

IMPROVING THE SOURCING AND PURCHASING OF WELSH WRITING IN ENGLISH IN LIBRARIES IN WALES IN CONJUNCTION WITH THE WELSH BOOKS COUNCIL

A REPORT

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JUNE 2005



CYNGOR LLYFRAU CYMRU
WELSH BOOKS COUNCIL

Noddir gan
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Executive summary

- 1 This study was commissioned by the Welsh Books Council following the publication of the report of the Culture, Welsh Language and Sport Committee of the National Assembly for Wales, - *Welsh Writing in English [2004]*.
- 2 This study considers a specific recommendations made by the report, namely that ‘Library authorities, in conjunction with the Welsh Books Council, should consider ways of improving the sourcing and purchasing of Welsh writing in English.’
- 3 This study encompasses the public library authorities in Wales and the libraries of the Higher Education institutions and Further Education colleges in Wales.
- 4 The study discovered that libraries in all sectors are heavily dependent on the services provided by the Welsh Books Council in terms of sourcing and purchasing Welsh writing in English, using a combination of the approvals collections service, the monthly lists of new publications, and *gwales.com*. Materials are normally supplied through local bookshops, and libraries in Wales have supported such bookshops and are anxious to maintain the relationship. However, libraries in all sectors are also sourcing Welsh writing in English by alternative means, such as library suppliers via consortium purchasing agreements, but such services are only providing access to a limited range of Welsh writing in English.
- 5 The methods used by libraries in Wales to source and purchase Welsh writing in English compare unfavourably in some respects with the best services on offer from mainstream library suppliers in England and beyond, especially as so few of the processes are based on modern technology. The practices in use by libraries in Wales to source and purchase Welsh writing in English have strengths and weaknesses, and there is now an opportunity to bring about improvements, especially as the technological infrastructure in most libraries in all three sectors is sufficiently robust.
- 6 Libraries in Wales recommend that the best method of modernising and improving the sourcing and purchasing methods for materials published in Wales is by extending the use of technology.
- 7 This report recommends that the developments necessary to improve the sourcing and purchase of Welsh writing in English should be based on *gwales.com*, the interactive website developed by the Welsh Books Council to cater for the needs of bookshops and individual book buyers. It is recommended that a specific section of the service should be developed for libraries as such a facility would be able to address the needs and requirements identified by this study, especially if it could be integrated with the existing section of the service for bookshops. That would create a streamlined and integrated service and offer the possibility of creating additional facilities and services for libraries. It would also be able to retain the stronger elements of current arrangements and services.

- 8 Funding in the region of £80,000 will be necessary to develop the website to meet the needs of libraries, and it is recommended that an application should be made forthwith to CyMAL, the Welsh Assembly Government's policy division for libraries. The *gwales.com* service proposed appears to share many of the aims and objectives of the CyMAL Libraries Strategic Development Programme, particularly the resource discovery stream and the emphasis on the development of online information services. Such a development would contribute to the process of modernising library services in Wales and improve services to users.
- 9 The report also recommends that a core list of Welsh writing in English titles should be created and disseminated annually to public libraries in Wales to assist them to improve their sourcing and purchasing policies.

Introduction

Purpose of the study

This study was commissioned by the Welsh Books Council in October 2004 as part of its overall response to the report issued by the Culture, Welsh Language and Sport Committee of the National Assembly for Wales, entitled *Welsh Writing in English: A Review*. Among its many recommendations, that Review stated that

‘Library authorities, in conjunction with the Welsh Books Council, should consider ways of improving the sourcing and purchasing of Welsh writing in English.’

The approach adopted for this study was to turn that recommendation into a series of key questions relating to libraries in Wales, their relationship with the Welsh Books Council, and the manner in which Welsh Writing in English (the abbreviated form WWE is used in the remainder of this report) is sourced and purchased, such as

- What are the policies and practices regarding WWE in libraries in Wales at the present time?
- Do libraries in Wales receive the necessary information about WWE books and materials to enable them to implement those policies and practices?
- Who is responsible for selecting and purchasing WWE in each authority or institution?
- What are the primary supply sources 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 WWE books and other related materials reach libraries quickly and efficiently?

From the outset the parameters of the study included WWE for adults and children and in various formats.

In addition, it was necessary to consider other aspects of library provision and services as they are centrally relevant to the 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.

Other parameters

Even though the recommendation of the Culture, Welsh Language and Sport Committee’s report refers specifically to library authorities (interpreted as meaning public library authorities in Wales) in the context of sourcing and purchasing WWE, 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; the approach throughout seeks to provide

key information concerning the current position in the three library sectors, and to provide recommendations as to how the situation could be improved.

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 WWE. 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 related to the key questions listed above from the head of the services and the persons most directly concerned with sourcing and purchasing of WWE materials. 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, 12 Further Education institution libraries in Wales were selected to participate in the study (out of a total of 20 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, 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 remainder were surveyed by means of a structured telephone interview procedure involving the heads of services and those concerned with the sourcing and purchasing of 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 this 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, but the emphasis has been placed primarily on reporting salient facts and on reflecting the views, concerns and recommendations gathered during the research process. There was a remarkable degree of agreement on the strengths and weaknesses of the current patterns of provision, and a significant consensus on the ways of achieving improvements.

1 WWE and libraries in Wales

It is necessary at the outset to place this study in an appropriate context, and to note the primary formative influences on library services in Wales. They can explain to a significant degree why certain policies, practices and procedures have been adopted, and an awareness of those influences can inform and assist the work of the Welsh Books Council, and others, as they seek to respond in the most appropriate manner to the challenges of the Culture, Welsh Language and Sport Committee's report.

Some key influences

1.1 Welsh public library authorities

1.1.1 Following local government reorganisation in 1996, 22 library authorities were established in Wales. They vary greatly in terms of their size (population served) and in terms of the resources that they receive to maintain their services. Generally they are regarded as being constrained by limited resources, and expenditure on public library services in Wales has been consistently lower historically than in other parts of the United Kingdom, despite having additional responsibilities for serving bilingual cultures and communities, often sparsely distributed. The comparative position remains the same at the present time. Staffing levels and expenditure on purchasing library materials in particular are significantly lower in Wales, and limited human resources have required the adoption of the most convenient and cost effective means of working.

1.1.2 In recent times all local authority services have been under the closest scrutiny in terms of their expenditure and in terms of the quality of the services provided. Various assessment and regulatory frameworks have been established and their influence has been far-reaching. Internal quality assessment frameworks have placed emphasis on business planning, detailed scrutiny and effective budgetary management. Other frameworks place additional emphasis on community planning, self-assessment in terms of service quality, and risk assessment. The most significant influences in recent times have emanated from the work of the Audit Commission in Wales – now the Wales Audit Office, and the Best Value framework. That framework has subsequently evolved into more general and thematic service improvement planning. Each and every public library authority in Wales has undergone detailed analysis and performance measurement under the auspices of that framework, and the overall impact has been the development of an all-pervading emphasis on providing value for money services, delivered by the most effective and cost efficient means. Virtually all aspects of a library's work, particularly stock selection, acquisition and purchasing procedures, have to be fundamentally justified, and every title selected has to justify its place on the shelf.

