

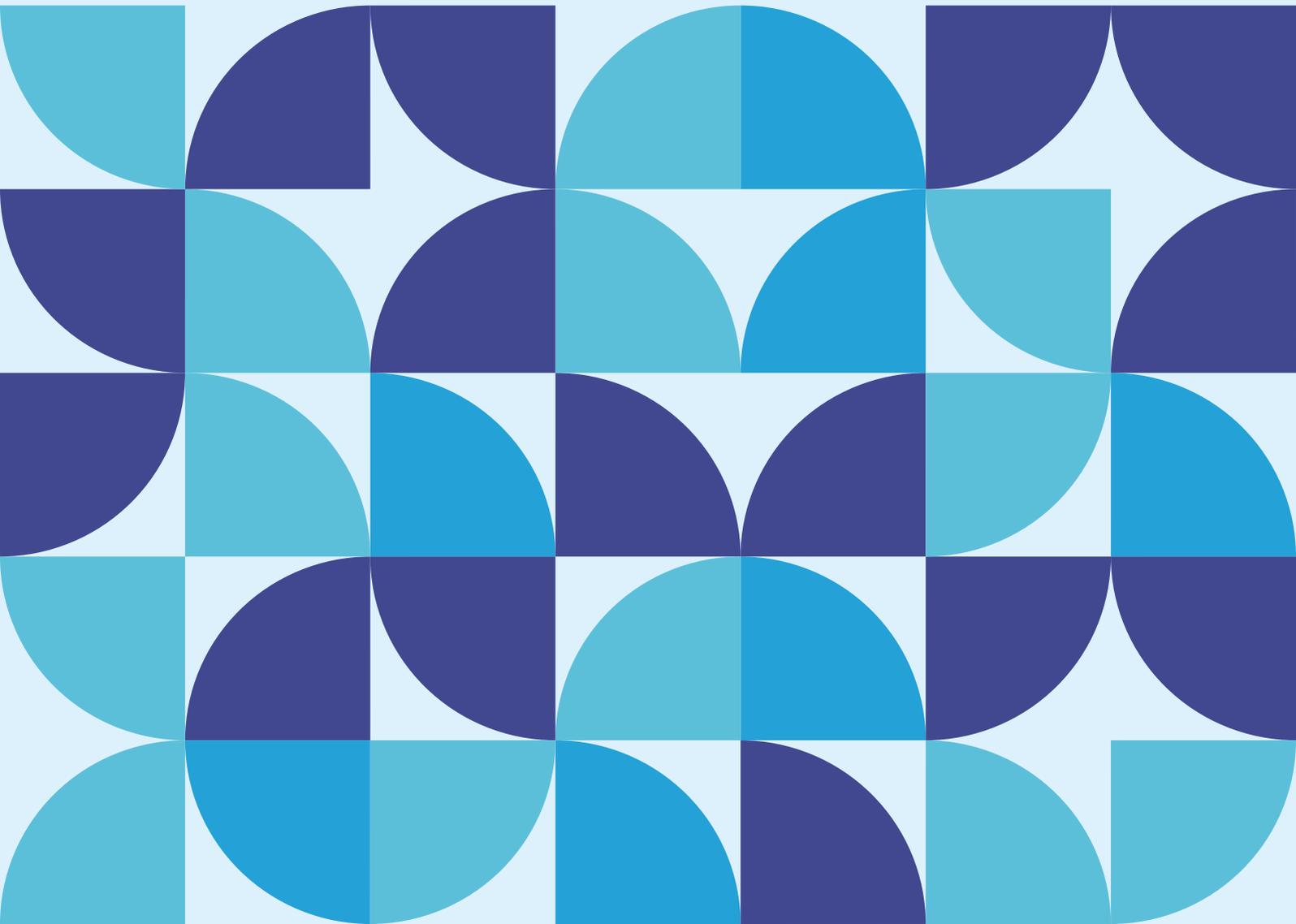


CYNGOR LLYFRAU CYMRU
BOOKS COUNCIL of WALES

2024–25

Annual Report

Books Council of Wales



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OUR VISION

We want a Wales where each one of us has found the right book; the words that inspire, educate, heal, or simply delight us.

*Wales: A Reading Nation
Strategic Plan 2022–27*

Expressing appreciation over a difficult year



A word from the Chair

Linda Tomos, Chair of the Board

This has been a particularly challenging year for the Books Council of Wales and our partners.

