

# THE WELSH BOOKS COUNCIL AND THE SOURCING AND PURCHASING OF WELSH-LANGUAGE BOOKS IN LIBRARIES IN WALES: A REVIEW WITH RECOMMENDATIONS

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## Executive summary

- 1 This study was commissioned by the Welsh Books Council in order to ascertain whether there are ways of improving the sourcing and purchasing of Welsh-language books in libraries in Wales, and also to establish the nature of the demand for large print books and spoken word material in Welsh in public libraries.
- 2 The study encompasses all Welsh public library authorities, and the libraries of Higher Education institutions and Further Education colleges in Wales.
- 3 The study established that libraries in Wales are heavily dependent on the services provided by the Welsh Books Council for the purposes of sourcing and purchasing Welsh-language books, and that they use a combination of the approval collection service, the monthly lists of new publications and *gwales.com*. Orders are normally supplied through local bookshops, and libraries in Wales, particularly public libraries, appreciate the relationship with bookshops and wish to sustain it. In addition, libraries in all sectors source and purchase Welsh-language material by other means, such as the service provided by major library suppliers, even though they are only able to provide access to a limited amount of the total output.
- 4 The procedures and processes used to source and purchase Welsh-language books compare unfavourably with the best services available and offered by major library suppliers in England and elsewhere, especially as so few aspects of current practice are based on technology. Current methods used in libraries in Wales to source and purchase Welsh-language books have certain strengths but also weaknesses, and there is an opportunity to improve the service, especially as much of the necessary technological infrastructure already exists in libraries in Wales.
- 5 Libraries in Wales suggest that the process of modernising and improving the sourcing and purchasing procedures for Welsh-language books should be based on extended use of ICT.
- 6 This report recommends that the necessary improvements and developments for the sourcing and purchasing of Welsh-language materials in libraries should be based on *gwales.com*, the interactive website developed by the Welsh Books Council for bookshops and individual book buyers. It is recommended that a bespoke section for libraries be developed that would address the needs identified by this study, and that the proposed section of the website for libraries should be integrated with the section for bookshops. That would streamline and simplify present arrangements, and offer the possibility of providing service enhancements. Such a development would also safeguard the stronger elements of the present arrangements.
- 7 Funding of £80,000 will be necessary to develop the website for the needs of libraries, and it is recommended that an application for funds should be made forthwith to CyMAL, the division within the Assembly Government responsible for the strategic development of libraries in Wales. The recommendations of this report appear to share the same aims and objectives as CyMAL's initial strategic plan for libraries in Wales issued in 2005, especially the resource discovery stream and the development of additional online information services. This

proposed development would also modernise libraries in Wales and improve services for their users.

- 8 In respect of large print books and audio books (or spoken word material), the study establishes a need for such material in Welsh in libraries. The report recommends that the spoken word production programme should be enhanced and accelerated, and further recommends that the production of large print books in Welsh be recommenced, even though the number of copies that library services in Wales are likely to purchase are limited and will offer a significant challenge in terms of funding a viable production programme of material of the highest quality.

## **Introduction**

### ***Purpose of the study***

This study was commissioned by the Welsh Books Council in October 2004. Its purpose was to seek answers to a number of key questions pertaining to the relationship between the Welsh Books Council and libraries in Wales in relation to the sourcing and purchase of Welsh-language books, such as

- Do libraries in Wales receive the necessary information about Welsh-language books and materials?
- Who has the responsibility for selecting and purchasing Welsh-language materials in each authority or institution?
- What are the primary supply sources currently used?
- What are the strengths and weaknesses of the current processes?
- Are there ways of achieving improvements?
- How can the Welsh Books Council ensure that Welsh-language books and other related materials reach libraries quickly and efficiently?

From the outset the parameters of the study included Welsh-language materials for adults and children and in the various formats now available in Welsh.

In addition, it was necessary to consider other aspects of library provision and services as they are relevant to the core issues under review, such as

- the current position regarding library management systems in use in libraries in Wales, and their ability to receive and process bibliographic data;
- the extent to which libraries have access to EDI software and systems, and the extent to which they are being used;
- what is the extent and nature of the demand for large print books in Welsh in libraries?

### ***Other parameters***

Even though the initial parameters for the study referred specifically to public library authorities in the context of sourcing and purchasing Welsh-language materials, and to the relationship between them and the Welsh Books Council, it was agreed that this study should be extended to include the libraries of Higher and Further Education institutions in Wales, for reasons which will be noted later in the body of the report. However, the primary emphasis of the discussion in the report relates to public library authorities in Wales and it also seeks to provide key information concerning the current position in that sector, and to offer recommendations as to how the situation could be strengthened.

### ***The methodological approach***

In order to achieve the objectives of the study, each and every one of the 22 public library authorities in Wales were visited, and an interview (based on a series of

structured questions related to the key issues identified above) was conducted with the head of the service together with those librarians most closely concerned with the issues under review, namely the sourcing and purchasing of Welsh-language materials. By that means, discussions were held with a total of 52 persons in the sector. In addition, a structured questionnaire was designed and distributed to the libraries of all 11 Higher Education institutions in Wales. It sought information relating to the key questions listed above from the head of the services and the persons most directly concerned with sourcing and purchasing of Welsh-language collections. It also invited comments on the present provision and suggestions regarding improvements that may be necessary or desirable. Every one of the institutions responded and contributed to the study. Finally, twelve Further Education institution libraries in Wales were selected to participate in the study (out of a total of twenty in the sector that were regarded as relevant to this particular study) to represent the range of institutions in the sector providing studies in the arts and humanities. The sample included Tertiary institutions, colleges selected on the basis of their geographical distribution and relative size and location within Welsh-speaking areas, colleges offering A Level and Baccalaureate studies, colleges offering courses validated by Higher Education establishments in Wales and so on. Four were visited and the remaining eight were surveyed by means of a structured telephone interview procedure involving the heads of services and those concerned with the sourcing and purchasing of Welsh-language materials, again asking questions related to the key issues noted above.

This study also involved some desk research and reference to reports and documents relevant to the field of study.

### *Acknowledgements*

The author of this report is grateful to all the libraries and librarians who contributed so willingly and constructively to the study, and to the staff of the Welsh Books Council for their support and guidance. The accuracy of the information in this report is, of course, the responsibility of the author, as are the recommendations, but the research revealed a remarkable consensus of views on the ways of achieving improvements.

## **1 Libraries in Wales and Welsh-language books**

It is appropriate at the commencement of a report such as this, and in this area, to indicate the factors that influence the work of libraries in Wales and the manner in which they operate. They can explain to a significant extent why certain policies and practices described in the report have been adopted, and an awareness of those factors is important in terms of the Welsh Books Council's response to the existing situation and to the recommendations offered by this report.