1.1.3 In 2002 the Welsh Assembly Government introduced a range of service Standards that sought to ensure that Welsh public library authorities were providing 'comprehensive and efficient' services in accordance with the requirements of the Public Libraries and Museum Act 1964. The Standards identified specific targets in relation to expenditure, stock provision, staffing, space, and user satisfaction, among others. One Standard referred specifically to Welsh language provision, and identified a specific target on expenditure on books and materials in Welsh. Some organisations and groups expressed disappointment that a similar Standard for WWE was not introduced at the same time. Unfortunately, libraries in Wales do not, as a rule, record specific and separate data relating to WWE matters, such as acquisitions and borrowings by the public, and it was therefore impossible to calibrate a service Standard.

The Welsh Assembly Government has already indicated its intention to revise the Standards framework and to extend it for a further three-year period to March 2008. It is likely that this second Welsh Public Library Standards framework will refer to WWE. Libraries will be required to undertake a regular review of their collections in this area by means of a process referred to in professional parlance as a 'stock quality health check'. Methods have been adopted to achieve such a process to good effect in other collection areas and in relation to other genres, and Welsh libraries will be required to compare their holdings and acquisitions to core lists that will be circulated to them, and to report on their findings in terms of holdings and acquisitions (numbers of titles purchased and numbers of copies of each title) each year, as part of their Annual Report to the Welsh Assembly Government. When sufficient data of this kind has been obtained, a specific service Standard relating to WWE in libraries in Wales could be calibrated and promulgated. Discussions have also commenced between librarians in the sector about the issue of data collection in the WWE field, and progress can therefore be expected.

The Welsh Public Library Standards framework is now administered and monitored by CyMAL: Museums Archives and Libraries Wales, the Welsh Assembly Government's new policy division for the sector. In March 2005 CyMAL published its Initial Strategic Development Programme for Wales – '@ Your library', and development work and significant financial support for Welsh libraries will be channelled through that programme. It is important to note that considerable emphasis is placed by the programme's work plan on promoting the role of libraries by means of a major national library marketing initiative, on reader development activity and on promoting resource discovery by electronic means. Such initiatives are directly relevant to the issues addressed by this report, and to the future work of the Welsh Books Council.

1.1.4 The major emphasis placed on securing value for money in all aspects of a library service's work, and arriving at efficient processes in terms of sourcing and purchasing library materials, has meant that authorities

are constantly under pressure to seek new and more efficient work practices. One outcome has been the formation of cooperative arrangements between many (but not all) authorities in Wales in the form of material purchasing and processing consortiums. Such arrangements relate mostly to the purchase and processing of English language library materials, and it is obviously a development of some relevance to the WWE sphere. Such consortiums work on the basis of securing substantial discounted prices for materials and value-added services and features from preferred book-trade suppliers, and this has now become a very competitive field. Welsh libraries express their satisfaction with the services provided by these consortium-based methods, and it is likely that membership of the various consortia could expand. Welsh library authorities are also seeking such developments in relation to their acquisition policies and practices for Welsh-language books and for all materials issued by publishers in Wales. They are certainly seeking to achieve a more refined and streamlined process, especially one that would provide similar financial benefits. As an early finding of this research, it is possible to note that WWE material is sourced and purchased by a range of means at the present time. Some appear not to be in tune or in keeping with the most modern approaches available and librarians believe that they are depending on information sources with limitations, and as a result their procurement policies and procedures also have limitations.

- 1.1.5 Two other characteristics of the field are worthy of note. Firstly, the sourcing and acquisition procedures have been simplified greatly in terms of libraries and ‘mainstream’ English language publishing. ‘Mainstream’ is a term widely used by librarians in Wales to differentiate between material published in English and sourced through commercial library suppliers and other trade sources, and material published in Wales in English. It has certain unfortunate connotations perhaps, but the distinction is an important one in terms of the manner in which Welsh libraries function. It is relatively rare by now to encounter selection processes in relation to English language material that are not essentially technology based – using bibliographic databases of various kinds to facilitate selection. Visits to libraries by trade representatives are also rare except in relation to very specialist materials, and visits to bookshops and library suppliers by librarians for material selection purposes are now the exception not the rule.

Another concept commonly referred to in the context of public libraries that has a certain mystique and ambiguity surrounding it, is the concept of ‘material suitable for library use’. It is a term very familiar to librarians, but one that rather mystifies others. It is based on a librarian’s intuitive response to new publications and an assessment of the public’s likely response to those titles, allied to a long tradition of familiarity with public tastes and predilections, and considerable experience of scanning use statistics and assessing collections. In the opinion of many librarians in Wales, not all WWE material is ‘suitable for library use’ and for many reasons – it may not appeal to borrowers, it is often published in unpopular genres such as poetry, and some is

even too 'daring'. Some librarians take the argument a stage further by stating a belief that WWE titles that come through mainstream channels – published outside Wales – are often 'more suitable for library use' than those published in Wales.

Secondly, libraries and their suppliers undertake regular profiling activities in relation to their needs, and an ever-increasing proportion of the total library stock is selected by the supplier on behalf of the library, in accordance with that agreed profile. In effect, a substantial proportion of a library's stock is now supplied on the basis of standing orders. For example, a typical library profile in terms of fiction acquisition will revolve around obtaining titles that appear in top-ten popularity lists, titles in prize lists, short-listed titles in major competitions and so on, together with supplier-selected titles relating to popular authors and to popular subject and genre areas. There is therefore far less emphasis on detailed title-by-title selection of English language material by librarians.

Professional concerns about the overall effect such necessarily simplified and streamlined processes may have on the overall nature and quality of collections, have resulted in the development of 'stock quality health check' procedures alluded to earlier.

Another general early finding of the research is that libraries in Wales are not yet entirely ready, for various reasons, to adopt such streamlined policies in relation to WWE (or Welsh language) materials. Some of the reasons relate to concerns about quality (of content and physical format) and the quality of supplier services (in terms of providing materials appropriate to the needs of libraries and comprehensive information and approval collections). Nevertheless, as stated above, Welsh libraries would also wish to move to a situation where all Welsh materials could be processed in a more simplified and cost-effective manner.

- 1.1.6 In recent times Welsh public libraries have derived great benefit from substantial investment in Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) made by the Welsh Assembly Government (to connect libraries to the broadband learning network) and the New Opportunities Fund (NOF) to establish the People's Network. Creating that Network has been a hugely successful initiative and has brought about benefits in terms of providing new services to users, and also in terms of updating staff skills. The Network has also contributed substantially to the increase in the numbers of people using Welsh public library services, even though traditional use patterns have changed – borrowings have fallen, continuing a trend discernible for more than a decade, but visits to libraries by various means have increased in frequency. The most recent statistics however suggest that even the decline in borrowing has been arrested and a small increase in borrowing is now apparent in many authorities.