✧ OVERVIEW

The decrease of 10.5% in our annual budget was very difficult to manage and I would like to express our appreciation as a Board of Trustees for the hard work and skill shown by our staff led by Helgard to address the subsequent issues. Despite this difficult context, we have continued to deliver support

to the publishing industry which has once again produced very high-quality books in both English and Welsh for people in Wales. The New Audiences Fund has continued to provide opportunities for new and existing authors and publishers to explore innovative directions for their work. It was particularly

heartening to learn more about the success of the New Audiences Fund at an event held in Wrexham where Rebecca Evans MS, Cabinet Secretary for Economy, Energy and Planning was able to meet participants and discuss their projects.

These achievements would not have been possible without the active support of Jack Sargeant MS, Minister for Culture, Skills and Social Partnership and the positive relationship which has continued with civil servants in Creative Wales and Welsh Government Culture Division. I know that I speak for all my fellow Trustees in sincerely thanking them for their contribution to the success of the Books Council's work. The contribution and interest of the Cabinet Secretary for Education, Lynne Neagle MS has also been invaluable in supporting the Book Council's relationship with Welsh schools to encourage all children to enjoy reading, including Rhyngom – our special project to publish more books for young readers that represent the culture, people and history of the whole of Wales, and that celebrate and promote diversity.

During the year, the Board was delighted to welcome Professor Angharad Price to join us as a Trustee. Angharad is Professor of Welsh and Creative Writing at Bangor University and is the author of several novels, essays and scholarly works on Welsh literature. As Chair, I would like to also sincerely thank a long-standing Board member, Professor Jane Aaron who has provided an immense contribution to the work of the Books Council over the years and to wish her well in future endeavours. Jane is a distinguished scholar who has provided wise counsel to me and others who have benefitted from her friendship.

Once again, the highlights of this past year are numerous, and I encourage you to read this Annual Report. I'm sure that you will be as impressed as I was by the breadth of work that has been accomplished despite the challenging financial constraints. The Books Council continues to play a vital role in terms of providing expert advice, maintaining the quality of the books supported and connecting books with readers. However, there needs to be an acknowledgement that this unique expertise can only be sustained and extended through the maintenance of a core budget which is commensurate with the expectations of the industry and the public that high quality publications and services will continue to be supported and produced.

Finally, as Chair, I have greatly benefitted from the input of many colleagues. I would like to sincerely thank all our supporters, volunteer members of the panels, Friends of the Books Council, and my fellow Trustees who have given their time and expertise to enable us to achieve more. Without the dedication of the staff who ensure that our work flourishes under Helgard's leadership and our many partners in Government, local authorities and the publishing industry, we would not have succeeded in achieving the outputs and results outlined in this report. I really look forward to working with you all as we move forward.

With my very best wishes

Linda

A year of prioritising and making difficult choices



Reflecting over the year
Helgard Krause, CEO

* OVERVIEW

Books are powerful vessels of knowledge and cultural identity, and we believe that investing in publishing is not just about books, it is about preserving our heritage, empowering communities, and building a stronger future.

Our vision for a Wales as a nation of readers empowered by knowledge is reflected in the multitude of activities we delivered during this last financial year.

However, a 10.5% cut in our budget, after over a decade of standstill funding, meant prioritising and making difficult choices; consultation with publishers and booksellers was key to achieving temporary workable solutions but the challenges we as a charity and a sector made up of micro-enterprises face, remain very stark. Market conditions in Wales are difficult: dramatically reduced multi-book sales to institutions such as schools, libraries and the early years sector due to shrinking public budgets; less discretionary spending by consumers on books and magazines; and ever-increasing competition from the entire UK book sector, are set against dramatically increased production and distribution costs.

And yet, against this backdrop we also delivered the final year of

one of the most transformative strategic interventions in recent years, the New Audiences Fund, which started a process of systemic change which otherwise would not have been possible. As our showcase in Wrexham and impact report clearly demonstrated we were able to connect with more diverse communities, making a real difference and enabling change at a grass-roots level. We are hopeful that based on our evidence we will be able to secure further project funding in the future.

We also had the opportunity to propose a significant expansion of our Reading Promotion activities, by submitting an ambitious three-year plan to Welsh Government's Education Department, which was subsequently approved, and we are looking forward to working in partnership with Welsh Government to turn a spotlight on the transformative power of reading for pleasure.

