

IFRCS31 Claire Furlong, Executive Director, Literature Wales

Senedd Cymru | Welsh Parliament

Pwyllgor Diwylliant, Cyfathrebu, y Gymraeg, Chwaraeon, a Chysylltiadau Rhyngwladol | Culture, Communications, Welsh Language, Sport, and International Relations Committee

Effaith Gostyngiadau Cyllid ar Ddiwylliant a Chwaraeon | Impact of Funding Reductions for Culture and Sport

Ymateb gan: Claire Furlong, Cyfarwyddwr Gweithredol, Llenyddiaeth Cymru | Evidence from: Claire Furlong, Executive Director, Literature Wales

1. What impacts has reduced funding had on your organisation and sector so far?

Actual funding cut: Literature Wales received a 2.5% reduction in our multi-year grant funding from Arts Council Wales. Our application had asked for an increase of 7% in the first year (raising to an increase of 11% by the third year). This will limit our growth and our ambition in delivering literary activity.

Indirectly, the reduced funding has had a myriad of knock-on effects.

Our relationship with the Arts Council: The 10.5% cut to ACW has led to a reduction in staffing levels and has impacted our working relationship. For example, our Lead Officer at ACW is now unable to routinely attend our Board Meetings, the best forum to share information on each other's major updates. We fear that this will lead to less understanding of the impact of our work within ACW, which could in turn lead to further reduced funding. Also, we worry that with their reduced senior leadership team, those in positions of power at the organisation do not have the capacity to be fully informed about the sector, meaning they are unable to advocate for it effectively. There is a sense within the arts sector that the Arts Council are under pressure, and should not be disturbed unless absolutely necessary. This is not a healthy relationship in the long term. We are still waiting for their over-due Strategic Plan to help guide us as a sector, and a sector-wide plan or guidance on advocating for the arts.

Cost of Living: Whilst our core grant had a smaller reduction than many of our peers, it has still come at a time when the impact of rising costs is taking hold. Our

programme running costs have increased dramatically. Paying freelance writers and staff is our main expense and we have prioritised paying fair fees for both groups. We have also been faced with increases to overheads and running costs, such as electricity, our unit prices going from an average of 13p/kWh in 2019 to 37p/kWh 2022, an increase of 175%.

Fortunately, we have managed to diversify our income sources over the last few years, meaning that we are able to keep operating and have not yet needed to make redundancies or drastically reduce our opportunities for freelance writers. However, we have cut back on new programmes and aspirations for growth. Funding from other sources is becoming increasingly difficult to secure: for example, The Jerwood Foundation received 247 applications in its latest round (summer 2024) and awarded just 12 grants. The Paul Hamlyn Foundation had £6m available for its latest round but received applications totalling over £66 million.

Some of these increased costs have led to the need to increase Tŷ Newydd course fees, impacting accessibility for those on low income. There is a danger that other venues and organisations will need to follow suit, endangering our combined belief that everyone in Wales should have an equal access to the arts. We try our best to offer free activities and bursaries where possible, but we depend on course fees as an income stream to keep Tŷ Newydd open, and our tutors well-paid.

2. What measures have you taken in light of it, such as changing what you do and how you do it?

Currently we have several projects on hold or reduced that were due to start this year, such as the National Writing Squads (a national network of regular creative writing activity for young people) which could have had a huge impact on young people across Wales.

3. To what extent will these impacts be irreversible (e.g. venues closing, or specialist skills being lost rather than a temporary restriction in activities)?

Currently we have made no irreversible changes. Although you could argue that by delaying initiatives that impact the creative development of children and writers, we have made irreversible changes to our potential impact.

However, further cuts would lead to a reduction in staff, with specialist skills and experience lost. Our capacity to continue to run the Tŷ Newydd Writing Centre would also be called in question.

There is also potential to lose key ambassadorial roles for Wales (such as the National Poet or Children's Laureate) which are publicly funded, and hard to fundraise for from private sources.

Already our National Poet scheme feels like a "lite" version when compared to similar roles across the world which are provided with significant and stable public funding, for their role in the public life and culture of a country.

We are also concerned that many of our freelance writers are giving up their work as artists, and seeking contracted 9.00 am – 5.00 pm type-roles to ensure stability. This limits the pool of creative potential, and we suspect that artists practicing other artforms are doing the same.

'You can't make a living as a writer working in Welsh. For 10 years I was freelance, but once I became a mother, I took a part-time job at a publisher as a creative editor, so I work part-time and write the rest of the time'. Respondent to Literature Wales/Aberystwyth University's 2023 report into writer fees in Wales.

4. What interventions would you like to see from the Welsh Government, beyond increased funding?

Advocacy for the arts, and a national conversation about the important role of the arts within other sectors such as health and well-being, tourism and education.

5. To what extent do the impacts you describe fall differently on people with protected characteristics and people of a lower socioeconomic status?

We have had to make difficult decisions regarding accessibility and inclusion. For example, following training in deaf awareness, we piloted creating BSL flyers for writer development courses, initially those that were specifically targeted at D/deaf or disabled writers. This approach was successful, and we had hoped to make it standard practice, as we do with dyslexia friendly documents, but as it is an expensive process we have been unable to expand this pilot.

Research we conducted in 2023, showed that 76% of writers earned less than £10,000pa with many reporting that their careers were possible due to additional

support, including 83% of Welsh language writers reporting that it was necessary for them to have another job alongside their writing career. The uncertainty of a career as a freelance artist will be even more difficult for individuals from a lower socioeconomic status – with a sector-wide danger that a career as a freelance artists will become something for the privileged.

Also: see answer above regarding Tŷ Newydd course fees.

6. Do you have any other points you wish to raise within the scope of this inquiry?