The use of ICT has also substantially changed the manner in which libraries themselves are managed. It has already been noted that selection and purchasing of stock have migrated to an ICT platform in many areas, and libraries are able to offer and use more ‘virtual’ services routinely. To date, apart from the continued development of the Welsh Books Council’s *gwales.com* service, no such developments are reflected in the manner in which libraries in Wales are able to routinely source and purchase materials published in Wales and from sources in Wales, although some material deemed to be part of WWE by definition is sourced and purchased from non-Welsh sources. This issue will be explored further in this report, but it is sufficient at this point to state that this research has found that an increasing number of libraries in Wales are either using, or are about to use, EDI facilities, and that they would wish to move to a situation whereby all their stock sourcing and purchasing could be achieved by those means in the near future.

1.1.7 It is also important to note that Welsh public libraries tend to deal with WWE and Welsh language materials in the same way, and often together, – in terms of a long-standing and continuing commitment to acquiring materials for their users, in terms of providing suitable and adequate collections (even though the number of borrowings of certain types of WWE materials would not justify stocking certain publications, such as some poetry), and in terms of not applying the full rigour of selection criteria to some WWE publications, such as those that relate to physical quality. This commitment is not necessarily reflected in the existence of formal specific acquisition policies or financial allocations relating to WWE, but even a cursory glance at current library catalogues will show that most libraries in Wales will hold a copy or copies of most of the more generally recognisable WWE titles published in the last three decades or more. Specialist WWE collections have been built up in many libraries in Wales during that time. Nevertheless, some libraries will acknowledge that they sometimes have difficulty in identifying WWE materials, and will have even more difficulty in sourcing some titles, such as the vagaries of the WWE book trade services, and many expressed the view that the wide-ranging definition adopted by the *Welsh writing in English* report would not provide an easily applied or convenient definition for public libraries.

This research has also identified a problem in relation to the definition of WWE among librarians. Reference has already been made to the functional division drawn by many librarians between ‘mainstream’ English language publications (some of which, on account of authorship or content, could be defined as WWE), and WWE materials published in Wales. Some believe that a book written in English by a Welsh author should be treated as an English-language book, and many tend to be considered and treated as such. Should they be worthy and successful, they will ‘emerge’ among those books in English that can be sourced and selected by methods currently adopted for English-language books in general. However, it is important to recognise that

small independent publishers may not be able to offer the discounts necessary to mainstream library suppliers to allow their books to 'emerge' in this way. This study has gathered evidence that some materials that could be regarded as WWE are currently sourced by Welsh public libraries as though they were simply books in English, through the library supply channels of the UK English-language book trade. The end results are WWE collections built up through rather haphazard means. Therefore, any improvements in future sourcing and purchasing methods proposed and sought by libraries for materials defined as WWE need careful planning and coordination.

1.1.8 Following local government reorganisation in 1996, and as a consequence of policies in education developed both by the Westminster and Welsh Assembly governments, the position of school library services in Wales became less secure and their role less apparent. Greater financial control was vested in individual schools and fewer resources were allocated to the provision of centrally coordinated school library services. This study found that the pattern of provision is now very different from local authority to local authority in Wales. Some authorities have established school library services of a high quality either singly or jointly with neighbouring authorities, in others school library services no longer exist, and the situation with regard to secondary schools is particularly erratic. Ensuring that information about WWE is disseminated effectively in such a situation is not easy, but this study found that the services provided by the Welsh Books Council through its Children's Books Department are well received and widely praised.

1.2 Libraries of Higher Education institutions in Wales

1.2.1 As noted earlier, the parameters of this study were extended to include consideration of the sourcing and purchasing practices of libraries in HE institutions in Wales in relation to WWE. This was deemed necessary and appropriate in the context of the recent developments in teaching and research in WWE in the sector – there are three Welsh HE institutions who note that they support major centres for the study of WWE, and others who list WWE as an area of significant activity. However, only one academic library states that it makes a policy-based effort to purchase at least one copy of all WWE publications, using central funds or funds channelled through the academic department which has responsibility for teaching and research in WWE within the institution.

1.2.2 Again there are a number of important contextual influences in this sector, and a number of important findings concerning the sourcing and purchasing of WWE. They are listed together in this section for the sake of the coherence of the discussion of pertinent issues and convenience of analysis:

- from the evidence gathered, it would appear that the bibliographic services provided by the Welsh Books Council are being received by all libraries investigated in this sector, and are used on a regular basis for various purposes. The services of the Council are also used for direct purchasing purposes, but only on an ad hoc basis;
- there is a significant emphasis on consortium-based approaches to material sourcing and purchasing in this sector. Initiated and supported by the Funding Council for the sector in Wales, the Higher Education purchasing consortium uses Dawson as its preferred supplier of books and SWETS as its preferred supplier of periodicals. Libraries will source and purchase WWE material that appears in the information services of these suppliers for the simple reason that the discounted price secured via the consortium is a major consideration and a major inducement. When materials do not appear in the lists provided by these suppliers (and this is a matter agreed – or not, between the supplier and the publisher), libraries resort to a range of sourcing options for WWE material, all of which appear to have shortcomings – campus shops, local shops (which often delay single copy orders), online and internet sources (which often add a substantial handling charge), individual publishers via standing orders (who, it is reported, can, surprisingly, provide a poor service) and others, including the Welsh Books Council’s Distribution Centre direct. There is some uncertainty as to whether this is an acceptable approach. Many respondents to the research questions posed by this study indicated a wish that the Welsh Books Council should consider establishing a formal direct-selling or consortium-based approach to supplying WWE (and Welsh-language) materials, either directly with HE libraries and others, or through a nominated preferred bookshop supplier;
- most HE institution libraries have devolved their allocations of purchasing funds to departments, faculties, subject schools or other research and teaching units. To all intents and purposes therefore, the greatest influence on the selection process is the input of academics and researchers. Librarians augment that process when necessary during overall collection management activity. Librarians in subject areas perceive themselves as being conduits, disseminating information about materials, and coordinating the purchasing and servicing procedures. They would therefore wish to receive as much information about WWE materials, for example, in electronic form, in order to facilitate the dissemination of that information to the appropriate people, and to receive and forward orders for purchases in the same way;
- constraints on funds in HE institutions mean that it is rare for more than one copy of a work to be purchased; departments and teaching units more often than not are solely responsible for purchasing multiple copies of texts. The creation of technology-based teaching and ‘virtual’ learning environments and the provision of essential

texts and readings by electronic means for students, under licence agreements with publishers, also means that the practice of purchasing multiple copies of books is declining rapidly, especially with regard to undergraduate texts. Libraries reported that even if sourcing and purchasing processes were improved and streamlined, the impact on the numbers of copies of a work purchased would not necessarily be great;

