Wales: a Reading Nation

5 year strategic plan 2022–27

CYNGOR LLYFRAU CYMRU
BOOKS COUNCIL of WALES

Noddir gan
Lywodraeth Cymru
Sponsored by
Welsh Government

OUR VISION

Wales: a Reading Nation

We want a Wales where each one of us has found the right book; the words that inspire, educate, heal, or simply delight us. Where the people that make up our sector bring ideas to life, connect creativity and business to bring to us the many, multifaceted stories that resonate with us and reflect all that Wales is. To be united in a common purpose: to read more to do more.

OUR MISSION

Our mission is to support and promote the book sector in Wales. We do this by:

- providing strategic direction which is informed by the context of a bilingual Wales closely connected to both the British and global publishing industries;
- providing services and grants, specifically geared towards the needs of differing audiences whilst ensuring diverse content in both languages;
- respecting editorial independence whilst striving for excellence and innovation;
- promoting the importance and the transformational power of reading for pleasure.

OUR PURPOSE

We are here to ensure that Wales has a flourishing publishing industry and that the people living here can work in our sector or benefit from its creative endeavours which are made in Wales, for the people of Wales. As a not-for-profit organisation, any commercial income we raise by providing services is invested back into the sector we serve, mostly through indirect subsidies to the industry. Supporting a sector mainly made up of micro-enterprises and sole traders, we use our capacity and expertise to act as a conduit for cross-sectoral connections, to share our understanding of the wider cultural and economic context where relevant, to advocate for the value of our sector and to demonstrate the contribution it makes. Whilst the development of talent and creativity is intrinsic to the sector's endeavours, our main purpose is to support the entire book ecosystem which is embedded in the foundational economy of Wales.

Our sector is part of the UK publishing industry which is the largest in the world, publishes *c*. 250,000 books annually and is dominated by large multinational corporations. The funding we receive from Welsh Government on an annual basis, following the submission of our operational plan, has therefore a very specific purpose which is to address two very different types of market failure: the commercial market for Welsh-language titles is not large enough to provide sufficiently varied output and therefore needs structural support, as is the case with other lesser-spoken languages across the world. The imperative to provide support for what is described as 'Wales in English', i.e., content that charts the historic, cultural and political life of the nation in English, is very different. Typically deemed commercially unattractive, it is rarely commissioned or published by UK publishers which leads to a lack of publishing opportunity, especially for new and emerging voices but also for established authors. English-language funding attempts to counteract this lack of interest and expertise by investing in businesses whose very existence is predicated on publishing about Wales.