### *Some key factors*

#### *1.1 Welsh public libraries*

- 1.1.1 Following local government reorganisation in 1996, 22 library authorities were established in Wales. They vary greatly in terms of size (population served) and their resources. Generally it is possible to state that the resources allocated to them have been constrained, and expenditure on public library services in Wales has been consistently lower than average United Kingdom expenditure after 1996. Staffing levels are also lower and to an extent those factors explain why some practices, especially those relating to stock selection, have changed substantially in the recent period. The emphasis is on completing the task by the most convenient, simplest and cheapest means.
- 1.1.2 In recent times all local government services have been under the microscope. Various external and internal regulatory frameworks have been established to measure the quality of services, and the authorities have had to respond to the evidence revealed by those frameworks. In terms of internal quality assessment, a major emphasis on community planning, business planning and self-assessment and risk-assessment, has emerged. These frameworks followed reviews by internal and district auditors, but they also formed the response to the Best Value regime of the Audit Commission. Every library authority in Wales has undergone a review of some kind within the requirements of these frameworks in the last five years, and the resultant emphasis in service delivery is on creating convenient and cost-effective processes to serve communities, on securing value for money at every level and in every aspect of a library's work. The work of asking fundamental questions about the nature and quality of services continues.
- 1.1.3 In 2002 the Welsh Assembly Government introduced a range of Welsh Public Library Standards in order to ensure that every authority was meeting the requirements of the Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964. That Act places a statutory responsibility on library authorities for the provision of 'comprehensive and efficient' library services. Some of those Standards stipulated the levels of expenditure necessary, certain purchasing levels and annual additions to stock, and the manner in which stock should be replenished. The targets set were higher than those being achieved by authorities in Wales in 1998/99. In addition, one Standard

referred specifically to the levels of expected expenditure on Welsh-language materials. Authorities were required to spend

‘either a minimum of £1,000 per 1,000 Welsh-speaker population within their areas on the purchase, marketing and promotion of Welsh-language materials,

or

a minimum of 4% of the total library purchasing fund on the purchase, marketing and promotion of Welsh-language materials’.

Authorities in Wales were expected to achieve one or other of the clauses of that Standard by March 2005. It is not yet known whether that has happened, but in March 2004, most were anticipating that they would reach the particular clause of the Standard adopted by them by that date, and a number of authorities in predominantly Welsh-speaking areas were already achieving or exceeding the Standard. However, a number of authorities in the areas where Welsh-speakers are small in number were reporting that they were having some difficulty in planning their strategy for reaching the Standard as they did not have the necessary expertise in Welsh matters on the staff. That meant that it was difficult for them to ensure that they acquired the most appropriate materials for their libraries and their users of Welsh-language materials. A small number of authorities reported that some of the monies allocated for the purchase of Welsh-language materials remained unspent at the end of financial years, and that is clearly an unsatisfactory situation. Further reference will be made to this issue in other parts of this report.

The Standard relating to expenditure on Welsh-language materials forms the basis of purchasing policies in this area in every authority by now. It is likely that a new framework of Standards will be introduced from April 2005, with new targets to be met by March 2008, and an increase in the levels of expenditure on Welsh-language materials will be stipulated – either spending 4% of budgets (which have increased to an extent between 2002 and 2005), or £1050 for every 1,000 Welsh-speakers resident within the authority. Discussions are proceeding on the whole framework, but the continued use of a specific Welsh-language Standard in the second framework has received political support from the start of discussions, primarily because it relates well to other Assembly government policies in the area of the Welsh language.

The Standards framework is now administered by CyMAL: Museums Archives and Libraries Wales, which was established on 1 April 2004 as a policy division of the Welsh Assembly Government. In March 2005 CyMAL announced its Initial Strategic Development Programme for Libraries – ‘@Your Library’, and the work of developing the contribution of Welsh libraries will be channelled through that programme. It is important to note that the programme places considerable emphasis on promoting library services by means of a national marketing campaign, reader development and the provision of more online electronic library

services. A substantial amount of the programme's resources are to be allocated to work associated with 'resource discovery' processes and facilities online, and such a programme has a particular relevance to the matters under consideration in this study and to the future work of the Welsh Books Council.

- 1.1.4 The emphasis on obtaining value for money in public services and achieving effective purchasing methods has meant that library authorities in Wales are constantly seeking new strategies in terms of purchasing materials and obtaining the stock that will be offered to the public. One consequence of that process has been the establishment of cooperative or collaborative groups of authorities formed to promote certain aspects of services, and to purchase, process and obtain materials collaboratively. The primary emphasis in this field has been on collaboration in the purchase of English-language material, and very favourable arrangements have been established with certain library suppliers involving considerable reductions in prices and improved levels of servicing (jacketing, labelling, adding class marks, ownership marks and even the creation of catalogue entries, together with the provision of access to major supplier or systems databases and EDI). The field is by now a very competitive one, and if the supplier is able and prepared to supply Welsh-language materials (some are already doing so on a limited scale), then these developments are significant ones from the point of view of Welsh bookshops and their link with public libraries in Wales. There is some evidence that libraries in Wales are also using the services of internet booksellers on an occasional basis for special purposes, and that is also an important development in terms of the relationship between the Welsh Books Council, Welsh bookshops and public libraries in Wales.

Libraries that have participated in such schemes report that they are very satisfied with the levels of service obtained, and it would not be surprising if they were extended to more authorities, and they could become an even more important characteristic of the sector's method of working in the near future.

- 1.1.5 In such circumstances and because human resources are constrained, two other features have emerged. Firstly, the processes associated with selecting and ordering of English-language library materials have been greatly simplified, to the extent that many are now 'virtual' or online methods – libraries select their materials from online bibliographic and book trade databases, and the materials selected are ordered electronically. Visits to libraries by commercial representatives are now very rare events except for very specialised purposes, and librarians only visit library supplier centres on an occasional basis.

Secondly, libraries and library suppliers have arrived at a position whereby the needs and requirements of libraries in terms of stock, have been profiled, so that much of the book stock is obtained by standing orders. Many libraries, for instance, note in their profile of needs that they wish to obtain, as a matter of course, those books that appear in the

lists of best-sellers, those books that appear in the lists of titles selected for national and international prizes, together with the works of popular authors and works in popular genres and subject areas and so on. There is now only very limited title-by-title selection of English-language materials for libraries, and much greater dependence on a profiled supply service. By such means – referred to as ‘supplier selection’, the supply of materials arrives ready-serviced for use at very competitive prices.

However, for various reasons, primarily to do with ensuring that titles are suitable for library use (in terms of content and physical characteristics), long-standing custom and practice, the commitment to creating Welsh and Welsh-language collections of a suitable quality and so on, librarians in Wales at the present time prefer to view books in Welsh and relating to Wales before purchasing them, and give them special attention. There is therefore a considerable difference in the approaches adopted for selecting Welsh-language and non-Welsh material at the present time. Nevertheless, libraries in Wales are very anxious to arrive at a situation whereby a similar approach can be adopted to the selection and purchasing of all library materials, regardless of source, as this report will indicate. However, much work is necessary if such aspirations are to be realised.

In recent times some concern has been expressed as to the effect of ‘supplier selection’ on the overall quality of collections in public libraries. The response from libraries has been the introduction and application of a new approach to stock management and stock quality control – the stock quality health check approach. One particular methodology that could be applied to English-language fiction collections has already been developed by the Audit Commission, and there will be further work undertaken to develop similar mechanisms for other categories of library stock in the near future. If the second framework of Public Library Standards is introduced for Wales, as is expected, stock quality health checks will be a requirement for all collections, including Welsh-language collections.

- 1.1.6 In recent years there has been very substantial investment in ICT in all Welsh public library authorities by the Welsh Assembly Government (to link libraries to the broadband learning network), and by the New Opportunities Fund. The creation of the People’s Network has been a major success in terms of providing new facilities and services in public libraries, and in terms of enhancing staff skills. Many more users have been attracted to libraries even though traditional patterns of use have changed considerably. More people become members of public libraries, there is greater use of facilities and higher numbers of public visits are reported. However, borrowing levels have been falling for many years, but as a result of improving the quality of provision, by providing access to ICT and by extending convenient opening hours, there are now signs that Welsh public libraries are arresting the decline in the number of borrowings, and some can even point to small increases.