This last year also saw the arrival of a new literary journal. *Folding Rock*

was launched to much acclaim in March, having successfully secured the franchise until March 2028, and we look forward to the venture flourishing and providing an important platform for writers in Wales.

Having secured additional funding, we were delighted to be able to showcase Wales and its tremendous talent by exhibiting at Frankfurt Book Fair with 17 publishers from Wales participating, and to be able to support Cyhoeddi Cymru / Publishing Wales to have a presence at London International Book Fair and the Children's Books Fair in Bologna. We also took a lead role in developing and submitting an application to UNESCO to secure the prestigious status of City of Literature for Aberystwyth & Ceredigion; we expect to hear of the outcome in autumn 2025.

In compiling evidence during a very intense year of lobbying for a better settlement for the sector, we can demonstrate that our sector has experienced a real terms cut

of 40% over the last decade; that is substantially less well funded than Scotland, Ireland or any of the smaller European nations. Never are the generous contributions of trustees and volunteers more needed than during tumultuous times and I am deeply indebted to them all for the support and advice my team and I had over the last year. I would also like to pay tribute to all my colleagues, who worked tirelessly to secure reasonable outcomes during the most challenging times. A special thank you should also go to the formidable management team with whom I have the pleasure of leading our organisation – none of it would be possible without them.

The publishing sector makes an important contribution to many of Welsh Government's policies, but to achieve our vision of Wales as a Nation of Readers and to improve PISA ratings and literacy ratings in Wales, we need a publishing sector that is adequately funded to ensure its resilience and enable it to thrive. We want to see publishers producing quality books for readers of all ages, life stages and interests that authentically reflect our realities here in Wales. Our main focus as a Books Council in the coming year is to make the case for investment in our sector, which makes significant contributions to almost all of the Well-being Goals and has demonstrated over many years its commitment and passion to serve readers in Wales.



✧ PUBLISHING

Folding Rock magazine receives £80,000 annual funding

In September we announced that *Folding Rock*, a new venture by writer, editor and creative producer Kathryn Tann, and editor and designer Robert Harries, was the recipient of £80,000 of annual funding to publish a new literary magazine from Wales.

Folding Rock: New Writing from Wales and Beyond will provide a platform for new and established writers, celebrating Welsh writing in English. Its aim to champion and celebrate the best emerging and established Welsh and Wales-based writers goes to the heart of our work at the Books Council – strengthening the publishing industry in Wales by creating opportunities for the next generation of authors to hone their craft.

The first issue of *Folding Rock* was published in March 2025, and it will be published three times a year, with digital content alongside the

print magazine. You can find out more at foldingrock.com.

This funding will be available up to March 2028, following the advertisement of an open tender for a new English-language literary magazine in March 2024.

Four other publications received funding as part of the English-language Cultural Periodicals funding franchise for the same period: *Nation. Cymru*, *Poetry Wales*, *The Paper* and *Welsh Agenda*.





 ✨ SECTOR

Wales on the world stage

Publishers and partners from Wales offering a Welsh publishing presence at the Frankfurt, Bologna and London book fairs.

Wales in Frankfurt

- 17 publishers and partners from Wales attending the fair
- 230,000 visitors attended the fair over a period of 5 days
- 4,300 exhibitors
- 92 countries present

We were pleased to secure funding from Welsh Government via Creative Wales this year to showcase the very best of books and content from Wales at international book fairs in London, Bologna and Frankfurt. Wales-based publishers had the opportunity to meet representatives from other creative industries, such as film and games, as well as other publishers, to discuss collaborations, rights and licensing, and build relationships.

We co-ordinated Wales' presence at Frankfurt Book Fair in October, the largest content fair in the world. 17 publishers and partners from Wales attended, and the 5-day event attracted around 230,000 visitors with 4,300 exhibitors from 92 countries.

The Wales presence at London and Bologna book fairs was managed by Cyhoeddi Cymru / Publishing Wales.

New Audiences Fund reaches £1.5m



R. Arwel Jones
Head of Publishing Development

* FUNDING

The challenges faced in the sector in 2024 mean that New Audiences funding has been of vital help to the publishing industry

Visit the Book Council of Wales' website for more information on the New Audiences Fund:

books.wales

2024 saw a third year of New Audiences grants, and in June we announced the recipients who would share £500,000 of additional funding to support over 40 projects across Wales. This year, applications were invited under three themes: book promotion and marketing programmes that reach new readers in Welsh and English; provide opportunities to new voices in news services and popular magazines; and develop and publish new content that represents Wales in all its diversity.