- HE sector libraries are the most advanced in Wales in terms of their use of technology, both in terms of service development and also service management. All libraries report that they are using EDI methods of sourcing and purchasing stock generally, but that they cannot do so in the context of all WWE and Welsh-language material, unless titles appear in EDI-based library supplier databases and lists, and only if the supplier such as a bookshop, has the necessary facilities. It is the wish of all libraries in this sector that they should be able to source and purchase all their acquisitions by EDI in the near future, and they also indicated that the Welsh Books Council in any consideration of a consortium-based approach to the supply of WWE material, should only involve suppliers who could work (and who would be prepared to work) within an EDI environment;
- in terms of sourcing WWE materials, libraries in this sector use the bibliographic services provided by the Welsh Books Council for selection, authentication and bibliographic checking purposes. They report that only a very small proportion of what is defined as WWE appears in the information sources of commercial library suppliers, and therefore the lists and services of the Welsh Books Council perform an essential and unique function. Librarians welcome the fact that those lists are now to be provided online and express the wish that every effort should be made to ensure that they are even more comprehensive, seeking to cover every WWE publisher, including the smaller publishers and the most elusive. However, there is clear comprehension in this sector that the lists reflect only what publishers are prepared to channel (by way of copies or information) through the Council's Distribution Centre. Librarians in this sector argue that future developments and refinements should be based exclusively on *gwales.com*.

1.3 Libraries of Further Education institutions in Wales

- 1.3.1 For reasons that are difficult to identify, many libraries in this sector have been neglected over many decades. There are of course notable exceptions, but until very recently few have been involved in major general library initiatives in Wales, and few attempts have been made to ascertain their current state and the nature of their facilities and services. Even recent reports from the sector reflect a continuing problem with limited investment in library (or learning resources) facilities and services. This is certainly surprising bearing in mind the growth of student numbers and the extension of the range of

educational opportunities achieved through institutions in the sector. They are included in this study because:

- many FE institutions in Wales enjoy a close relationship with HE institutions. Students can enrol on HE validated and franchised courses at their local FE colleges, and can undertake degree and other HE courses by that means, particularly in arts and humanities areas. Through formal franchising agreements HE libraries offer considerable advice and assistance to FE libraries and impose certain minimum provision standards;
- many FE institutions have been competing with schools for students for A Level and, latterly, for Baccalaureate level course offerings. Some of the Tertiary institutions created by several local education authorities are also technically placed within this sector;
- many of the community-based educational developments of a ‘lifelong learning’ nature are organised by colleges in this sector, and many informal learning opportunities are also provided. Their role as providers of learning materials and support services is therefore important.

As in section 1.2 above, the essential relevant features of the sector’s libraries and the main findings of the research are dealt with together in this section.

1.3.2 In certain respects, the findings are disappointing. The contribution made by this sector to the Welsh book trade (in terms of purchasing materials published in Wales in English and Welsh) in general is small, and higher aspirations are inevitably constrained by limited resources. Nevertheless, it is apparent that:

- the libraries in the sector are aware of information sources provided by the Welsh Books Council and are very appreciative of them, including *gwales.com*. The services are used primarily for the purposes of obtaining and checking bibliographic data and for disseminating information about WWE material among academic staff. As the provision of ICT has developed in many libraries in the sector, so has the use of electronic information sources, and the sector generally welcomes the Council’s intention to provide information by electronic means, and would welcome the establishment of a consortium-based approach to the supply of materials from Wales to FE colleges on a formal footing. A number of respondents in the study referred to the suitability of developing *gwales.com* into a full EDI system. However, only a very limited number of FE sector libraries can implement a full EDI system at the present time, but several use a hybrid system – selecting electronically, but processing orders by email or manually through procurement and accounts departments;
- the sector’s libraries have already adopted a consortium-based approach, promoted by its Funding Council. The preferred

suppliers under the system are Coutts and Dawson, even though there is no requirement to use the consortium or to rely on it exclusively. There is an abundance of evidence that shows that colleges are continuing to use local bookshops and specialist Welsh bookshops for WWE materials, with varying degrees of efficiency and success. Nevertheless, the emphasis in all FE institutions on effective procurement and the financial advantages of using the consortium, also results in significant dependence on that purchasing consortium. Many librarians will obtain WWE material via the consortium when that material is on offer, but they also report some difficulty and inconvenience when seeking materials by alternative means when titles do not appear in consortium provider lists. Their experience mirrors that of HE librarians in that respect. Because of the difficulties they have experienced in sourcing materials, some librarians noted the value of occasional visits they have received from representatives and schools officers from the Welsh Books Council and, where there is no existing relationship with a local bookseller, the value of direct purchasing from the Distribution Centre;

- the selection of library material is primarily undertaken by academic staff in FE institutions in Wales, and many librarians in the sector suggest that this should be the target audience for service enhancements in the sector. Future developments in the methods that could facilitate the dissemination of information about WWE materials should be electronic;
- the total number of books and materials purchased annually in many institutions is restricted by lack of resources; single copies of books only are purchased unless academic departments contribute from their own finance to purchase multiple copies, and the development of ‘virtual’ learning environments has almost eliminated the need for such provision. It was also pointed out by many librarians that improving the information about books, and streamlining the means of obtaining them, would not necessarily result in increased purchasing by this sector. New course initiatives are given priority, the remaining budget then has to be distributed accordingly;
- many colleges have sought to develop a more apparent Welsh ethos in recent times, and specific Welsh-language policies. Resource constraints mean that the implementation of such policies is perhaps no more than aspiration, but the advent of the Welsh Baccalaureate in the sector is regarded by many librarians as the means by which interest in and demand for WWE material may increase.

In respect of both these sectors (HE and FE), the current emphasis on consortium purchasing arrangements for library materials is important. Some librarians suggest that the Welsh Books Council needs to consider developing a WWE consortium purchasing facility for libraries in both these sectors in Wales. Others

suggested that it might also be appropriate to consider developing a formal supply link between the Welsh Books Council and the preferred suppliers identified for both sectors. It is argued that such an arrangement could possibly offer an additional means of improving the sourcing and purchase of WWE materials for libraries in educational establishments. However, there would be significant issues and inherent problems to overcome, such as the discounts that publishers in Wales would be required to provide within such a system, the implications for the existing links between the institutions and local bookshops, and the amount of work necessary to set up such a facility in relation to the limited increase in the volume of trade that might follow. It would appear to be more appropriate to further improve awareness and information services and to seek to streamline sourcing and purchasing methods using technology.

