of the review "*The Way Forward*" was discussed during the meeting held by officials on 1 September 2017 with Literature Wales, Arts Council of Wales and WBC. It outlines a positive and constructive way forward and discussions during the meeting indicated that there are no major barriers to the transfer of functions. (Sentence cut here.)

The Welsh Books Council has built an excellent relationship with Welsh Government and is deeply appreciative of the funding that is enabling WBC to deliver its mission: that is to support and promote the publishing industry and to coordinate the interests of authors, publishers, booksellers and libraries. The implementation of the recommendations would ensure that the Welsh Government funding will be used in a more cohesive way thus making a greater contribution to improving the social, economic, and cultural well-being of Wales. I therefore trust that your Panel, after fully informed and wholly disinterested consideration, will feel able to endorse these Recommendations warmly.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'M. Wynn Thomas', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

M. Wynn Thomas
Chair