CYNGOR LLYFRAU CYMRU
BOOKS COUNCIL of WALES

Child Poverty Strategy

Progress Report

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A Welsh-language version of this document is also available

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1 Introduction

The Child Poverty Strategy was developed by the Welsh Books Council during 2012 and endorsed by Huw Lewis AM, the former Minister for Culture and Sport.

As stated in that document, reducing Child Poverty by extending access to opportunities and resources for families, children and young people is a priority for the Welsh Government. In light of its responsibility to develop the publishing industry in Wales in both languages, the Books Council considers this vision to be an integral part of its work to further literacy, to promote books and to provide reading material with a broad appeal.

The four main themes to the Child Poverty Strategy state that the Books Council will:

Strategic Objective 1: Play a central role in the process of developing varied and suitable reading materials, which are necessary to inspire young readers from differing backgrounds

Strategic Objective 2: Disseminate information about reading materials to a variety of audiences

Strategic Objective 3: Develop opportunities to promote literacy and reading by means of specific schemes

Strategic Objective 4: Contribute towards family inclusion, in order to ensure the necessary support for children and young people

2 Report on the Strategic Objectives

Strategic Objective 1:

Playing a central role in the process of developing varied and suitable reading materials, which are necessary to inspire young readers from differing backgrounds

Welsh-language Publications

As noted in previous Progress Reports, the Council is well aware of the need to support a range of books and reading material to meet the demand of readers from differing backgrounds in order to enable them to identify with the contents. The Council supports books through the Publishing Grants Panel (Welsh-language); some 100 books are published every year – a combination of original titles and adaptations – and we are of the opinion that the provision offers a wide range and variety of books. The books published also include bilingual volumes that can be used by non-Welsh-speaking adults to support children with their reading.

The Council's emphasis is on leisure reading, and the number of Welsh-language titles supported by us has remained fairly constant over recent years. Unfortunately, this is not true in the case of educational books, a number of which are supported by the Welsh Government's Education Department. A substantial fall – of 245 to 78 – was seen in the number of educational books

reaching the Distribution Centre during the past financial year. This had an effect on the number of titles sold and, consequently, on the number of books reaching the schools. It must be noted that there was an increase in the digital material produced during the same period, and there is also an increase in the number of books to be published this year the detriment of access to reading material due to of a lack of access to e-readers.

The Publishing Grants Panel (Welsh-language) has recently placed an emphasis on the field of children's books, and Dr Siwan Rosser was commissioned to prepare a report on the current provision and the demands of the market. The full report is expected by the end of the current financial year.

English-language Publications

Although the number of English-language books for children supported by the Council is comparatively small, substantial developments have been achieved over recent months. For many years Pont, Gomer Press's imprint, has been the main player in the field of English-language books for children; their highquality titles are firmly rooted in Wales, and give children an opportunity to read about their own experiences and localities.

By now, of course, another publisher – Firefly – has entered the field, and has already contributed substantially to the provision. Their titles offer a wide variety of themes, including a story based at a children's home, a book about bullying, and another focusing on problems concerning depression within the family. The high quality of the books has also been recognised, with a number of their titles listed for some of Britain's main awards for children's books, and included in lists of recommended reads in the Guardian and The Times. The Council is eager to give Firefly further support and help to ensure its development.

One disappointment felt during the year was that the hoped-for developments with Schools Challenge Wales – a scheme to support under-performing primary and secondary schools in Wales, offering them the same opportunities as those available in other schools – did not materialise. A discussion was held regarding arranging visits by experienced authors to schools as part of a programme to spark children's interest, but the scheme did not develop in the way we had hoped.

Strategic Objective 2:

Disseminating information about reading material to a variety of audiences

We are of the opinion that the continuing challenge facing us is of promoting the published books amongst the target audience, i.e. the children themselves, teachers, and those who buy books for children, such as parents, carers or relatives.

From the point of view of the children and teachers, we are constantly striving to reach them through the schools themselves. We have a team of experienced Officers who regularly visit schools throughout Wales, and booksellers also have strong connections with their local schools. Catalogues of Welsh- and English-language books are published, and digital copies distributed to every school in Wales.

The Council regularly produces books supplements, in which children's books are given a prominent place. These catalogues are widely distributed, and are warmly welcomed by readers.

Although the Book Club had to be drawn to a close in 2015, we continued with our commitment to promoting the field of children's books. To this aim we launched the @LlyfrDaFabBooks brand – a move that has given new momentum to the work. Under this scheme we have arranged author visits in numerous areas – events that generate a palpable sense of excitement and are undoubtedly a very effective way of sparking an interest in books and reading.

We ensure that information about the books is widely disseminated to libraries so that titles can be loaned to readers. In addition, as part of the scheme, a stock of Library of Wales titles are supplied free of charge to school and public libraries.

Strategic Objective 3

Developing opportunities to promote literacy and reading by means of specific schemes

The Council's connection with the field of promoting reading extends as far back as 1998 when the Council was invited to a meeting held at the Welsh Office, as it was at the time. As a result of that meeting, the Council was invited to lead the celebrations for the National Year of Reading. The legacy from that particular year was to hold Book Day celebrations on an annual basis, with the activities being supported by the Welsh Government's Education Department. Over the years, with cuts to the budget, the arrangements have been adapted in accordance with the funds available.

One of this year's highlights was the flagship event held at the Grand Theatre, Swansea, for an audience of 600 local school children. The event was arranged in cooperation with World Book Day UK, and a number of authors from Wales and England were present to entertain the children. Due to the success of these events in Wales over the past two years, Swansea was also selected as the venue to hold the biggest book quiz in the world, in cooperation with the Guinness Book of Records. On Book Day itself, it was announced that the attempt had been successful.

Once again, a large number of schools throughout Wales joined in the celebrations for Book Day, and we are well aware of the fact that the date marks an important event in the educational calendar.

As part of the @LlyfrDaFabBooks brand, an event was held at Cardigan Castle – where 600 children were present over two days – and during the year several author tours were arranged in various parts of Wales.

The Council has – in its Strategic Plan prepared this year – also given due attention to promoting reading and literacy. One of the Council's concerns is that teachers these days are not as familiar with the field of children's books as in the past, and as a result find it difficult to refer pupils to specific titles that are suitable for their age and background. Although we are aware of the pressure of work felt by teachers, we feel strongly that this matter must be addressed if we are serious about promoting literacy.

The Council also cooperated with The Reading Agency on the Summer Reading Challenge – a scheme that aims to maintain reading standards over the summer holiday by attracting children to their local library and encouraging them to read 6 books of their own choice. The campaign

was successfully launched in the company of Kirsty Williams, Cabinet Secretary for Education, at Glynneath Library.

Strategic Objective 4

Contributing to family inclusion, in order to ensure the necessary support for children and young people

Once again this year a very successful launch was held for the Quick Reads/Stori Sydyn titles at the Senedd building in the company of Huw Lewis, the Minister for Education at the time. These short, snappy books have been specially tailored for new and reluctant readers, and are a good way of introducing books and reading within the home.

Due to budget cuts, only four volumes were published this year – two in Welsh and two in English. However, Huw Lewis noted that he was strongly of the opinion that these titles are a great asset, and he congratulated the Council, the authors and the publishers on their work.

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