Constructive observations and suggestions made by librarians in these two sectors, and their recommendations as to how improvements may be achieved for sourcing and purchasing of WWE are very similar in nature and purpose to those expressed by librarians in public library authorities. To avoid unnecessary duplication, such matters are summarised together in section 2 of this report.

2 Public library authorities in Wales and the sourcing and purchasing of Welsh writing in English

As was noted in the Introduction, the main emphasis of this study relates to public library authorities in Wales and the processes and procedures adopted for the sourcing and purchasing of WWE.

In this section, this report will concentrate on describing the primary elements in the relationship between public libraries, the Welsh Books Council, and the suppliers, such as bookshops, and will highlight current practices, their strengths and weaknesses, seeking to reflect at the same time some of the main aspirations of libraries in terms of necessary refinements and improvements. The section will focus on general findings and on the factors that are common to virtually all Welsh public library authorities.

It is appropriate to begin the overall analysis of the evidence gathered by this study by noting that every library authority stated that its debt to the Welsh Books Council is very significant in terms of the assistance it gives to the processes of sourcing and purchasing WWE. The general opinion is that the information and bibliographic support facilities and the approval collection services provided for public libraries by the Council are vital and essential, and that the quality of those services in general are high. Libraries were, nevertheless, aware that an opportunity now exists for achieving refinements and improvements in those services.

It is also important to note that the Welsh Books Council's bibliographic services relating to WWE are, to all intents and purposes, the only current and specific services provided by any organisation, but that other additional sourcing and purchasing services are also being used by Welsh public libraries. The dependence of public libraries on the Council's bibliographic and information services for WWE is very significant, but libraries are offered some element of choice when it comes to selecting the source of supply of material defined as WWE. Some can be sourced from commercial library supply services, some can be obtained from other book trade outlets, but none of the alternatives can be regarded as comprehensive and sufficiently current.

In general the initial findings of this study would confirm that:

- Welsh public libraries receive the necessary information about WWE from the Welsh Books Council to a very satisfactory degree, and that the information is disseminated to the appropriate persons in those library services;
- there are now opportunities to refine and develop the information services, and to improve the supply and procurement procedures and services, primarily by synchronising or linking the various services more closely and accurately, such as the bibliographic information and the approval collections service;
- there are now opportunities to transfer many of the Welsh Book Council's information services to a technology-based platform in a series of steps, because the essential ICT infrastructure is now in place in all Welsh public

libraries. The investment made in recent years has resulted in a situation being created that enables all library services in this sector to receive and disseminate information electronically;

- even though the sector is not yet fully attuned to the possibilities and use of EDI, a sufficient number of authorities are now using the EDI facilities within their library management systems, or are intending to do so shortly, and even more that are using a hybrid system – searching supplier databases online or on CD versions and despatching orders by email, to justify a programme of activity by the Welsh Books Council to modernise its services;
- the situation is apparently less encouraging in supplier bookshops in Wales. There appears to be a reluctance, or an inability, on the part of many supplier bookshops in Wales to develop sophisticated electronic methods of working with their client libraries, and this compares unfavourably with the kinds of services relating to English-language books provided by commercial library suppliers;
- in addition, it becomes apparent that publishers also have a responsibility for remedying some of the weaknesses in the present position, such as addressing their reluctance to prepare pre-publication information in good time. All partners in the WWE book trade in Wales have their role to play if the needs of libraries are to be met.

2.1 Public library authorities and their relationship with local bookshops

The relationship between libraries and bookshops in Wales is an important one in the context of sourcing and supplying WWE. Almost without exception, and when it is feasible and practical, libraries support their bookshop suppliers very strongly, and wish to maintain that important relationship into the future. Libraries have endeavoured to protect that relationship from the worst excesses and pressures of value for money regimes, and have fostered their relationship with the bookshops that supply them with WWE materials. The expenditure of libraries has been a major means of sustaining the bookshops through difficult times and circumstances.

Libraries are content with the service provided by most of their supplier bookshops in terms of promptness, and the with value added services provided in some cases. There is, however, considerable variation in the nature of services provided by supplier bookshops, and in the nature of financial arrangements between libraries and bookshops. Libraries point to the need to simplify and improve the administration of procedures in particular, and to the need for improvements in the means of communicating electronically. These aspects are explored further in the following sections.

2.2 Approval collections

The most important element in the current relationship between the Welsh Books Council, supplier bookshops and libraries, is the provision of approval collections. Most public library authorities in Wales utilise this facility, some do not out of

uncertainty as to what it entails, and some indicated a wish to use approval collections in the future.

The collections are assembled by the Distribution Centre of the Welsh Books Council and are usually channelled through a bookshop of the library's choice. Some are sent directly to the library service, but in both models the purchases are then channelled through the supplier bookshop of the library's choosing. The frequency and regularity of this service is at the discretion of the library and the supplier bookshop, and can range from a weekly to a six-weekly or even three-monthly service. The approval collections usually consist of recently published Welsh-language and WWE material for adults and children provided by publishers to the Distribution Centre. It is generally acknowledged that the WWE collections cannot be entirely comprehensive or always current under such an arrangement. Some publishers of WWE material outside Wales use the services of the Welsh Books Council's Distribution Centre, provided suitable financial arrangements can be agreed, but others do not. Publishers of WWE from Wales and outside Wales are known to enter into additional or alternative arrangements with commercial library suppliers, and this does therefore offer libraries some alternative sources of information and supply for their acquisitions of WWE. They are used simply because some Welsh libraries are able to obtain a larger discount on the purchase price of titles and better levels of additional services from library suppliers than from local bookshops, but it is generally acknowledged that only a very small proportion of WWE material is sourced via those alternative means.

It is therefore clear that the Welsh Books Council is the only comprehensive and specialist point of current and comprehensive source of information and supply of WWE materials, and is the one natural major focus for libraries in this field. Improvements that would address any current shortcomings in the situation should therefore be based on developing the Council's services and on building on the foundations that the Council's existing services provide.

Libraries point to the advantages of maintaining the present approval collection service for sourcing and supplying WWE, because:

- it ensures that libraries are exposed to a significant proportion of current output, some of which may never be brought to their attention by other commercial library supplier routes. The vast majority of WWE material published in Wales is included in the collections, and significant amounts of WWE published outside Wales are also included;
- it ensures that libraries can normally select from among the WWE titles at a very early opportunity;
- it provides a relatively cost-effective and convenient means of selecting WWE titles in spite of its administrative burdens;
- it ensures that librarians are able to select WWE materials in accordance with their suitability for use in libraries, and that they are able to reassure themselves of the quality (in terms of content and physical robustness) of the materials. This approach to selecting WWE can work in favour of new authors and some new and more unusual materials. It certainly removes the rather

mechanistic pre-profiled approaches now adopted for selecting much other English-language material, as described earlier in this study;

- it ensures that a creative and often long-standing association with supplier bookshops can be maintained; some are known to supplement and augment approval collections and to provide value-added services, and such aspects are greatly appreciated by librarians.