- 1.1.7 It would appear that the age-old problem in Welsh libraries – the lack of Welsh-speaking staff and staff who can manage Welsh-language collections of materials, remains. Indeed it is possible to argue that the situation has deteriorated as staff resources overall have declined as a result of financial constraints. Many authorities are afflicted by this problem, particularly in south Wales, but it is also a problem in other areas, such as the south-west and the north. This study obtained evidence that authorities are now seeking further cooperation in order to overcome the problem, using the skills of one authority in terms of the Welsh language to improve the services and facilities of others within a region. Any initiatives to improve the bibliographic services provided for Welsh public libraries by the Welsh Books Council should be mindful of this particular situation.
- 1.1.8 It is also significant that some librarians in Wales are still of the opinion that the supply of Welsh-language material that would be suitable for public libraries, especially in those authorities where the numbers of resident Welsh-speakers is small, remains erratic. However, many more librarians acknowledge that the situation has improved dramatically in recent times in terms of the suitability, quality and range of the output. The Welsh Books Council established an assessment panel comprising public librarians to review the output of the Welsh presses in 2002/03 and 2003/04 – the output produced under the new grant-awarding arrangements introduced by the Welsh Books Council. The report of that panel praises the range of materials now being produced for adults, and welcomed the increase in the numbers of novels published, together with the variety of non-fiction works produced.

In areas where the number of Welsh-speakers is limited, some librarians report that borrowing levels from Welsh-language collections are very low, and express a certain disappointment that they cannot justify allocating larger sums of money for the purpose of buying more Welsh-language material in such circumstances. Indeed there is some evidence that the public feel aggrieved that material in the Welsh language is purchased – possibly at the expense of a wider range of English-language material – and that is certainly a disappointment. In many of these authorities most of the financial resources are expended on material in Welsh for children and young people and on materials for Welsh learners, and they argue that those two areas are the only ones that reflect a sufficient level of interest among borrowers to justify investment in stock. It is reasonable to expect that the most recent publication programmes and support schemes will gradually percolate through the system, but all librarians in all parts of Wales are anxious to see the development of a marketing and promotion campaign for Welsh-language collections in libraries. Many librarians acknowledge that it is their own limitations in these areas and in terms of managing Welsh-language materials, that presents the most formidable barrier to development, and that is a very significant factor in our consideration of the manner in which the Books Council can meet the needs and aspirations of libraries in the future.

1.1.9 After local government reorganisation in Wales in 1996, and as a result of various Westminster and Welsh Assembly Government policies in the education sphere, more emphasis was placed on funding schools directly, and a higher proportion of local education authority spending was transferred directly to schools. That changed the position relating to the provision of centrally organised school library services for schools in Wales significantly, especially for secondary schools. The present situation is varied, with a range of school library service arrangements apparent. In some authorities no service of any kind is offered, in other authorities comprehensive services of a high quality are offered. The work of disseminating information about Welsh-language books efficiently and effectively in such a situation is not easy, but during the course of this study it was noted that the services provided by the Welsh Book Council's Children's Books Department at the present time were very well received and widely praised.

## ***1.2 Libraries in Higher Education institutions***

1.2.1 As noted previously, a review of sourcing and supply procedures in the Higher Education sector libraries in Wales in relation to Welsh-language books was undertaken as part of this study. It was deemed appropriate to include the sector on account of the importance of the influence of education and research in Welsh universities on publishing in Wales, and the link between creative literature and the Departments of Welsh Literature and other cognate Departments in these institutions.

1.2.2 A number of pertinent factors were identified during the course of this study, and they are listed in this section for ease of reference:

- on the basis of the evidence gathered it would appear that the services provided by the Welsh Books Council for libraries in this sector are being received and are being used; they are also reaching the appropriate individuals in the sector. The key task thereafter is ensuring that the information is forwarded and reaching those who are substantially responsible for book selection – academics and researchers – consistently and effectively. This is achieved through the librarians in most instances, and by ensuring that they receive the information that would facilitate dissemination and promote greater awareness of publications. The key to that task is the use of ICT;
- the sector sources and purchases its books and periodicals to a large extent through consortium arrangements supported by the Higher Education Funding Council in Wales (Dawson being the preferred supplier of monographs, SWETS being the preferred supplier of periodical material). The arrangement is intended to secure the best and most advantageous pricing and quality servicing facilities for libraries, and the vast majority of book orders – including orders for Welsh-language material, are channelled through this consortium. Licensing agreements for electronic materials have also been secured, but as that development is not particularly relevant to

Welsh-language material at the present time, the matter was not investigated further;

- it was noted above that much of the responsibility for selecting books and other library materials is vested to a very significant degree in academics and researchers in departments, faculties, or academic schools. This is important in terms of ensuring that information about Welsh-language books reaches the right people in institutions. Librarians also reported that they are also responsible for a certain element of selection, especially to support processes concerning the quality and overall content of collections, and the acquisition of more general works, such as reference sources. Librarians are also responsible for distributing the information about books and other materials to departments and faculties, and for maintaining the information systems and services generally;
- from the point of view of Welsh-language publications, the sector is responsible for the purchase of a relatively small number of publications – buying more than one copy of a Welsh-language title is the exception rather than the rule – and academic departments are required to spend their own monies on the purchase of multiple copies of texts and set works. Many of the titles selected for purchase are sourced via standing orders (with the University of Wales press, for example) or by arrangement with the local bookshop or the main campus bookshop, and libraries normally expect value added services as part of the contractual agreement. Three institutions in the sector alone can report that they have specific allocations for the purchase of Welsh-language materials and material of Welsh interest, but those allocations are insufficient to permit them to buy more than a limited proportion of the total output, and they are uncertain as to how much of the total output is pertinent to their needs;
- the methods used to place orders for purchases of books and periodicals in the libraries of these institutions are almost exclusively based on EDI. This is the most sophisticated library sector in Wales in terms of its ICT provision.

1.2.3 As far as the use made by these libraries of the services provided by the Welsh Books Council is concerned, they report that:

- they use *gwales.com*, and the monthly lists, primarily for the purposes of obtaining and checking details of requests from users and in order to maintain the information services they provide for academic staff, and to review the products in subject field generally. Librarians in this sector are probably more aware that they are only being alerted to a proportion of the total output – the material distributed by the Council's Distribution Centre – and subject librarians in universities report that they have to spend time searching for material of specialised interest for academic staff and for Welsh-language publications of a rather more local or esoteric nature;
- they are anxious to see all other services – particularly the lists of publications distributed by the Books Council – being offered via ICT platforms. That would facilitate their work and services,

particularly disseminating information and promoting awareness among those who need this material for their teaching and research. Some librarians noted that a delay can occur between the publication data of a title and the time when it appears in lists, and this can create inconvenience to academic libraries;

- they are anxious to see the development of an EDI service for materials published in Wales, building on the limited offering available online at the present time, in anticipation of the establishment of a direct purchasing facility via the Welsh Books Council. A number of institutions in this sector note that both the small bookshops and the consortium suppliers can sometimes be very slow in supplying Welsh-language materials, thus making the purchasing procedures inconvenient and protracted. Even academic presses are accused of sometimes being rather slow and careless when supplying material by standing order.