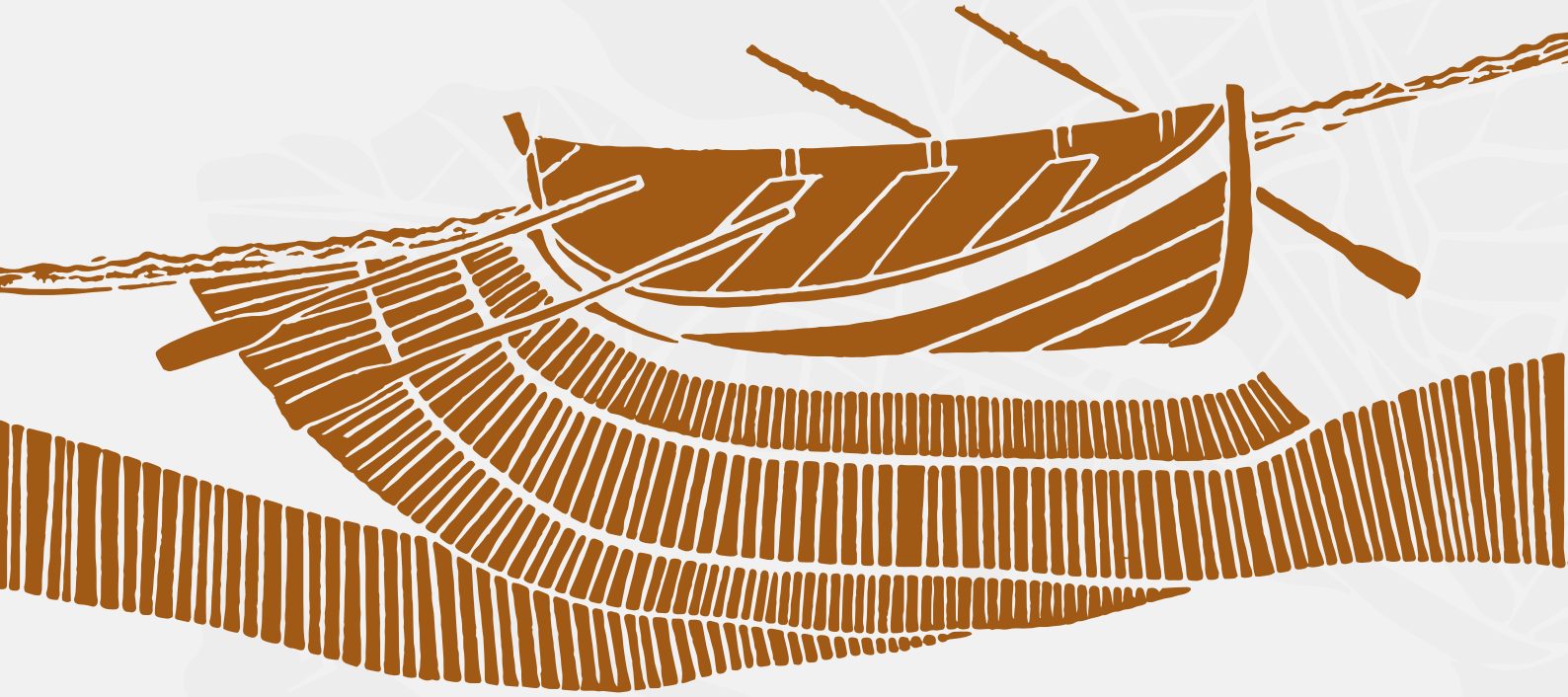
OUR VALUES

We believe

- in the transformative power of reading for pleasure and that it impacts positively on our well-being, mental health, educational attainment, and social and cultural capital
- in supporting a publishing sector that is open and welcoming, thrives on creativity and collaboration, and produces quality content that makes a positive contribution to the lives of people and the foundational economy in Wales
- that we need to be proactive in developing the sector to attract the people, skills and experiences that reflect all of Wales
- that the diverse cultures and languages of Wales enrich all aspects of our lives and communities
- that everyone should have access to books and magazines in print, digital or audio formats irrespective of their ability to afford them
- y Gymraeg belongs to all of us and is an integral part of our daily lives, heritage and culture
- that the many and multifaceted stories of Wales connect us to the wider world and help us to promote our nation within Europe and more globally.

OUR AMBITIONS AND PRIORITIES

We have five overarching ambitions which frame the priorities of our strategic plan for the next five years. Directly informed by the principles of the Future Generations Act and the Well-being Objectives, these priorities are all connected by key themes that impact most if not all of the activities we support and influence what we fund and how we award funding, and they also provide a framework to measure our impact.