However, this arrangement is not entirely without weaknesses. Librarians argue that

- approval collections can contain extraneous material entirely unsuitable for library use, such as books of crosswords, colouring books, bath books, calendars, almanacs, games, very expensive and very specialised academic books, books of local interest not relevant to particular localities and so on;
- there are sometimes inexplicable delays between publication dates and the inclusion of a title in approval collections. This can mean missing out on the value and impact of publicity and marketing activity that can coincide with the publication of titles;
- approval collections cannot meet the needs of libraries in terms of knowing about a WWE title at its pre-publication stage, and this is an important consideration for libraries;
- the system can create laborious, repetitive and time-consuming administrative processes, especially as they are usually manual at the present time;
- the system compares unfavourably with the facilities and services now being offered by the best commercial library suppliers. The comparison is particularly unfavourable in terms of supplier databases, electronic ordering and tracing and other technical facilities. Librarians in Wales wish to be able to use the most modern electronic facilities in tandem with the current approval collections;
- the system cannot cater particularly well for titles and materials needed and sought urgently in response to reader enquiries or unanticipated demand for a particular title;
- the approval copy system in relation to WWE in particular, may have resulted in the consolidation or perpetuation of the seemingly long-standing practice of purchasing just one copy of a work; some approval collections have even been processed by the supplier bookshop in advance and in anticipation of approval copies becoming acquisition copies. Only if a book is particularly in demand will the library order further copies. Single copy purchases of WWE titles is a significant feature in purchasing policies in public libraries in Wales at the present time;
- the system currently in use has an inherent weakness in that the approval collections are not synchronised specifically with the Welsh Books Council's other bibliographic services. Librarians point to the inconvenience of receiving an approval collection with an invoice for the titles only, and no other

information. Some weeks later (perhaps up to six) they receive the Monthly Lists of WWE titles from the Council, with descriptions and bibliographic details. Checking is then necessary through orders already placed which creates a significant additional burden. Similarly, some more general Council catalogues (such as those produced at Christmas) do not always indicate publication dates or the status of cited titles (e.g. first in a series), and it could be possible that libraries would order unnecessary duplicate copies as a result. Such material is of course intended for the general public, not for libraries, but this reflects the dependence of Welsh public libraries on the services of the Council at the present time and emphasises the need for developing a library-specific service. This lack of synchronisation between the different elements of the services is the matter that generates the greatest number of comments from public librarians at the present time;

- the materials provided by the approvals system is not always synchronised with the information provided by *gwales.com*, especially in respect of timely information, reviews and graphic representations of new titles. However, the development of an advanced information service about current and some forthcoming titles by the Welsh Books Council, in association with publishers, is already offering a major improvement, and this will be much appreciated by librarians when they become more aware of it and more familiar with it.

2.3 Other services provided for libraries by the Welsh Books Council

2.3.1 The Monthly Lists and other catalogues

Reference has already been made to the fact that library authorities in Wales are heavily dependent on the bibliographical services provided by the Welsh Books Council. The Monthly Lists are the aids that are mentioned most frequently among the essential tools of the librarian's trade in Wales. Each and every public library authority reported that they received the lists and catalogues and used them, and that they appreciated the service greatly. Such lists are regarded as essential because:

- they are issued regularly and in a consistent and timely manner;
- they draw attention to a very significant proportion of WWE output, from Wales and beyond, but it is acknowledged that there is a slightly diminished degree of comprehensiveness in relation to WWE material published outside Wales, and that certain material published in Wales can also prove to be very elusive;
- they can provide a benchmark and an invaluable guideline as to the nature and content of WWE material and its suitability for use in the public library context;
- they can offer information on material published in non-book media, even though the output in this sphere is very limited. Without these items, the work of the librarian would be very difficult.

Some librarians offered some additional observations on the nature of this provision, namely that electronic listings would be much more effective and would facilitate easier and wider dissemination, promote wider and greater awareness of material published, and of what is available in the field, and would meet the needs of librarians and their modern methods of working more closely. The Welsh Books Council has been aware of these sentiments and has already responded by indicating that its lists and catalogues will only be issued in electronic form in future. In addition, librarians noted that:

- it is not possible to depend entirely and exclusively on the lists as they only offer information on material distributed through the Council's Distribution Centre or information on additional materials offered piecemeal by publishers. Libraries have to supplement the listings to a certain extent by searching in other sources, particularly retrospectively, and by visiting bookshops and other trade outlets to ensure that collections are comprehensive in accordance with policies. Material of local relevance is often cited as an area that is less than well covered;
- the descriptions and genre definitions are sometimes a little ambiguous in the opinion of some libraries, and it is a problem that appears to afflict WWE titles more particularly. Examples cited included the rather indistinct definitions between leisure reading material for children and school texts and other curriculum-related material. Welsh Books Council officers are already aware of these comments and observations, and have sought to refine definitions and descriptions, particularly on *gwales.com*;
- too little information is provided on forthcoming WWE publications, and this matters a good deal to the selection processes adopted in libraries, and to the manner in which libraries can anticipate and respond to user needs and demands;
- there is no obvious and deliberate relationship or synchronisation between the lists and catalogues and the contents of approval collections, as was noted in 2.2 above.

2.3.2 *gwales.com*

This study was carried out in the period close to the release of the most recent and amended version of *gwales.com*, and librarians who used the source regularly expressed their satisfaction with the enhancements made to the service. The Welsh Books Council was yet to initiate its CD-Rom facility based on *gwales.com*, and it was therefore not possible to discuss the issue during this study. Surprisingly some library authorities in Wales stated that they do not yet use *gwales.com* or only use it very occasionally as a destination of last resort in the search for information or bibliographical details in response to reader requests. This reflects the degree to which libraries in Wales depend on the approval collections service and the monthly lists as their primary

selection and information tools. It is also probably a reflection of the rather limited use of technology that is possible in the sourcing and purchase of WWE material in libraries and through supplier bookshops at the present time. There would appear to be a need for continued and concerted efforts to promote the more general use of *gwales.com* among all librarians in Wales. The Welsh Books Council is aware of the need to offer training to librarians in the detailed use of *gwales.com* in its revised and upgraded form, but it is very important to note at this point that to date it is a system developed to benefit bookshops in Wales and, more recently, individual book buyers, and that it does not have specific or tailored facilities for libraries and librarians.

