

Welsh Books Council support for digital activities

e-Books

For book publishers the main digital output naturally is the e-book and WBC support for those began in 2011/12 with a view to incentivize early adoption of e-book production amongst publishers. Ringfenced support for e-books ceded two years ago in view of cuts to grants and the fact that the conversion costs for text based books have decreased. Of 1,631 e-books currently available on gwales.com, 353 are in Welsh.

Initially the number of grant applications varied considerably in the two languages, with the majority of applications coming from English-language publishers which was an accurate reflection of the market: some English-language publishers sold well through Amazon daily deals and whilst sales were comparatively impressive, income and profit were mostly small due to huge cut taken by Amazon. Since Amazon occupies the consumer market for e-books by over 80% other business opportunities for e-books are extremely limited. Most English language publishers now accept that the market expectation is that e-books should be available as a matter of course without receiving specific grants for them. However, the early opportunities of rapid sales growth no longer exists due to Amazon changing the terms and conditions of the daily deals and a recent marketing push to promote audio books instead of e-books.

Only a minority of Welsh language publishers experimented with e-books at the outset and even at the height of the e-book boom sales of Welsh-language titles remained very modest. In response to the market realities very few Welsh-language publishers believe that e-books present a viable business model for them, and those who continue to offer e-books only convert a small number of carefully selected titles.

Audio Books

Recently WBC responded positively to calls from one publisher to produce audio books – the initial feed-back on the venture is that again the process can be cumbersome, costly and time-consuming with very little monetary reward (the dominance of Amazon/Audible in the field makes it difficult to justify the investment when sales are very small). Another publisher, who received grant support for the initial adaptation of David Walliams' *Gangsta Granny* (*Nana Grwca* by Atebol) recorded the book in partnership with the RNIB and were highly commended in an international audio-book ceremony in New York.

Magazines

In addition to production grants for e-books we also developed three platforms to assist publishers to publish e-books such as EPUB, iOS and Flash. These were available to both Welsh- and English-language publishers and a parallel service was also established for the magazines in both languages, the latter however did prove not to be financially viable at the time for magazine publishers and they moved on to explore other models.

We actively encourage the magazines we support to consider a holistic approach to the digital/ analogue reach of their publications with regards to promotion, marketing and content. All publications have an element of web / social media presence. The most innovative, namely *O'r*

Pedwar Gwynt, *New Welsh Review*, *The Welsh Agenda* have a thoroughly integrated digital/analogue approach to publishing whilst *Wales Arts Review* is a “born digital” publication.

Welsh-language supported magazine titles have been actively encouraged to subscribe to the Welsh libraries e-zines and some early take up is now in evidence.

Golwg 360 is a Welsh-language digital news service we support and is a vital part of the plurality of Welsh-language news production (likewise, in a very sparse landscape, it is equally important to the plurality of voices who play a part in Welsh civic society in both languages). This started out as a purely web-based service but, through our support and encouragement, now measures its reach through FB, Twitter, SoundCloud and YouTube as well as website traffic.

Apps

Grants specifically for Welsh-language apps were provided between 2014 and 2016. 14 offers were made for children’s books apps, but five of those were not taken up. On the whole publishers found the business model almost impossible to justify, with the development process cumbersome and very time-consuming whilst the monetary rewards are small due to the depressed price points of apps. In the case of the Welsh Language the commercial issue is compounded further by the dominance of S4C’s high-quality apps for children which are all available for free so consumers are reluctant to pay for such content.

Other digital formats

Support was also given to uploading audio-clips onto websites to help parents and learners with pronunciation of Welsh words, audio books, Vooks and CD-ROMS.

Marketing

Marketing grants increasingly include elements of digital marketing, incorporating audio and video for use on social media. This is especially true of children’s books, and WBC actively encourages publishers to engage with innovative ways of using social media and recently offered training courses in Cardiff and Aberystwyth which were attended by both English- and Welsh-language publishers.

Likewise the WBC are providing and are developing our digital services to the industry by using FB, Twitter, YouTube, Instagram and gwales.com which provides a platform for world-wide sales and information dissemination. We promote titles, provide a platform for reviewing and share and retweet promotion and marketing materials posted by publishers, booksellers, authors, libraries, schools and other book sector organisations. In recognition of the ever changing way readers and consumers engage with content, and to allow for greater flexibility of how we and publishers promote titles, a major investment in new systems at WBC is crucially important and we hope that we will be able to secure Welsh Government support to realise our ambitions.