OUR AMBITIONS

1. Content and activities supported by us reflect Wales

Priorities	What success looks like		
Support publishers who can demonstrate their commitment to investing in diverse content, authors and formats	English-language content fully reflects the diversity of Wales; is relevant to both Welsh and English speakers; is geographically and thematically varied; inspires readers of all ages; supports the reading for pleasure agenda	Welsh-language content fully reflects the diversity of Wales; gives the widest possible choice to readers; is of excellent quality whilst reflecting the differing reading habits of readers of all ages as well as reading ability and interests	Subcommittee membership is diverse and reflects Wales in the broadest sense to ensure robust decision-making
Invest in indigenous capacity to develop content made in Wales supplemented by adaptations only where they meet an identified strategic need	Tangible outputs-supported grants prioritize content that ensures fair representation in both languages; outputs reach intended audiences through tailored campaigns and targeted engagement	Expanded activities such as the Competition for Young Illustrators have nurtured and developed new talent for original picture book production	Stronger links with FEI and HEI (illustration, creative writing, etc.) have helped develop talent; publishing career is promoted as a viable career path
Encourage and reward risk-taking and experimentation, especially where there are identifiable gaps	Coproduced strategic innovative interventions with partners directly address specific gaps in provision; publishers trained to address these gaps	A measurable and significant uptake of grants by new participants	Adaptation of the concept of 'intelligent failure' that accepts that not all supported activities lead to desired outcomes, but may provide valuable learnings and opportunity for further development
Examine and challenge the power of incumbency	Incumbency is challenged in every tender process; guidelines and composition of panels enforce this principle; tenders are advertised in ways that are attractive to new and diverse applicants	A culture of self-reflection in the workplace embedded in the industry; ongoing training on unconscious bias, anti-racism, disability awareness for grant recipients	Continue open and transparent decision-making; principles of cultural contracts adopted and embedded by funded partners

OUR AMBITIONS

2. Our industry is successful and acts responsively

Priorities	What success looks like		
Business models that are flexible and agile and that do not solely rely on grants to publish content	Content priced at market rates; reflects industry standard discounts to remain competitive	Regular review of financial viability of business to ensure that only sustainable businesses are funded	Business proactively seeks commercial sponsorship, other third sector funders or crowd funding campaigns and proactively engages with national campaigns
Business that demonstrates long-term commitment to all communities in Wales and takes concrete steps to tackle underrepresentation	A measurable and significant increase of people from underrepresented groups employed or working freelance in the sector; increased representation on boards, committees and panels	Communications and brand values demonstrate that the sector is open and welcoming to all	Relevant funded content is marketed and sold internationally and creates new income streams for publishers
Companies that invest in talent development, skills and training, e.g. apprenticeships, and respect the people who contribute to their success	An industry which pays sufficiently to attract the best talent; that embraces fair pay and good working conditions	An industry which is seen as a vibrant profession, where training is provided to nurture all talents, including marketing, finance, project management and IT	An industry fully engaged with the reading for pleasure agenda; that prioritises good communication and stock management to facilitate national book gifting campaigns
Business that puts collaboration ahead of competition, understands the interdependency of the whole supply chain and respects all the partners within it	Expanded remit for sector organisations Cwlwm Cyhoeddwyr and Cyhoeddi Cymru/Publishing Wales with regards to training and international showcasing	In collaboration with the Booksellers Association of the UK and Ireland a networking and lobbying organisation for booksellers in Wales is established	Campaigns have enabled the sector to cooperate in collegial ways; digital assets that support all stakeholders in the supply chain
Companies which continue to adapt and innovate to maximize digital potential, working towards decarbonizing and robust IT structures	E-books and audio books are fully embedded as a core publishing activity and published regularly	Print-on-Demand facilities in Wales fully embedded and automated within the supply chain	Investment in new technology and systems; cyber security accreditation for all larger grant recipients