The challenges we faced as a sector in 2024 meant that this year more than ever, New Audiences funding has been a crucial support for the publishing industry during difficult times. It supported yet more fresh ideas and new voices, but it also enabled projects that started out as pilots or start-ups under the scheme to grow and reach their full potential.

When we established the fund, we were looking for projects that would be catalysts for lasting change in our sector: creating opportunities,

increasing representation and supporting businesses. Three years and £1.5million later, we can look back on over 100 projects across Wales. But the stories behind these figures are more important still as we see how the grants have created jobs, supported fair pay, facilitated collaboration, mentored new voices and enabled the publication of new cultural materials.

In February 2025 we held a celebration event at Tŷ Pawb in Wrexham, inviting past and present recipients to discuss their projects, achievements and challenges in reaching new audiences in Wales. We were very pleased to welcome the Cabinet Secretary for the Economy, Energy and Planning, Rebecca Evans MS as we reflected on the impact of the investment and exchanged ideas for the future.



We would like to thank Creative Wales and Welsh Government for their support for this transformative fund, which has the potential to continue to create lasting change in our publishing sector for the benefit of all of Wales.



Stars of the Shelves

Over 5,000 children across Wales have the opportunity to meet an author.

✧ PARTNERSHIP

Thanks to funding from Welsh Government's Culture Division, 5,170 children across Wales were able to meet up with popular children's authors in a series of special workshops held in their local libraries.

A recent research report from the National Literacy Trust found that: "More children and young people who had experienced an author visit said that they enjoyed reading in their free time compared with their peers who hadn't had a visit (58.6% vs. 39.3%)."

The Stars of the Shelves scheme was formed as a partnership to bring children out of the classroom and into their local library, working with authors in creative workshops to celebrate books and inspire reading.

Between January and March 2025, workshops were held at 74 libraries with over 30 authors, including Robin Bennett, Claire Fayers, Mari Lövgreen and Siôn Tomos Owen.

Launching a new resource pack to support teachers

✧ NEW

October saw the launch of a new set of school resources specially created to support teachers to embed reading for pleasure in the classroom, across all age groups and key stages. The Celebrate Reading Pack has been developed following feedback from teachers on how we could support them to make reading for pleasure part of

daily school life: developing literacy, language skills and empathy, and delivering the Curriculum for Wales. The packs include activities and ideas for all key stages, as well as progression steps to help young readers of all ages discover a love of reading.

Launching a brand new podcast

✧ PROMOTION

Over six episodes of our new Welsh-language podcast, *Sut i Ddarllen* (How to Read) our Reading Promotions Officer, Francesca Sciarrillo, was joined by a range of special guests to discuss reading, its influence and the impact it can have on our daily lives, as well as books of all kinds. Among the guests sharing their memories and reading recommendations are Siôn Tomos Owen, Kayley Roberts and Manon Steffan Ros.

Francesca explains the choice of name 'Sut i Ddarllen': "I'm such a bookworm myself and when we were planning this podcast, we wanted to include certain themes in each episode that reflected the different relationships we all have with reading. We discussed how to return to reading – maybe if you hadn't enjoyed reading growing up

and wanted to give it another go – or how to find the right book for you, or even how to make time for reading in our busy lives – the word 'how' just kept coming up in all our ideas! So, while it's quite a playful title, I love it because for me, once you discover how you can make books and reading part of your life, it can change everything for you."

Sut i Ddarllen is available on all podcast platforms. Francesca's guests in series one are: Siôn Tomos Owen, Kayley Roberts, Manon Steffan Ros, Sara Yassine, Joe Healy, and Dr Eirini Sanoudaki. A second series will follow next year.

Watch and listen to the *Sut i Ddarllen* podcast:

 [Sut i Ddarllen](#)



* PROJECT

‘Rhyngom’ project boosts number of books celebrating diversity for children and young people

Rhyngom is a three-year, £810,000 project funded by Welsh Government’s Education Department and Adnodd. Its aim is to publish more reading books for pleasure that celebrate and promote diversity, for children and young people.

The funding has enabled us to commission 20 brand-new original books in Welsh and English, as well as the adaptation of 28 English-language books into Welsh, to create books that reflect more of our stories, people and communities.