### ***1.3 Libraries in Further Education institutions***

1.3.1 For reasons that are difficult to establish, many libraries in this sector have been neglected for many decades. The resources allocated to them have been restricted for many years even though these institutions have seen the fastest and most substantial increase in student numbers of any sector in Wales in recent times. They were included in this study because they have a number of very pertinent characteristics, including

- the relationship that has developed between them and many of the Higher Education institutions. Students are able to register on foundation and other courses in institutions in this sector which have been validated by HE institutions, and studies at the FE institution are recognised among those acceptable as part of degree and postgraduate studies;
- institutions in this sector have been competing for A level and sixth form students with schools, and A level studies represent a significant part of the curriculum portfolio of these colleges. In addition, Tertiary institutions created by local authorities in place of school sixth forms are a part of this sector, as are community-based initiatives in lifelong learning that are often coordinated by colleges in this sector. Students for such studies must have a part to play in the process of promoting and developing interest in Welsh-language books.

As in section 1.2 above, the findings of the study are also discussed in this section, again for ease of reference and convenience.

1.3.2 In some respects the findings are disappointing. The contribution of this sector to the Welsh-language book trade is very limited and the needs and requirements that were expressly identified are also limited, but the following findings are significant:

- librarians in the sector appear to be aware of the services offered by the

Welsh Books Council and use them, and as the libraries in the sector are developing their services via ICT platforms, they seek the development of the Council's services in that particular direction also. Virtually all the libraries in the sector now have ICT facilities that would enable them to deal with book-trade information electronically – by e-mail and by database searching, but as yet many do not possess full EDI-enabling facilities;

- even though there has been a growing emphasis on creating a Welsh ethos in many of the FE institutions in Wales, and many have been planning and developing specific policies, the actual numbers of students pursuing their studies through the medium of the Welsh language is small. As a result, a limited number of Welsh-language books and materials are purchased – some libraries in the sector reported that they had purchased fewer than a dozen titles in Welsh in recent academic years. Much of the emphasis in most of the institutions is on the purchase of material to support Welsh learners. It was not possible to identify any library that allocated specific monies for the purchase of Welsh-language materials separately. New curriculum courses are usually given priority, and the remainder of the resources have to be distributed according to stated priorities and demands. However, a number of the colleges, especially those with A Level courses, were in the process of planning their work in respect of the Welsh Baccalaureate and intended to extend their offerings under that scheme. The Welsh elements of those schemes are more apparent, and this offers some hope that the situation will improve somewhat in the future;
- many of the students in the sector at the present time are not necessarily avid readers, and they depend heavily on reading lists and course materials prepared for them by lecturers, and on digitised learning materials obtained via the web or the internet. It is now rare to find collections of leisure reading materials provided for students;
- the teaching staff of these colleges are largely responsible for identifying library materials and selecting books, with the librarians being responsible for processing the orders, and for maintaining awareness and information services and for selecting more general stock, such as reference materials;
- libraries in the sector resort to a range of means of procuring books and library materials. A consortium has been established with the support of the sector's Funding Council (with Coutts and Dawson being the preferred suppliers), but the colleges do not have to use it. However, the vast majority of orders are processed through the consortium for the obvious reason that a substantial financial saving can be achieved on book purchases. A number of colleges use local bookshops and regional suppliers and even internet bookshops when necessary, to obtain Welsh-language books, and they are permitted to do so by college procurement departments as the amounts of money expended are so insignificant;
- the majority of the colleges appear to use *gwales.com*, primarily in order to check information about books requested by users or college staff, and the comments about the service are appreciative, even though it is accepted that the service has not been designed for library use. Many of the college libraries also use the lists distributed by the Council in order to browse through the output of the presses

and in order to alert staff to relevant publications. As libraries in this sector do not use technology to the same extent as those in Higher Education institutions, the paper lists are probably sufficient to meet many needs, but many were eagerly awaiting the development of the electronic listings as they would simplify and facilitate procedures and processes, particularly alerting services;

- some libraries wanted to see the development of formal direct purchasing mechanisms with the Welsh Books Council, especially as they sometimes found other supply services slow and rather erratic, particularly small bookshops. FE libraries have purchased materials directly from the Welsh Books Council from time to time when circumstances dictated, but they do not want to sever the relationship between themselves and the local bookshop without first being reassured that terms and conditions would at least be as good and possibly offering better value for money;
- the limited supply of Welsh-speaking librarians is also a problem in this sector, and for that reason librarians in the sector are seeking short résumés in English and an indication of the educational level of a work; in the opinion of the librarians, *gwales.com* is the only appropriate place for such information;
- representatives from the Welsh Books Council have been making occasional visits to many of the establishments in this sector, and that service is greatly appreciated. It was also noted how very valuable the visits by officers of the Council's Children's Books Department have been. It therefore seems appropriate for the Council to consider extending this liaison service as an experiment.

We shall return to these factors from time to time in this report.

In the context of both these sectors (HE and FE) the formation of purchasing consortiums has been important. Even though some librarians have suggested that the Welsh Books Council should consider developing similar arrangements for the supply of Welsh-language materials to run side-by side or even with the existing consortiums, others suggest that it would be more appropriate for the Books Council to consider agreements with current consortium suppliers for the supply of Welsh-language materials. Such arrangements could offer improvements to the present situation in terms of sourcing and supplying libraries in both sectors. There would be some significant problems to overcome such as those associated with discounted prices offered by publishers and the possible effect on the relationship between a number of libraries and their local bookshops, but the idea is worth exploring, even though it contradicts the wishes of some librarians in the public sector, as we shall note below.

The constructive observations and suggestions offered by librarians in these two sectors regarding the effectiveness and relevance of current arrangements for the sourcing and purchase of Welsh-language material are otherwise very similar to those made by librarians in the public library sector. To avoid unnecessary duplication, those observations and suggestions are gathered together in section 2 of this report.

## **2 Welsh public libraries, sourcing and selecting Welsh-language books, the services offered by Welsh bookshops and the Welsh Books Council – the present situation**

The field research carried out for this study related primarily to this sector as has been noted in the introduction, and this report will concentrate essentially on describing and considering the current processes and needs of the sector.

This section of the report will focus on describing the key features of relationship between Welsh public library authorities, Welsh bookshops and the Welsh Books Council in the context of sourcing and supplying Welsh-language books, reflecting the views of librarians, together with their aspirations and needs. The section will concentrate on analysing the key features.

The general analysis of evidence gathered must begin by noting that all Welsh public library authorities expressed their appreciation of the work and contribution of the Welsh Books Council in disseminating information about the output of Welsh presses, and the major contribution it is making in seeking to address the needs of libraries. They are of the opinion that the quality of the services offered by the Council is high even though there is now an opportunity to update and modify some of the services in order to maintain their competitive and comparative position, especially in relation to some of the developments in the book trade in England. It would not be an exaggeration to state that the dependence of very many libraries in Wales on the information and alerting services of the Welsh Books Council is total.

The initial findings of this research therefore are:

- that libraries in the public sector generally receive the information they need about Welsh-language books and materials to a satisfactory degree, and that the information is channelled to the appropriate persons within services;
- that there is an opportunity to develop and improve the nature and content of those services, and effect improvements that would simplify and streamline the sourcing and purchasing procedures, especially if the information could be linked closely to the Council's other services in this field – the approval collection service in particular;
- that there is an opportunity to consider the way in which the information is disseminated, with much of it being transferred to a technology platform, especially as much of the necessary technology is now in place in libraries in the sector. Recent investment in technology means that each and every library service is now able to receive and distribute information by electronic means, using e-mail and website searches, even though some libraries in the sector are not yet using full EDI facilities, but it is expected that this will happen over the next year or so.