OUR AMBITIONS

3. In a reading nation everyone can be a reader

Priorities	What success looks like		
Advocate for universal annual book gifting to schools to be adopted as a core funding priority for Welsh Government	All schools receive an annual curated collection of titles in both languages for all key stages to ensure equitable access across both languages	Expert panel established to select an annual list of reading for pleasure titles in Welsh and English (in line with Curriculum for Wales priorities) to promote and increase engagement with reading in all schools in Wales	Curated book lists respond to specific needs and will include original content from Wales, adaptations into Welsh and titles on specific themes to address gaps in current provision
National 'Year of Reading' project	Coproduced with local communities and partners in both languages, with a particular focus on underrepresented communities	Measurable increase in reading activities, celebrations, festivals, catering for all age ranges through local facilitators	Substantial and measurable legacy in reading habits by participants evidenced through evaluation
Extend partnerships with libraries, facilitate connectivity with schools and access to books	Collaboration with stakeholders including local authorities to create a National Action Plan for Great School Libraries Cymru	Comprehensive review of school library provision in Wales carried out which identifies current provision and needs including network database	Expanded established programmes of activity (e.g. author events, School Reading Challenges, Quick Reads, World Book Day, Libraries' Summer Reading Challenge etc.) with increased regional reach and engagement
Partnerships with sports organisations to develop a reading engagement programme to reach adults	Coproduced content in both languages which is relevant to audiences enabled by surveys of club members, ascertaining current reading habits and opportunities and gaps in the current provision	Programme of innovative engagement activities delivered centering on role models celebrating and promoting the value of reading	A legacy of better community cohesion and connectivity across both languages through an extended network of book clubs

OUR AMBITIONS
4. Cymraeg For All

Priorities	What success looks like		
Continue to ensure that Welsh-language content is relevant across all ages by ensuring varied and diverse content, particularly for adult readers	Continued support for new publishing ventures by attracting new book and magazine publishers	Continued support for the training and upskilling of editors and leading to young people of diverse backgrounds entering the profession	Increased diversity within the workforce of commissioning editors through schemes such as paid internships or other training
Support the delivery of the new curriculum by focusing on existing and already funded structures in Wales	Initiated proven models to deliver educational content in a variety of formats equitably across both languages	Succeeded in advocating for an evidence-based approach for resources supporting Welsh as a second language	Content commissioned to fill identified gaps in Welsh-language provision in core subject areas and 'Wales in English' representation
Continue to invest in leisure titles that support adult learners of Welsh to accelerate language acquisition	Further collaboration with the National Centre for Learning Welsh ensuring close alignment to national standards	Commissioning of relevant learners content fully embedded in funded programmes	Regular research of new audiences through close cooperation with organisations who promote the Welsh language
Continue to invest in Welsh-language news services	Majority of content is original and not translated	Increased reach of younger people and diverse communities through innovative delivery channels	Closer cooperation with partners such as S4C and BBC

OUR AMBITIONS

5. Our connections with communities make them resilient and address existing inequalities

Priorities	What success looks like		
Coproduce and pilot reading promotion initiatives with communities across Wales	Engaged with community groups and enabled them to lead on cocreation of programmes	Worked with new partners to understand and address barriers to reading amongst a range of priority audiences	Increased connectivity with local businesses acting as sponsors and established fundraising opportunities
Invest in research and evaluation on what works where and why to better inform future projects	Research draws on best practice principles	Relevant findings are implemented in a measurable and timely way	All projects have been either externally or internally evaluated and learnings are shared with partners
Create partnerships with community organisers, service providers and businesses	Increased collaboration with partners such as housing associations, Mentrau Iaith, Transport for Wales to reach new audiences	Succeeded in platforming independent booksellers as community hubs and as a vital component of town centre regeneration	Collaboration with Fusion has increased community reach of Quick Reads/ Stori Sydyn programme

KEY CONNECTING THEMES

Healthy Habits

The positive impact reading has on mental health and well-being had already been well documented, but the COVID crisis emphasized these benefits further. A habit of reading improves memory and cognitive ability, and has a greater determining impact on educational attainment than socio-economic background, enhancing people's life chances in tangible ways. The ability to read is therefore foundational to creating citizens that embrace lifelong learning, and we believe that the teaching of reading should be centered in the new curriculum and that teachers themselves should become enthusiastic readers. Reading is also a cornerstone for language acquisition as it builds vocabulary and confidence for Welsh learners of all ages. Reading has been proven to provide the mental stimulation that can slow the development of Alzheimer's and dementia.