The service is used primarily in the context of WWE at the present time:

- to obtain and validate bibliographical details;
- to check and revise stock holdings, and this aspect seems to be gathering momentum under the ‘stock quality health check’ procedures now being applied widely in Welsh public libraries and described earlier in this study;
- to seek out reviews of books so as to enhance the selection procedures;
- to seek out book trade news and information on competitions, prizes, and so on, and to obtain publicity and promotional materials;

Librarians offered some critical but constructive observations on this service, some of which relate to their experience of using the previous version of *gwales.com*, based on a comparison of database and bibliographical services offered by mainstream library suppliers. The observations can be summarised thus:

- the delay that can sometimes occur before a review of a title appears, means that the service cannot always be used to assist the selection decision-making process;
- the nature of the reviews and the way in which they could be used by librarians;
- the delay over the provision of graphic representations of titles;
- some ambiguity and inconsistency in the information provided by publishers, particularly about forthcoming books, and the relative paucity of such information generally;
- uncertainty about the future plans for *gwales.com* and uncertainty over whether the online direct purchasing facility is now open to all, including libraries, and whether the system can offer an EDI-based service or its equivalent;
- in the view of some librarians, using the original *gwales.com* website from a librarian’s perspective could be a complex operation, and that subject

searching facilities in particular needed to be improved. The general view is that there is now a real need to develop *gwales.com* as a bespoke library support facility.

It is clear that public libraries in Wales are expecting the Welsh book trade to move to electronic platforms in the not too distant future, and would argue that it is essential that it does so in order to maintain its status and position and to improve user perceptions and comparative position. Libraries in Wales have migrated to many technology-based practices in recent years, and there is a certain sense of frustration growing that processes and administrative procedures relating to Welsh and WWE material published or channelled through supply services in Wales, are still largely based on manual methods. This matter is dealt with in more detail in section 2.4 below.

Some constructive suggestions were received from librarians as to how improvements could be achieved, but as certain parts of the supply chain are not yet technology based, it will take some time and additional resources, to implement action to achieve those improvements. A specifically-funded programme of improvements based on *gwales.com* would appear to be the only feasible way forward in the circumstances.

The primary suggestions received were:

- that the Welsh Books Council should continue to offer a programme of training and awareness on the services and facilities of *gwales.com* to libraries and librarians in Wales;
- that the Council should above all else, create a purpose-designed and bespoke system for libraries on *gwales.com*, rather than catering for the needs of libraries by means of those parts of the *gwales.com* system designed for other purposes and clients, namely the bookshops and individual buyers.

By this means, an appropriate emphasis could be placed on developing key features, such as

- ensuring the currency and accuracy of the information about new and forthcoming WWE titles;
- improving the subject searching capabilities of the system;
- synchronising the information on the database with the contents of the WWE approval collections distributed to libraries, and extending the interoperability of the system so that bibliographic data could be downloaded to create local catalogue entries, leaflets, publicity material and so on. The need to undertake time-consuming and repetitive procedures under present arrangements is frequently identified as one of the primary weaknesses;

- ensuring that advanced information about titles is available at the earliest opportunity, and that graphic information about WWE titles should also be provided promptly;
- ensuring that the reviews and other information provided are appropriate to the needs of librarians in selection processes;
- clarifying and developing the policy with regard to direct purchasing and online ordering. It is suggested that those authorities that cannot use a local bookshop currently should be able to purchase their materials directly from the Welsh Books Council;
- providing a facility on the *gwales.com* website that would enable librarians to seek online advice and further support for the sourcing and purchasing routines, and provide an area to facilitate discussion among librarians, for the sharing of knowledge and expertise, and for making suggestions about services, gaps to be filled, and so on;
- providing space on the website for the use of readers of WWE, so that they may convey their views on books and promote the reading of WWE works and titles. There are some excellent websites relating to English-language material and reading and reader development and reading groups in general. They are lively and can generate much interest and could provide a suitable facility to emulate. Such a facility, it is argued, could import much needed life into the field. Libraries at the present time can only justify additional purchases by referring to use statistics and to growing reader interest.

During the course of this study the Welsh Books Council announced its intention to develop an ‘information warehouse’ online to provide many of these facilities and services, and this initiative was received with enthusiasm among librarians.

2.4 The sourcing and purchasing of WWE and the use of ICT

This matter has been referred to in other sections of the report, and reference has been made to the aspirations of libraries. The most important findings are:

- few public libraries in Wales are currently using full EDI facilities, and its use is restricted to the sourcing of English-language material obtained from their main or preferred commercial library suppliers. Some WWE materials can be sourced and purchased by that means, and evidence shows that a proportion is indeed being sourced in that way. What is more common is a hybrid situation – libraries searching library supplier websites (and various other book trade and library information services), some using CD versions of supplier databases, and processing their orders by email. There are some additional features in the situation as well, such as consortium purchasing (based on the agreement between libraries in south Wales and library supplier Cypher) and consortium processing (ordering,

cataloguing and servicing via NEWNET and TALNET in north Wales), both having significant ICT elements;

- many libraries in the public sector report that they have the necessary EDI facilities within their library management systems and several indicated that they would be commissioning and subsequently using those facilities in 2005;
- public libraries in Wales are now comparing the methods used to source and purchase books in English, and the methods available to procure them, with the largely paper-based methods available in Wales. The comparison has highlighted the administrative inconvenience and cost of the existing system, and that explains why so many libraries wish to migrate to the more sophisticated and convenient methods of working based on ICT;
- public libraries point to the obvious problem regarding their working relationship with supplier bookshops in Wales. Currently approval invoices are often manually produced, orders have to be duplicated around selection teams in libraries, then re-presented to supplier bookshops, sometimes via even further lists to servicing departments, then invoices have to be checked against orders, and catalogue entries have also to be created. This is a multi-faceted process and hugely inconvenient compared to the manner in which these routines and procedures can (and would) be facilitated by full or even partial EDI systems. Communications systems between libraries and their supplier bookshops appear currently to be the most primitive in the chain of supply;
- libraries seek to maintain those links with supplier bookshops for WWE material for sound and proper reasons – the advantages currently outweigh the disadvantages. Therefore a development programme that maintains the integrity of that relationship is essential and is probably the only option available in the circumstances, and it should comprise:
 - 1 of a fully electronic service based on *gwales.com* developed specifically as a library facility and as the focus for information, sourcing and supply regarding WWE for all libraries in Wales. The service – *gwales.com/libraries* should offer the same facilities and services as the best commercial supply databases offered for materials in the English language in England and internationally. Whereas it is possible for libraries to use certain parts of the current *gwales.com* service, as has been pointed out earlier, it is not a system designed for use by libraries and they have to use the bookshop and individual buyer facilities. It will therefore be necessary to make significant technical additions and modifications in order to ensure that the database and the book ordering system can be accessed for library purposes, and integrated with a library orientated information and ordering system, incorporating the bookshop facility;
 - 2 in the short term the specialist service to be developed for libraries should link directly with the approval collections service provided by the Welsh Books Council to libraries. It is probably reasonable to expect that when a comprehensive range of WWE titles are offered via

the new system, together with the proposed core list for libraries (see 2.5 below), the need for the circulation of approval copies should diminish and eventually disappear – there will be sufficient information available on-line to facilitate sourcing, selection and ordering. This should also ensure that libraries are aware of WWE promptly via a modern, high quality facility, with a suitable range of service facilities and added value features;

- 3 the electronic service envisaged should permit downloading and reconfiguration of data for a range of local administrative purposes. Librarians would wish that list to offer bibliographical and other data, such as an indication of the suitability of material for library use, genre, age range and so on, together with reviews or synopses and other pertinent material. It could then be used for a range of in-house library processes and routines, and at the end of the process be used for catalogue entry creation and for the production of various other promotional materials, such as reading lists.