We’re very grateful to our many partners who have contributed their experience and expertise to

this project, and we celebrated the first milestone this year as the 20 original books commissioned in Welsh and English were published.

The new books include works by first-time writers as well as established authors. One of the main aims of commissioning original Welsh- and English-language books as part of the scheme was to ensure publishing opportunities for authors and illustrators from a range of under-represented backgrounds and communities, and some new authors were supported to work with a mentor or to co-author with a more experienced writer.

The second phase of this project is to publish Welsh adaptations of 28 English titles that promote and celebrate diversity – some of

which have won awards such as the Diverse Book Award, and which include books by Malorie Blackman and Benjamin Zephaniah. We’re producing educational resources to accompany all 48 titles and every state school in Wales will receive a free supply of the books and the educational resources for use in the classroom by autumn 2025. Every book published as part of the scheme has been endorsed by Welsh Government.

For more information about the Rhyngom project, contact the Children’s Books and Reading Promotion Department:

children@books.wales



“

I am delighted, and thank you from the bottom of my heart for the honour.

It means the world to me.

Bethan Gwanas



* AWARDS

Honoring Bethan Gwanas with the Mary Vaughan Jones Award

In November we awarded the 2024 Mary Vaughan Jones Award to Bethan Gwanas, in recognition of her outstanding contribution to children’s literature. This award, which is presented every three years, was established in 1985 to commemorate Mary Vaughan Jones’ significant and unique contribution

to children’s literature and it is the highest accolade in the field of children’s books in Wales. A special celebration was held at Glan-Llyn in Llanuwchllyn in November to present the award to Bethan in the company of family and friends from the publishing industry.

Recent past-winners of the award:

2021 – Menna Lloyd Williams
2018 – Gareth F. Williams
2015 – Siân Lewis
2012 – Jac Jones
2009 – Angharad Tomos

* NEW

New awards to celebrate the best of book covers

The Children's Book Cover of the Year Awards is a pilot scheme to highlight the illustration and design talents in Wales.

This year we launched our Wales Children's Book Cover of the Year Awards, with the help of our Young People's Panel. The awards were established to celebrate and recognise the contribution of illustrators and designers in bringing stories to life, and creating eye-catching, attractive books that appeal to young readers.

There are two categories – English-language Book Cover and Welsh-language Book Cover. The eight shortlisted books were selected by members of our Young People's Panel and the winners were chosen by an online public vote.

“

I am very proud to win this wonderful new award. I am delighted that this award has been set up to celebrate cover designs.

Jane Matthews
Winner of the English-language category

“

What an honor to hear that this little winter book has been chosen to win the prize!

Lily Mÿrennyn
Winner of the Welsh-language category

English-language Shortlist

The Song that Sings Us *Firefly*

Illustration: Jane Matthews
Design: Becka Moor
Author: Nicola Davies

Ceri a Deri: 1,2,3 *Graffeg*

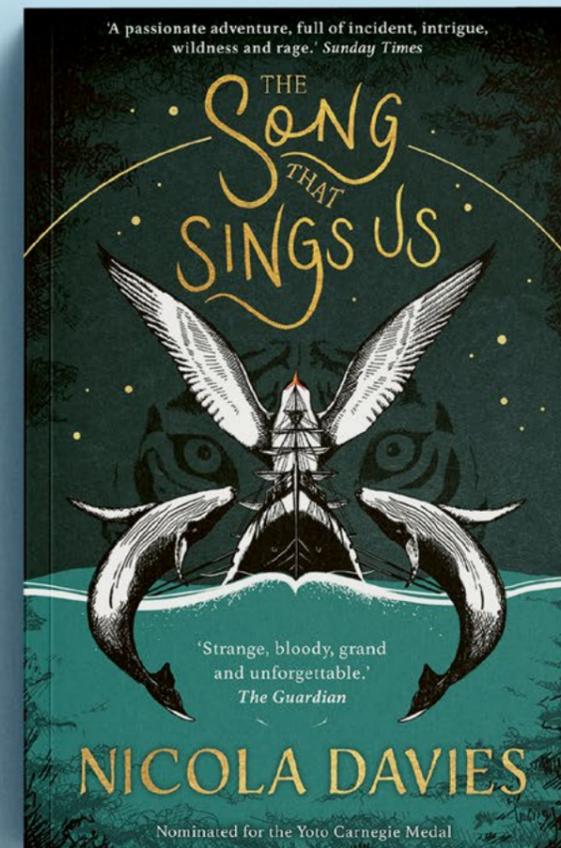
Illustration: Max Low
Design: Joana Rodrigues, Graffeg
Author: Max Low