### ***2.1 Public libraries and local and Welsh bookshops***

The striking characteristic in the triangular relationship between libraries, bookshops and the Books Council is the manner in which the Welsh library

authorities, without exception, where possible and practical, wish to support local bookshops very strongly, and it is not their wish to see any developments that would compromise that excellent working relationship in future. It is possible to state that public library authorities have defended and nurtured their relationship with local bookshops over a long period, sometimes in the face of criticism from auditors and senior managers. There is very little doubt that the expenditure of public library authorities has provided lifeblood for many shops in Wales, and it is gratifying to note that libraries are determined to maintain their support. However, that does not mean that public libraries are against changes in the present procedures in terms of promoting more effective methods of working, as we shall note.

The bookshops also acknowledge the major contribution made by public libraries, and appear to be making every endeavour within their resources and capabilities to provide an appropriate and effective service to libraries. According to the evidence obtained by this study, the present level of service usually meets the needs of libraries in terms of currency and promptness, and it is not unusual for bookshops to offer some added value to their services. It is possible to discover some variety in the nature and quality of services offered by bookshops in Wales however. It is undoubtedly necessary to refine and improve the administrative approach to the service, and this could be achieved by greater use of technology to promote more effective communication, especially between bookshops and libraries. This is discussed in more detail below.

## ***2.2 The approvals collection service***

This service is especially important in the process of sourcing and purchasing Welsh-language books. All but six Welsh public library authorities in Wales use the service which is offered and prepared by the Welsh Books Council's Distribution Centre, and which is usually channelled through a bookshop of the library's choosing. Of the six authorities that are not currently using the facility, two reported that they were not aware that the service was available, and a third had decided to discontinue the use of all approval collection services some years ago when it sought to rationalise and simplify its procurement processes generally. The situation in libraries is constantly under review, and it is possible that at least two authorities would wish to discuss the implications of becoming part of the approval service for books published in Wales in future.

In the opinion of librarians, the approval collections service offers the following advantages:

- a guarantee that libraries are alerted to a very substantial proportion of the output of the presses in Wales, and alerted to much of the output of presses outside Wales that is pertinent to libraries in Wales;
- a guarantee that libraries are alerted to those materials promptly;
- it is a cost-effective and convenient method of selecting books;
- it enables libraries to establish that Welsh-language books are of a suitable quality – in terms of content and physical presentation, for public library use;

- it offers a means of maintaining good working relationships with the supplier bookshop because many of them supplement the approval collections with material of more local interest, and they can offer a range of additional services (such as lists of local history books and other more elusive material).

However, the service is not without its shortcomings according to some librarians, and for various reasons:

- approval collections have been known to include materials inappropriate to the needs of libraries from time to time – materials such as crossword books, colouring books and bath books for young children, calendars and almanacs, games and toys, expensive academic books of specialist interest, and so on. It has also been known for certain important materials, such as ‘big books’ for children, to be omitted deliberately;
- the collections do not guarantee that every publication in Welsh will be available, even though it is acknowledged that the Distribution Centre is able to draw attention to the vast majority of Welsh publications provided the cooperation of publishers is obtained. Searching for some titles that are not available through the Distribution Centre for reasons best known to publishers is often time-consuming work;
- some delays can occur for reasons that are difficult to establish before a publication is available in an approval collection. This can mean that libraries miss out on the publicity and promotional work that can accompany the publication of a title, such as a book of the month, prize-winning titles and so on;
- the system can generate expensive and repetitive administrative procedures involving receipts, hand-written orders and so on. This is an important consideration that is addressed in the recommendations offered by this report;
- it is a method that can appear to be a little dated when compared to developing practices and services adopted by library suppliers in England and elsewhere. The comparison is particularly stark when electronic sourcing and purchasing methods are considered, and this is also addressed later in this report. However it is a system that libraries wish to retain in its essential elements, albeit with improvements and enhancements;
- in those authorities that do not have Welsh-speaking members of staff, selection from the material has to be undertaken with very little assistance in terms of synopses of contents, and the paucity of supplementary information services with the collections is an important consideration when future improvements are planned;
- when a title is required urgently, a delay can occur under this method of sourcing books, and some libraries suspect that some bookshops may have been taking certain items from the library approvals collections in order to serve their own customers first. It is also possible to ask whether the approval system has resulted in the establishment of a practice whereby libraries will only buy a single copy of many titles unless there is a particular reason for not doing so. We obtained evidence that showed that approval copies have already been processed by some bookshops in anticipation of the approval copy being bought and retained by the library service as a matter of course;
- in the view of librarians very little effort is made currently to link and synchronise the approval collection service with the other alerting services provided by the

Welsh Books Council, such as the monthly lists, and *gwales.com* and its reviews in particular.

## **2.3 Other services provided for libraries by the Welsh Books Council**

### **2.3.1 The Lists and catalogues**

For many years the Books Council has been creating and distributing Monthly Lists of materials distributed by the Distribution Centre – books published in Wales and books of Welsh interest published outside Wales but which are distributed by the Centre by arrangement with publishers. Other occasional lists and catalogues are also prepared for the use of libraries. The vast majority of libraries in Wales reported that they use those lists extensively in their stock sourcing and selection procedures. The service is much appreciated

- for its regularity and promptness;
- for its value as a means of ensuring that libraries are alerted to the vast majority of titles published in Wales in reasonable time. Libraries are able to order their stock from the lists and are able to undertake some stock revision work by using them;
- or the guidance provided in terms of designating publications to various categories or genres, and for adding information about target audiences for certain titles, and so on, and this service is unique to the services provided by the Council. Without that guidance, many libraries would be in some difficulty.

However, it was noted that it is necessary to develop that service, and the Council has already embarked on that task:

- electronic lists will be more appropriate and flexible and will promote the work of widening access to information and generate a greater awareness of output among librarians and their customers, and meet more of the librarian's requirements. The Books Council has already decided to discontinue the hard copy versions of these lists and will shortly begin circulating electronic lists. The Books Council has already responded to the needs and aspirations of libraries in this regard;
- it is not yet possible to depend exclusively on the lists and catalogues as they can only list those materials distributed by the Council's Centre. In the context of the use that libraries make of these lists, they are not comprehensive, even though the number of titles that fall outside the net is probably very small indeed. Libraries report that they are able to add to the material covered by the lists by visiting local and specialist bookshops from time to time and by searching other book-trade commercial databases;
- it is sometimes difficult for non-Welsh speakers to decide with any degree of certainty on the exact nature and emphasis of a book and its target audience, and to decide whether a work is fiction or non-fiction

suitable only for Welsh learners, and so on. Officers of the Welsh Books Council are already aware of such issues, and they are being addressed. If and when the lists and information services are developed via *gwales.com*, then the system can be refined to a significant degree, and other enhancements and improvements would follow;

- some catalogues issued by the Council are primarily intended to be used by the general public and individual book-buyers, but librarians have to use these sources as well, such is the limited nature of bibliographical services available to them. As a result, using *Gwledd y Nadolig* for example can lead to some difficulties as a tracing tool for librarians;
- these services are not directly linked to other services, the approval collection service in particular, and services are therefore not synchronised at the present time, with the result that much checking and cross-checking of information is necessary in libraries.