Equality and Diversity

The current make-up of the book industry, like many other creative industries, does not adequately reflect our society. Structural barriers such as a lack of access to an industry that is over-reliant on informal networks are compounded by a lack of visible role models from underrepresented communities. We are looking to adapt proven models, such as ring-fenced paid internships or foundational start-up support, to increase representation within our industry. Increasing representation in all our structures is a key priority. As a charity we naturally depend on the sizeable contribution of volunteers to deliver fair and impartial funding decisions. However, where unpaid work forms a material barrier to potential subcommittee members we will consider compensating for loss of earnings and providing IT equipment to enable participation.

Digital vs Print?

The publishing industry has undergone rapid transformation in the last two decades, but unlike the music industry still has its foundation in a hybrid model where both physical and digital outputs have remained equally relevant. Digital innovation has allowed existing publishers to experiment and find new income streams, and the use of social media continues to increase in importance in connecting with new audiences. Digital formats play an important role in increasing accessibility. At the same time, sales of print titles in the UK have increased dramatically as consumers seek respite from screen-based remote working and learning. Libraries are still heavily reliant on print titles to provide community services as digital lending continues to be expensive and fraught with difficulties. It is estimated that 10% of households in Wales are digitally excluded and that those in social housing are disproportionately affected.

Climate & Nature Emergency

The publishing industry plays a key role in disseminating quality information and makes an important contribution to creating well-informed citizens. The industry has started to decarbonize its supply chain, but more needs to be done and we are committed to further improving our performance with the ultimate aim of achieving zero carbon status in future. Superficially, digital content may appear the environmentally friendlier alternative to printed books and magazines but some lifecycle experts state that the amount of energy, water and raw materials needed to make a single e-reader is equal to that of 40 to 50 books, whilst the emissions created by a single e-reader are equal to roughly 100 books. Other considerations are the proven longevity of printed books, that they can be shared easily, reused and recycled, and the spatial and tactile cues from printed materials which lead to better comprehension and greater content absorption.

OUR FUNCTIONS

We are a development organisation, a funder, a service provider, a reading promotion agency, and an advocate.

Development

We provide the strategic direction to determine funding priorities and draw on the sector expertise of colleagues and the more than 50 volunteers on our Trustee Board, subcommittees and judging panels. It is their deep understanding of the particular and differing needs of the two language constituencies which informs their discussions and decision-making. We also coordinate strategic interventions to address specific gaps in provision, e.g., the reissuing of classics (Library of Wales), books for Welsh learners (Amdani), and social prescribing titles on mental health and well-being (Darllen yn Well).

Funding

We distribute funding to the publishing industry on behalf of Welsh Government. Funding applications for print and digital content, books, magazines and platforms are discussed and decided upon by independent subcommittees whose decision-making process is aided by external reader reports or specialist assessment for marketing.

Services

The services we provide are in support of the industry as a whole in response to a lack of capacity within the sector and are typically provided on a costed albeit subsidised basis, e.g., warehousing, distribution, sales, editorial, design, digital platforms and data management. All profits from services provided are reinvested into the sector.

Reading Promotion

In partnership with UK charities, we deliver UK-wide reading promotion programmes and activities such as World Book Day, the Summer Reading Challenge or Empathy Day by ensuring a bilingual offer and equitable treatment of both Welsh and English.

Advocacy & Influencing

We are passionate about the industry we serve and can demonstrate that books directly benefit other creative sectors by providing the stories that are made into plays, films, performances, TV productions and games. We work with others who share this belief to raise the profile of books as cultural goods that impact positively on education, health, the Welsh language and the economy.

WORKING IN PARTNERSHIP

Our organisation is only one part of Wales's literary and book ecosystem and effective partnerships are therefore central to our success. In response to our very broad remit our constituency of partners is very wide, but we retain a focus on **common goals** to maximize our impact.

Our main sponsor is **Welsh Government**, and we are funded directly by **Creative Wales** which is located in the Department for Arts and Sports. Given the scope of our work we directly contribute to all of Creative Wales's key priorities whilst also closely collaborating with several other sections such as Education, Welsh Language, Health and Economy.