Lilly & Myles: The Torch

Graffeg
Illustration: Hannah Rounding
Design: Joana Rodrigues, Graffeg
Author: Jon Roberts

Tapper Watson and the Quest for the Nemo Machine

Firefly
Illustration: Becka Moor
Author: Claire Fayers



WINNER

Welsh-language shortlist

Mynd i Weld Nain Y Lolfa

Illustration: Lily Mÿrennyn
Design: Richard Pritchard
Author: Delyth Jenkins

Ac Rwy'n Clywed Dreigiau / And I Hear Dragons *Firefly*

Illustration: Eric Heyman
Design: Becka Moor
Golygydd: Hanan Issa

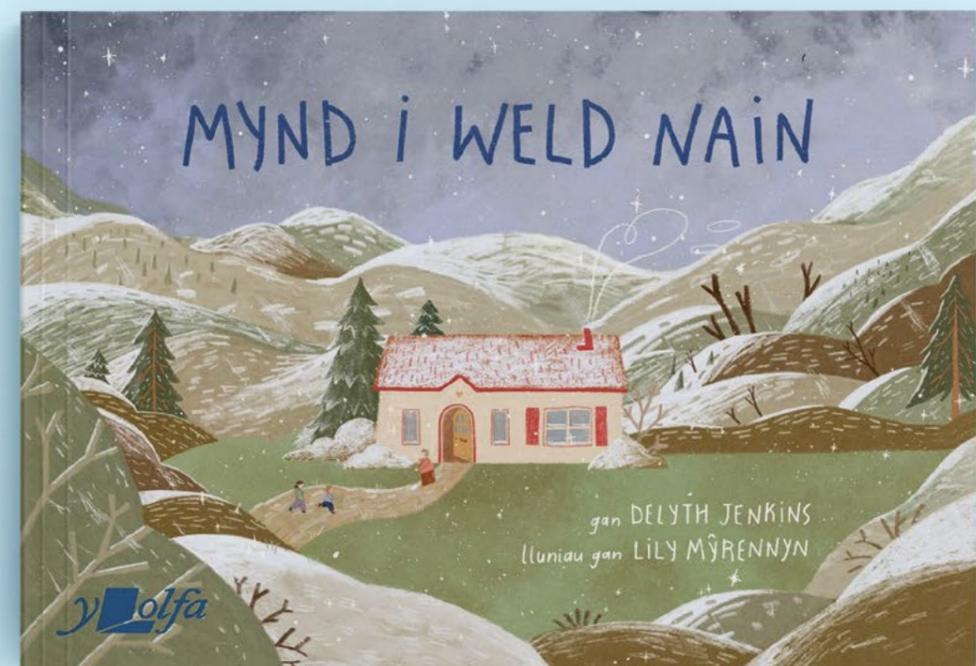
Diwrnod Pysur

Gwasg Carreg Gwalch
Illustration and Design: Huw Aaron
Author: Huw Aaron

Mwy o Straeon o'r Mabinogi *Rily*

Illustration: Valérie Leblond
Design: Gwasg Rily
Author: Siân Lewis

WINNER



Our year in numbers

The numbers behind our stories

549,539

books sent out by Distribution Centre

INDUSTRY

24,966kWh

electricity generated by solar panels

SUSTAINABILITY

62

volunteers on our Board, panels and subcommittees

VOLUNTEERING

536

shops in Wales serviced

INDUSTRY

5,170

children took part in Stars of the Shelves author workshops

READING PROMOTION

90

English-language books supported with grants

PUBLISHING

145

Welsh-language books supported with grants

PUBLISHING

£500,000

distributed through New Audiences Fund 3

FUNDING

27,207

children aged 4–11 took part in the Summer Reading Challenge in Wales

READING PROMOTION

16

Welsh-language magazines supported with grants

PUBLISHING

17½

job posts supported through grants

SUSTAINING JOBS

5

English-language magazines supported with grants

PUBLISHING

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*Mae'r ddogfen hon hefyd ar gael yn y Gymraeg
A Welsh-language version of this document is also available*