### 2.3.2 *gwales.com*

This study was undertaken very near to the time when the revised version of *gwales.com* was launched, incorporating the new facility for individual direct book buyers, and many librarians expressed their satisfaction with the development work generally and with the improvements that had been achieved. The Welsh Books Council was yet to launch its CD-Rom version of *gwales.com*, and therefore it was not possible to assess its value to libraries. However, evidence was found that a number of libraries are not yet using *gwales.com* regularly as anything more than a source of last resort in search processes. That can be explained to a certain extent by reference to what this report states in section 2.4 concerning the limited use of technology in the sourcing and supply procedures adopted for Welsh-language books in libraries. However, it is just as important to note that there is as such no specific or bespoke facility for libraries and librarians on *gwales.com* to date – libraries are expected to make do with facilities designed and developed to cater for the needs of bookshops and individual book buyers. This is a key issue in our analysis and understanding of the current situation and in terms of planning improvements for the future.

Generally, the main use made of *gwales.com* in this context is to

- obtain and check bibliographical data about books whose existence is known, checking facts about books requested by users, and so on;
- undertake stock revision procedures from time to time, comparing the collections of libraries with material listed in *gwales.com*, and this aspect of the work appears to be growing in prominence as the emphasis on stock quality health check procedures grows in libraries in Wales;
- seek out reviews of books in order to improve the selection procedures;

- seek out information on popular books, such as those that are designated books of the month, books in short-lists of competitions and prizes and so on, in order to obtain promotional material;
- seek out book trade news from Wales generally.

Librarians also added some comments about *gwales.com* that appear to relate to their use of the previous version and its more limited facilities and to the fact that it is not a library-orientated service in its design construction. Use of the previous version was undoubtedly more complex in terms of subject searching when compared to the more familiar book trade databases used by libraries in their relationship with their library suppliers. Among those comments were references to:

- a shortage of current reviews – reviews do not appear until some weeks have passed after date of publication, and by that time a decision to purchase a title will have been made on the basis of the information in the monthly lists or on the basis of viewing the approval copy of that work;
- the nature of the reviews and their value to librarians in the selection process;
- a paucity of information about forthcoming books – this has been a matter of some concern to libraries, but it is accepted that the service is at the mercy of publishers in this regard. However, the improved advanced information about forthcoming publications provided by some publishers in recent times is a significant improvement;
- uncertainty concerning future plans for developing *gwales.com* and whether it is to become a full EDI-based sourcing and purchasing system suitable for use by libraries and provide a wide range of functions;
- searching the database in the past has been a complex process. It is however accepted that personal preferences, experience of using a system and greater familiarity with others, are important influences in this context. The Welsh Books Council is very aware that it is necessary to offer continuing awareness training to users of the system as it is developed and enhanced, and there are already plans in train to increase awareness of the system among librarians, especially of the new resources and functions of the modified *gwales.com*.

Librarians in Wales almost without exception are now using electronic facilities to a certain extent to source and purchase English-language books from their suppliers in England, but it is not possible to state that they are as yet using the full range of EDI facilities. They are also expecting to see similar services and facilities being developed to cater for the output of Welsh presses. This is discussed further in 2.4.

In terms of the improvements and enhancements sought for Welsh libraries via *gwales.com*, this study received a number of recommendations:

- librarians need continued training and improved awareness of the facilities services and functions of *gwales.com*;
- librarians argue very strongly in favour of designing and developing a purpose-built facility for libraries on *gwales.com*; it is no longer appropriate or acceptable for libraries to have to resort to using a system designed essentially for other and different client groups – shops and individual direct buyers.

That would mean an increased emphasis on key features, such as:

- ensuring that information about new books would need to be accurate and always current;
- ensuring that the subject searching function is improved;
- ensuring that the needs of librarians are served by integrated services that would facilitate ordering and purchasing through local shops by means of *gwales.com*;
- ensuring that the information services provided via *gwales.com* are synchronised with approval collections sent to libraries, and they should also offer the possibility of downloading and re-formatting data so that catalogue entries and other promotional materials could be created locally;
- ensuring that the review process is more rapid, and that more graphic information about new titles is available at the earliest opportunity;
- ensuring that the guidelines for reviewers include consideration of the needs of librarians engaged in the book-selection process;
- enabling libraries who do not have a relationship with a bookshop supplier to order directly from the Council's Distribution Centre via *gwales.com*;
- allocating space on the website to enable librarians to seek advice and guidance on materials, and to offer comments and suggestions about titles that would fill gaps and meet user requests and needs that are currently difficult to satisfy;
- allocating space on the website to cater for the needs of readers of Welsh-language material, so that they may express their views on what they have read, and their opinion about the output. There are many websites that enable readers of books in English to do this, and in the opinion of many librarians, such a facility would be very useful and would import the liveliness associated with such sites in English. As this study was being completed, the Welsh Books Council announced that it was to develop a number of very pertinent services in response to these needs, and there was a general welcome for the concept of developing an 'information warehouse' online that would embrace many of these aspirations.

#### **2.4 Sourcing and purchasing Welsh-language books and the use of ICT**

Reference has been made already in this report to various aspects of this subject, and the aspirations and needs of libraries have been considered briefly. The study itself laid considerable emphasis on this aspect. The following are the most significant findings:

- only a limited number of Welsh public libraries are using full EDI facilities at the present time even in their processes for sourcing and purchasing English-language materials, but that situation could be transformed within a year or two. The most obvious use of technology at the present time is the practice of searching library supplier databases and lists online on the internet, especially the sources managed by the selected supplier, together with some extended searching of other sources to widen the scope and range of materials. Then the information gathered as a consequence of that searching is assembled and processed, with orders being forwarded by e-mail, with progress in the supply chain being followed electronically. There is some evidence that libraries in Wales use other internet-based suppliers such as *Amazon*, for particular and urgent purposes, using corporate credit cards;
- even though many library services in Wales use sophisticated management systems, and have staff that are more than competent in the use of much of the technology, only a small number are using the EDI modules available within those systems. Nevertheless, a significantly higher number are making the necessary arrangements to use those facilities in the near future, and others have set specific dates for the commencement of such services;
- the consortium arrangements agreed between authorities for the purpose of sourcing and purchasing their materials are well-known (such as TALNET in north-west Wales and NEWNET in the north-east). They are technology-based consortiums, and the prospect of combining such arrangements with the rather primitive facilities available to source and purchase Welsh-language material via lists and invoices attached to approval collections from the Welsh Books Council and local supplier bookshops, offers a complex and administratively burdensome scenario. For that reason above any other, Welsh library authorities are very anxious to see developments taking place;
- many libraries complain that few supplier bookshops appear willing (or able) to process materials by electronic means. There is evidence of e-mail communication between some, but this is not as yet a significant feature of the relationship between them;
- since libraries are very anxious to retain their link with supplier bookshops and the shops that are contracted to supply them with Welsh-language materials, it is suggested that the way forward is by means of a number of significant and coherent steps:
  1. ensuring that the services offered by the Welsh Books Council in future are provided via a technology platform, based on a new and library-specific section of *gwales.com* – it should be designated *gwales.com/libraries*. That facility should develop to be the only focus for sourcing and purchasing Welsh-language material provided by the Welsh Books Council, offering and emulating the best features of commercial and international book-trade sources. It will be necessary to undertake substantial

technical developmental work in order to ensure that the current bookshop facility on *gwales.com* can be linked to the proposed library facility, in order to meet the needs of libraries in a seamless and integrated fashion;

2. in the immediate term the system that is proposed for libraries should offer a direct link between its database and the approval collections service. It would not be unreasonable to expect that the need for approval collections will diminish when the new system is fully operational as it should offer the full range of functions and facilities that would enable librarians to select Welsh-language material online with confidence.