Our **Reading Promotion programmes**, funded by the Education Department of Welsh Government, are partly delivered in partnership with World Book Day, The Reading Agency, BookTrust Cymru, EmpathyLab and Read for Good. These programmes are typically coproduced with libraries and schools and build on existing services such as a schools officers, content through gwales.com and e-book dissemination via ffolio.cymru. Building on existing relationships with trade unions, commercial partners and other third sector organisations will allow us to extend these activities further.

Our **national cultural organisations** such as Arts Council of Wales, Amgueddfa Cymru, Literature Wales, National Library of Wales and Cadw are natural partners, and our collaborations cover not only cultural engagement but also business, sales and distribution support.

Whilst we are the main funder of the book industry in Wales, which includes the **business associations** Cwlwm Cyhoeddwyr and Cyhoeddi Cymru/Publishing Wales (CCPW), our success depends on ongoing creative engagement with anyone we fund and we therefore believe in open collaboration and coproduction as fundamental principles for our work.

We participate in the exchange of ideas, learnings and joint activities of all organisations which have a focus on the **promotion of the Welsh language** such as the National Centre for Learning Welsh, Mudiad Meithrin, Merched y Wawr, Ffermwyr Ifanc et al.

Close collaboration with **local and national festivals**, such as Eisteddfod Genedlaethol, Urdd Eisteddfod, Hay Festival, Tafwyl, Gŵyl Arall and Royal Welsh Agricultural Show, is essential in reaching audiences and we are continuing to expand our partnerships to have the widest possible reach.

We foster close relationships with **local authorities and education consortia** in recognition of the differing priorities and needs of a country as diverse and geographically distinct as Wales.

Partnerships with print, broadcast and digital media, which include the BBC, S4C, Radio Wales, Radio Cymru, AM Platform, and national and local news outlets including hyperlocal providers such as the *papurau bro*, allow us to amplify the marketing and promotion activities of publishers and booksellers, to highlight the value of reading and to promote the winners of the annual Tir na n-Og Children's Book Awards. We coordinate an annual feature, the Wales Country Focus, in *The Bookseller* magazine, the most widely read industry magazine which also has substantial international reach.

We support **international showcasing of the publishing industry** at bookfairs such as Frankfurt, London and Bologna by working closely with Wales Arts International, Wales Literature Exchange, Literature Across Frontiers, Literature Wales and Wales PEN Cymru.

We represent Wales within the wider **British and international publishing sectors** by engaging with the Independent Publishers Guild, Booksellers Association, *The Bookseller* magazine, Publishing Scotland and Publishing Ireland.

OUR GOVERNANCE STRUCTURE

Founded in 1961, the Books Council of Wales is a charitable incorporated organisation (CIO) governed by a board of independent trustees, accountable to the Charities Commission.

Our Board operates in accordance with our Constitution and Terms of Reference and a trustee is assigned to each subcommittee considering their particular skill set. Trustees and subcommittee members are appointed via an open recruitment process and serve for a set term as outlined in our Constitution. It is possible to co-opt members to address a specific area of expertise as required.

The Welsh- and English-language Publishing Development Subcommittees determine how funding is awarded with our officers providing administrative support. The other two subcommittees have a purely advisory function, supporting the Children's Books & Reading Promotion and Communications & Marketing departments.

OUR TEAM

The Management Team of the Books Council is led by the Chief Executive and includes the Head of Business & Corporate, Head of Distribution & IT, Head of Publishing Development, Head of Children's Books & Reading Promotion and Head of Communications, Marketing & Design.

All our colleagues are highly valued as we fully appreciate their unique contributions to our endeavours; publishing development cannot succeed without a logistics infrastructure that offers industry standard services. Staff well-being and work-life balance is a key consideration in our decision-making, and we continually adapt our policies and training opportunities to reflect this principle.

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