

FAO: Cabinet Secretary for Economy and Infrastructure

Chair of the Culture, Welsh Language and Communications Committee

Literature Wales – Reply to the Panel Chair’s Response

We are pleased finally to receive Professor Medwin Hughes (MH)’s response to the submissions of Literature Wales (LW), the Arts Council of Wales (ACW), and the Welsh Books Council (WBC). Below is our response to that document, which relate specifically to the Report produced by MH and the Panel. LW remains committed to working constructively with the Cabinet Secretary and the key stakeholders to enhance and develop a more closely-connected literature sector in Wales.

Out-dated information & selective evidence

A number of the detailed questions we asked remain not fully answered in the Panel’s response. Of greater concern, however, is the fact that the Panel *reveals itself to be justifying its conclusions based on a) information that is years out of date, and b) a narrow field of evidence*. Worryingly, what the Panel has given the Cabinet Secretary here is a post-hoc justification – a case of reverse engineering based on outdated information. The Cabinet Secretary should understand that no attempt has been made in this response to assess and acknowledge *the current state of play and the robustness of activities going forward*. In short, the response is as misleading as the initial report, and misadvises Welsh Government.

We need to be absolutely clear what the foundation of the response is. The Panel quotes from two documents: the Arad Report (published in December 2015) and ACW’s Annual Review and Investment Review reports on LW (from June and September 2015). *Both of these were assessments at a certain point in time, with significant institutional and sectoral developments and robust enhancements implemented and acknowledged since they appeared*. It is clear, however, that MH and the Panel have chosen not to take into account, nor bring to the Cabinet Secretary’s attention, *developments that were strongly and unambiguously articulated by both ACW and LW during the review process*. Through these updates, the Panel would have been able to see that many of the key recommendations and concerns raised in these two documents *had already been acted on*. Much of what is quoted as ‘evidence’ is out of date, out of context, or irrelevant.

(a) The Arad Report

The response from MH begins with an excessive and distorted emphasis on the Arad Report. *It is significant that this document was barely referred to in the initial report*. It should be remembered that the Arad review had a specific focus – enhanced international working in the literature sector. It did not, and was not intended to, review the full landscape of literature support and activity in Wales. The objectives of this research were to map current international activities and examine existing partnerships and international collaborative work between key organisations. *The findings therefore related to a range of organisations, not LW alone*. To co-opt this report as a mainstay of its attack on Literature Wales is unacceptable.

The key stakeholders have responded to the recommendations presented in the Arad report and significant progress has since been made. In particular, ACW has led on establishing an International Literature Stakeholder Group Wales, which first met in September 2016. *There is no mention of this in the Panel’s response*. As well as LW, WBC and ACW, the group also includes Wales Arts International (WAI), Literature Across Frontiers (LAF), Welsh Literature Exchange (WLE), Wales Pen

Cymru and British Council Wales (BCW). This collaborative model is working well, and progress was reported to the Panel, including work on a joint Welsh presence at London Bookfair 2018.

Elin Haf Gruffydd Jones, Chair of WLE, has been present at these strategy group meetings, many of which took place while the Review was underway. *Elin Haf Gruffydd Jones is MH's Vice-Chair and would have had access to the progress which should have played a significant role in how the Panel viewed the position of the Arad Report.* The fact that this information was not shared or considered once again poses significant questions concerning the transparency and independence of the Review process.

(b) ACW Assessments

The Panel seeks to undermine in a most divisive manner the relationship between ACW and one of its Arts Portfolio Wales (APW) clients. *Again, the evidence cited is fundamentally out of date,* and refers to ACW assessments from 2015; the Panel fails to take note of updates and contemporary evidence provided by both ACW and LW. Monitoring by ACW of its APW clients is thorough and robust, and there are clear processes in place to support development where needed. *LW was reassured that in April 2017, the only recognised risk to the organisation that placed it within the 'red risk' category – as was recently made clear to the Culture, Welsh Language and Communications Committee – was the very fact that the sector was awaiting the (delayed) Hughes report.* The absurdity of the Panel's logic is evidenced by the fact *that it cites ACW's robustness in identifying areas where LW could improve and enhance its activities, only then to say that the ACW cannot be trusted to be robust and impartial.* It is for the Cabinet Secretary to judge whether ACW's monitoring arrangements are sufficient and effective, and whether APW clients are delivering on the objectives agreed in their Remit letter. The evidence in LW's case has been published. It is also for the Cabinet Secretary to judge whether the Panel's explicit accusation that ACW is not objective is professional and acceptable.

General

While ignoring the more recent accounts of LW's progress and development, the Panel admits that it drafted its recommendations in response to its concerns over 'systemic issues', rather than by considering the benefit and impact of transferring most of LW's functions according to the terms of reference as set by the Cabinet Secretary. Once again, the Panel does not seem to understand the aims, impact and value of significant areas of work that it suggests be transferred.

This response from the Panel seems again to confirm a biased approach from the outset, with an unwillingness to consider a broad evidence base. The range of letters from individuals and organisations both from within and beyond the literature sector attest to the value of LW's work, and also to its vision of a connected sector and its open, collaborative approach.

We trust that our response provides the Cabinet Secretary and the Culture, Welsh Language and Communications Committee with a *balanced and up-to-date view* that the Panel's brash report and anachronistic response simply do not provide. We also hope that key stakeholders in the sector will be given the opportunity to look to the future for a strategic, connected approach that will deliver for the people of Wales.

Literature Wales, 02/10/17