

Cynulliad Cenedlaethol Cymru / National Assembly for Wales
Pwyllgor Diwylliant, y Gymraeg a Chyfathrebu / The Culture, Welsh Language and
Communications Committee
Independent Review of Support for Publishing and Literature in Wales
Ymateb gan Paul Doyle, Swyddog Llythrennedd Plant Llyfrgelloedd Castell-nedd Port Talbot /
Evidence from Paul Doyle, Children's Literacy Officer (Neath Port Talbot Library Services)

I am aware that the Committee will soon be discussing Professor Medwin Hughes' report into literature and publishing in Wales. Published earlier this year the report called for a number of functions to be withdrawn from Literature Wales and handed to the Welsh Books Council. In response, the Minister issued a statement, which in my opinion was hasty and, having been present at events where the Minister has spoken passionately about the value of writing, surprising. I struggle to believe that the Minister had read the full report at the time of the statement. Had he done so he would have read a report that contradicted much of what he said.

Much has been said about the Report as you will no doubt be aware. I am not going to go into it here but will say that I do share the reservations that have been widely expressed. It is hard not to read it and see a bias and also a rather clumsy attempt to justify cuts to arts and literature funding in Wales. Wales deserves better.

The main reason I want to write to you ahead of the Committee's discussions is to give a personal account of my own experience of working alongside Literature Wales, specifically the South Wales Literature Project and Writers on Tour.

My role as Children's Literacy and Reader Development Officer for Neath Port Talbot Library Services often sees me working alongside professional writers, delivering a range of projects to adults, but mainly to children throughout the County. Since 2009, when I started creating and delivering projects, I have worked closely with the South Wales Literature Project and Writers on Tour and for that matter the Welsh Books Council. (Incidentally it was surprising that during the consultation process for the Report library colleagues weren't consulted directly by the panel. Furthermore 'librarian' was omitted from the list of background choices on the online form. Libraries have worked with both organisations for many years and I am sure would have helped the panel greatly had they been approached.) Working with Literature Wales has given Neath Port Talbot Library Service the opportunity to deliver targeted projects that would not have been possible without their support. This is largely due to the work undertaken by the staff responsible for the South Wales Literature Project. Their approach has been very proactive, putting Literature Wales and creative writing on the front line, working directly with the members of the public. It is a huge strength. To lose this would be a terrible blow and a serious

backwards step. For all their qualities this is something that the Welsh Books Council will not be able to deliver. It is not what they do. To hand over responsibility to the WBC based on this Report and nothing else is wrong.

Let me outline briefly some of the activities that have taken place in Neath Port Talbot as a result of Literature Wales' input.

1. Working with the Minority Ethnic Achievement Support team to deliver a sustained creative writing project with secondary school girls from black, Asian and minority ethnic backgrounds.
2. Working with Arts Development to put together a programme of creative writing opportunities targeting NEETS.
3. Working with Communities First to deliver a project with the then Young Person's Laureate, Catherine Fisher. This saw children from Cwmafan work closely with Catherine to create a film based on one of Catherine's books. The film was shown to the public at Cwmafan Library.
4. Working with the Abertawe Bro Morgannwg Health Trust on a creative writing project aimed at patients suffering from long term pain conditions.
5. Working with a Welsh language group and author Ioan Kidd on a range of writing.
6. Working alongside the library service on a number of school based projects aimed at children with additional learning needs, more able and talented children and boys struggling to engage with school. In addition teacher training sessions have also been created helping teachers to become better equipped to work creatively with their children.
7. Delivering, in partnership with Seren and the Library Service, a full day of poetry workshops in Neath. The day also featured Gillian Clarke in her role as National Poet.

This list isn't a full picture of activities over the last few years.

On top of all this activity the Library Service has benefited from the Writers on Tour programme. Like every other library service in Wales our budgets have been cut over successive years. This has had a detrimental effect on our ability to bring in writers to work with adults and children. Whereas a few years ago there was money

in the system, now there is not. It saddens me that this is the case. Visit a school where they have a visiting author and see for yourself the positive effect it has on the children. But be quick as these days are few and far between. However, via Writers on Tour we are able to deliver the odd author visit. Next month a group of Glynneath children will benefit from a day of writing and storytelling with the incomparable Michael Harvey. This is made possible because of Writers on Tour. Why hand all this over to the Books Council who have no experience of working with writers to deliver projects such as this. It does not make sense.

You may have guessed that this is very close to my heart. I work in schools almost every day of term time. I am passionate about given children the opportunity to be creative through reading, writing and storytelling. This was non-existent when I was a boy growing up in Sandfields. And this passion I have was riled when reading the Report to see that the work I mentioned above was given one derisory line in the whole document. It was dismissed out of hand as though it did not matter. Not just work in Neath Port Talbot but work in Merthyr, Caerphilly, Newport, pioneering work with Cardiff City and so on.

I do hope that this helps to inform the Committee when the time for discussion comes. The whole process is a botched job aimed at cutting spending. A Report such as this cannot be allowed to set the future direction of literature in Wales. The Minister's statement was wrong and misinformed.