Such a system should also ensure that materials are supplied promptly, and that the administrative workload is diminished. It should also offer a modern service of the highest quality, and additional and flexible functions. It is suggested that this is the only feasible development in the circumstances, and the only means of meeting the needs of libraries in Wales. It is the only development that would enable the Welsh book trade to compete on equal terms and compare favourably in terms of its sourcing and supply facilities with services in England and elsewhere. It also relates well to the important current emphasis on developing electronic 'resource discovery' services for Wales. Such a service would contribute to the development of library services in Wales, it would create better and more cost-effective processes, and it could lead in due course to increased levels of awareness and interest in Welsh-language books. Eventually such a system could increase overall turnover for the trade and assist in the task of generating more success for publishers in Wales. It would certainly eradicate a situation whereby monies allocated for the purchase of Welsh-language books for libraries remain unspent at the end of a financial year.

Such a development shares the aims and objectives of CyMAL's strategic development programme for libraries in Wales – '@Your Library', and it is recommended that an application for financial aid to fund the initiative is sought from that programme. A review of the costs of developing the buyer facility on *gwales.com*, and the work necessary to integrate the new facility with the existing bookshop facility, suggests that a sum of £80,000 to £85,000 is necessary for the work. An application should be submitted immediately so that further consultative work to develop the precise brief for the system can be commenced. It is hoped that a system for piloting and trial work could be available by March 2006, and that a full system could be launched soon after April 2006.

## **2.5 Large print books and spoken word material in Welsh**

The study collected much evidence from public librarians on the matter of publishing large-print books in Welsh for blind and partially-sighted clients of public libraries in Wales. In essence that evidence is rather inconclusive, and firm unambiguous recommendations are therefore difficult to formulate. Many librarians expressed their concern that the present situation is inadequate in that they are unable to meet the demand for new material. Such concerns are

expressed most often in the authorities with the highest number of Welsh-speakers.

On the other hand, some authorities indicated that the demand for such material was very limited. The view expressed most consistently was that there is uncertainty about what precisely is happening in terms of publishing material of this kind at the present time. It is probably significant that a number of library authorities are still allocating sums of money from their budgets for the purchase of these materials by standing order as in the past. Some authorities regretted that the scheme to publish such material had been suspended some years ago and were urging the Welsh Books Council to re-commence the programme. They felt that they would be in a position to respond more appropriately to user demands, even though that view was not always reflected in the numbers of titles and copies of titles that they might be prepared to purchase. Librarians usually subscribe enthusiastically to schemes that promote social inclusion in their work.

It was noted that the most obvious demand came from mobile library services and from those special library services offered to the housebound or those resident in special units and homes. Such a demand is not necessarily restricted to the areas with the highest numbers of Welsh-speakers, and it is interesting to note that many libraries in different parts of Wales could refer to recent requests from readers for materials of this kind. It was also noted that the demand for large-print books in English was on the increase, and the same is true for spoken word material, but for different reasons perhaps. As the population of Wales grows older, then it is reasonable to expect that the demand for specialist material of this nature in the Welsh language will also increase.

On the other hand libraries noted that the demand for such material was very limited, especially in areas where the numbers of Welsh-speakers is low. Some librarians suggested that there was very little evidence of existing collections being used regularly, but that would not be surprising as no new titles have been added for several years, and the condition of some material had deteriorated somewhat. However, in line with the libraries' traditional wish to support Welsh-language publications, reflected in other parts of this report, it appears that libraries are likely to subscribe to such publications should the programme re-commence.

The study encountered a significant consensus of opinion regarding the nature of any new programme, and that view is described here in some detail, as it should feature prominently in any deliberations concerning any new initiative in the field of Welsh-language large-print publications:

- the design and general appearance of publications should be much higher than the products of the previous programme, even though librarians recognise that the format of that particular publication programme reflected the unit cost that libraries were prepared to pay at the time. However, the view at this time is that products should be of the highest quality and comparable to the best material published in English (by Ulverscroft, Magna Books and others), and equal to the best quality Welsh-language books, and the normal print equivalents. On no account should the material suggest that

- it is published just to serve a purpose. Ideally the large-print version should be identical to that of the normal version in terms of quality of production;
- the products of any new publication programme should be attractive and lively, containing a range of new titles, contemporary works and standard titles that would be popular among readers. It was even suggested that some libraries could use the large-print versions of certain titles to reduce waiting lists for those titles, and in order to ensure that every title purchased was worth its place on the shelves;
  - large-print editions should be published at the same time as the normal versions so that they could benefit from the promotion and publicity work that accompanies the launch of new Welsh-language books. It is argued that this is now possible under the new grant arrangements that support future publishing programmes, not individual titles;
  - the output of any new programme needs to be regular, sufficient and on schedule – some librarians suggested that up to forty new titles per year would be necessary for the scheme to be viable in the authorities with the highest number of Welsh-speakers, but a target between twelve and twenty titles per year appeared to have more general support among those authorities most anxious to see a new programme started;
  - unit costs of large-print material should be very similar to those of the normal version of the work and similar to comparable publications in English.

Should it be possible to commence a new programme of publications incorporating the above key characteristics, the authorities suggested that they would be willing to commit themselves to purchasing material by standing order (directly with the Welsh Books Council or through a supplier bookshop as in the past). By adding the number of copies that each authority suggested they would buy, there would appear to be a ready market for some 200 copies of titles of large-print materials in Welsh. This figure would undoubtedly pose a considerable challenge in terms of financing a programme that would meet the stringent and exacting demands of libraries in this field, but such material would relate well to initiatives to foster social inclusion promoted by the Assembly Government, and it is therefore possible that additional funding to support a publication programme could be obtained from a range of sources, and the matter should be discussed further with CyMAL.

Librarians also indicate a wish to see more spoken-word material issued in Welsh. Many regard spoken-word material as a means of meeting the demands of many client groups, including the needs of those who had previously been issued with large-print books. However, most librarians argue that Welsh libraries need Welsh-language material in both formats, and that spoken word material is not always appropriate to the needs of the blind and partially sighted. Librarians welcomed the more recent spoken word publication programme as the products enable libraries to respond to the needs of Welsh learners, the parents of children who are undertaking their formal education in Welsh in bilingual schools, and to other less conventional needs and demands. They also contribute to the modernisation of the Welsh-language collection in any library.

Librarians made various recommendations in the context of the need for more spoken-word material in Welsh:

- the publication programme should seek to issue at least thirty new products per year, with a range of material and sufficient choice;
- it is not always necessary to concentrate on producing spoken-word versions of literary works, and non-fiction material should be included in the programme in order to achieve a balanced list of material for library clients;
- some librarians argue that it would be easier to contemplate additional investment in a larger collection of spoken-word material than book material, and that the use made of spoken word material would be higher. Many librarians expressed their satisfaction with the products of the more recent production programme developed with financial support from the Welsh Books Council, and it is their wish to see that programme being expanded and enhanced above all else in this field;
- it is suggested that all future spoken-word publications should be issued as compact discs.

### **3 Recommendations**

This list has been divided according to sector in order to reflect the emphasis of the research work undertaken, but it will be observed that a number of recommendations relate equally to all three sectors investigated.

On the basis of the evidence, it is possible to make certain recommendations that would primarily create arrangements that would be more effective, simpler and smoother, and which would reduce the administrative burden associated with the processes and procedures of the present systems. However, libraries alone would benefit in the short term because the needs of libraries would require considerable additional work from the Welsh Books Council in the first instance. It is also very necessary to recognise that due to the various constraints on library spending, it would be inappropriate to expect a major and sudden increase in the numbers of books and copies of those books that libraries would buy simply as a result of improving the sourcing and supply mechanisms. However, there should be some perceptible improvements in the short term by ensuring that there are no sums allocated to the purchase of Welsh-language materials unspent at the end of financial years. Librarians in all sectors argue that there is a need for promotional work over a significant period of time to support the Welsh-language collections, and that could lead eventually to improved levels of use. Those improved levels of use could, in turn, justify higher levels of investment in collections. However, such considerations were not part of the brief for this study, and this report does not elaborate on the matter.

#### **3.1 The Welsh Books Council's services for public libraries in Wales**

For commercial and political reasons it is not possible to recommend that the Welsh Books Council should establish a commercial library supply service for Welsh-language materials for Welsh library authorities. According to the evidence gathered by this study, such a development is not favoured by the Welsh Books Council either. Such an arrangement could have certain advantages, including the provision of a prompt and swift service, with additional service additions, but it would cause major concerns to booksellers and could affect the close, constructive and valuable relationship that exists between public libraries and bookshops in Wales. Indeed, such a development could compromise the viability of some small bookshops in Wales as it is clear that library expenditure channelled through those shops provides a crucial source of income.

Therefore, on the basis of the evidence and the discussions held with the library authorities, a number of recommendations are offered that could bring about improvements in the present arrangements, adding some of the best characteristics and features of library supply processes in England and internationally. We recommend:

- 3.1.1 that the Welsh Books Council continues to offer its approval collections service of Welsh-language books to library authorities in Wales;

- 3.1.2 that discussions should be held with those authorities not using the approvals collection service at the present time to ascertain whether they would now wish to use such a service. Only one authority indicated that it would not wish to use such a facility in future;
- 3.1.3 that consideration should be given to offering the approval collection service directly to libraries, rather than through a bookshop. That already happens in some instances, and a considerable body of evidence was gathered that suggests that many libraries would opt for a direct service should it be offered. It would simplify and streamline the process, and there would be no threat to the commercial link between the library and the supplier bookshop of its choice, as it would continue to be the supplier of choice. Libraries could continue to work closely with supplier bookshops and receive the kind of value-added service that is so valuable at the present time. The special relationship could be sustained. Moving to a single model service across Wales would eliminate a number of the small problems encountered by libraries at the present time, and would lead to significant improvements to service quality very quickly.
- 3.1.4 the quality and nature of the approval collections should be improved by ensuring that
- the Distribution Centre and those shops that supply libraries should discuss the profile of the libraries' needs on a regular basis (annually) and should monitor the opinions of librarians as to the quality of the service, ensuring that as many as possible of the needs of libraries are being met, and that unsuitable material is not included in approval collections. The Welsh Books Council should lead on this issue;
  - complementary and supplementary material should be tailored to particular approval collections and coordinated more accurately. The preparation of sufficient information in English and Welsh, on the contents of the collection, is essential. It should include the bibliographic record, an indication of the level of treatment, the likely audience (such as children and educational institutions), together with a review of the work as soon as possible for each title in the collection, together with graphic material. Libraries should be informed directly by electronic means of the contents of collections that are being despatched. Providing information in electronic format about the works in each collection should enable libraries to download it and reconfigure it for various purposes, such as creating catalogue entries, reading lists, promotional and marketing material, lists for book selectors, creating orders to be sent to supplier bookshops and so on. It is immediately apparent that providing such services and facilities, and responding to the sophisticated needs of librarians, would impose an unreasonable burden on the Welsh Books Council, and it cannot be expected to undertake the work from within its existing resources. The solution undoubtedly is the development of a library-specific service based on *gwales.com*, properly funded as a discrete project with additional finance as indicated in 2.4 above.

### **3.2 Libraries in the Higher Education sector**

The needs and aspirations of libraries in this sector were noted in section 1.2 above, and it is recommended that the Welsh Books Council should respond by

- 3.2.1 developing electronic methods of communicating with libraries in this sector in order to facilitate the work of developing better levels of awareness of the output of Welsh presses among book selectors;
- 3.2.2 exploring the possibility of permitting libraries in the sector to order Welsh-language books directly from the Welsh Books Council via *gwales.com* by means of EDI to overcome the deficiencies of the present arrangements that use various outlets and sources. Orders could still be channelled to the libraries via the bookshop of choice, or it might be appropriate to establish a consortium arrangement with a particular shop or group of shops that might want to be part of such a system, and one that could offer services based on electronic methods. The institution libraries would undoubtedly seek preferential price arrangements and additional servicing so that they could secure best value for money. However, Welsh-language titles are already subsidised at the production stage by the award of production grants, and unit costs are lower than corresponding and similar works in English, and it would be unreasonable and inappropriate to expect a further subsidy.

### **3.3 Libraries in the Further Education sector**

The needs and aspirations of librarians in this sector were noted in section 1.3 above. An additional recommendation is made in 3.5 below, and it is further recommended that the Welsh Books Council responds by:

- 3.3.1 developing electronic methods of communicating with libraries in this sector in order to promote and extend the awareness of Welsh-language books among selectors;
- 3.3.2 developing more specific liaison links with libraries in this sector;
- 3.3.3 if ways of responding to recommendation 3.2.2 are found, then the facility should be expanded to libraries in this sector also, as the services offered by bookshops appear to be rather fragmented and ad hoc at the present time for this sector. The sector regards value for money procurement as very important in effective administration and libraries in the sector will seek discounts on the prices of Welsh-language titles and additional servicing. However, as has been noted above, the prices of Welsh-language titles are lower than similar books in English as they are subsidised at an early stage by means of production grants, and it would not be reasonable or appropriate to expect further reductions and additional subsidies. The appropriate bodies that could offer advice on these matters are Fforwm (representing the interests of college management and governors) and the Further Education Funding Council for Wales.

### **3.4 Information and Communication Technologies**

This report has already considered the role of ICT in sections 1.2, 1.3, 2.4, 3.2 and 3.3, and has outlined what appear to be the necessary steps in the context of ICT and sourcing and purchasing Welsh-language material for public libraries and for libraries in the education sectors.

Therefore it is recommended that

- the Welsh Books Council establishes a work programme that would bring about a number of improvements and developments in the process of sourcing and supplying materials based on technology, specifically *gwales.com* as described in section 2.4 above, thus responding to the aspirations and needs of librarians.

### **3.5 Large print books and spoken word books**

As was noted in section 2.5, the evidence gathered relating to large print Welsh-language books and spoken word material in Welsh was varied and inconclusive and it is therefore difficult to present recommendations and to support the recommencement of a production programme that would publish a significant and regular supply of large print material in Welsh for Welsh public libraries. The comments made by librarians concerning the fundamental requirements regarding quality are understandable and appropriate, but the number of copies of each title that libraries would purchase is relatively small – too small possibly even for a programme of production by the latest short-run publication methods. Nevertheless, the emphasis placed by Welsh libraries and the Welsh Assembly Government on social inclusion and on making appropriate resources available for those with special needs is significant, and therefore it is recommended that:

- the Welsh Books Council should have further discussions with the appropriate Welsh Assembly Government departments, including the Equal Opportunities team of CyMAL, and with the bodies representing the interests of blind and partially-sighted people, using the evidence gathered by this study in order to establish the most appropriate means of funding and re-commencing a suitable publication programme;
- the Welsh Books Council should further develop the publication of Welsh-language spoken word material and endeavour to increase the rate of output for reasons stated above. However, spoken word material should not be seen as an alternative means of meeting the needs of the blind and partially-sighted.