Such a development would represent not only a significant step in the modernisation of the book trade in Wales but it would also respond in the only feasible and appropriate means to the needs of libraries in all sectors in Wales. It would contribute to the development and modernisation of libraries, and enhance the services available to library users at the same time. It would lead to greater efficiency and effectiveness in the area of sourcing and purchasing of WWE, and could contribute to more success for indigenous Welsh publishers.

The development of a *gwales.com/libraries* service shares similar aims and objectives to those of CyMAL's '@Your library' strategic plan, particularly its resource discovery strand, and it is recommended that the Welsh Books Council should seek financial support for the development from CyMAL under the auspices of that programme. As a broad estimate of costs (based on recent work undertaken to develop the *gwales.com* facility for individual buyers, and bearing in mind the additional technical work necessary to integrate the various parts of the existing service for bookshops with the new library facility), grant in aid of some £80,000 to £85,000 is necessary. An application should be submitted without delay, and the work of consulting with libraries on the nature of their specific technical requirements should begin forthwith. It could then be anticipated that a system could be available for trial and piloting by March 2006, and that a full facility could be launched soon after April 2006.

2.5 *The concept of a 'core list' of WWE for libraries*

Reference has already been made in this report to the issue of the difficulties that librarians encounter when they seek to define Welsh Writing in English. The Assembly's Culture, Welsh Language and Sport Committee report adopted the widest possible definition, and the breadth of that definition would, in the view of librarians, present a significant problem in terms of sourcing material, in terms of selecting material in accordance with their acquisition policies, and in terms of the constraints on financial resources currently available to libraries in Wales. Such concerns have already generated some discussion among interested groups, and an early outcome of those discussions has been the development of the concept of a core list of WWE for libraries specifically to help them to overcome some of these difficulties. In recent times librarians have become more familiar with using recommended or core lists of reading materials, particularly under the auspices of the Estyn Allan reading promotion scheme, and librarians involved with that scheme are among the most enthusiastic supporters of the concept of a WWE core list.

During this study, libraries were given the opportunity to consider the relevance of the concept of the core list in relation to improving the sourcing and purchasing of WWE. Some respondents expressed reservations, believing that such a list could become a very prescriptive selection tool, usurping the role of the librarian in the selection process and possibly steering collections away from local needs and interests. Others reiterated the view that some of the WWE material currently being published, particularly by publishers in Wales, is among the least popular in terms of public borrowing, and that current levels of interest and use may not yet justify additional investment. Others pointed to their existing honourable support for WWE sustained over many decades without any 'outside interference'.

However, the vast majority of those consulted expressed the view that the production of a WWE core list would bring about a number of benefits, as it could:

- provide librarians with a clear and a consistent definition of WWE materials;
- provide librarians with a unique current bibliographic tool whose coverage and content could provide very significant improvements on the present arrangements. It was assumed that the lists would be produced in association with librarians and by librarians but administratively coordinated by the Welsh Books Council, - this would add greatly to the range and value of services provided to libraries;
- provide an indicative or evaluative list of materials whose literary and others merits had been established;
- provide a valuable tool to facilitate stock quality health checks in this area;
- help to streamline, modernise and simplify sourcing and purchasing procedures.

Many suggestions as to how such a core list should be created and used were also received. In terms of creation, the general view that emerged was that the list should be

- created in consultation with librarians in the public sector so that suitable material could be appropriately identified;
- issued to an agreed timetable, and reflecting the rate at which WWE titles are published, with the expectation that a core list would be circulated at least annually, particularly if it is adopted as a stock quality health check mechanism by the second framework of Welsh Public Library Standards, as seems very likely;
- circulated electronically.

In terms of content, it was suggested that:

- the initial core lists issued should provide both retrospective and current coverage. Retrospective coverage should be restricted to material still in print and therefore available for purchase;
- the core list should contain all kinds of pertinent materials, fiction and non-fiction, other literary forms and any other appropriate material, such as reference works, non book formats and electronic sources and formats, and should include WWE titles for children;
- the creative literature material on the core list should be identified under detailed genre headings in order to assist with the issue of definition and selection, and that target reader groups should be clearly identified in order to address current ambiguities and shortcomings.

Significantly, librarians did point to certain issues relating to the concept that merit consideration. Firstly, some librarians suggested that problems could arise from the point of view of authors and their publishers whose works may not be selected for inclusion of the lists from time to time.

Secondly, some librarians pointed to the possible adverse effect on the Welsh Books Council's Distribution Centre and local bookshops of developing the core list concept should major library suppliers decide to stock and sell the titles listed. Such an arrangement could only be achieved if library suppliers and publishers of WWE were able to reach a suitable financial arrangement. Mainstream library suppliers will only deal on the basis of substantial discounts from publishers to them, and such discounts would be significantly more than those currently offered by most publishers in Wales. It is possible that obtaining access to a wider market in England and elsewhere by having titles listed in major library supplier databases could persuade more Welsh publishers, and therefore more publishers of WWE, to become engaged with this aspect of the book trade to a greater extent. This could offer additional alternative sourcing and purchasing routes for libraries, and libraries may obtain some of the titles at prices lower than those offered by any of their

supplier bookshops, and with possibly more value added features. However, this could also accentuate the problem of haphazard information about WWE titles and the current haphazard nature of sourcing and supply of WWE titles. The Welsh Books Council has had to consider similar issues in relation to some of its schemes and initiatives in the past and has usually found the means of addressing them. If it is expected to develop its information services for libraries in relation to WWE titles, its Books Centre and its bookshop stakeholders cannot be expected to suffer adversely as a result of that enhanced work, and publishers and libraries must be expected to demonstrate a continued high degree of loyalty to the bookshops and to the Distribution Centre in future arrangements.

3 Recommendations

This list of recommendations relates both to individual library sectors and to the needs and aspirations that are common to all the library sectors in Wales. On the basis of the evidence gathered by this study it is possible to make certain recommendations that should bring about changes in the sourcing and purchasing of WWE. Those changes could make sourcing and purchasing more effective, more efficient and less demanding and time-consuming in terms of their administration in libraries. Nevertheless, it is important to observe that the changes and developments sought by libraries (and reflected in these recommendations), would impose a very significant additional administrative burden on the Welsh Books Council in the first instance. In addition, as has been stated earlier, there are other very influential issues relating to WWE in Welsh libraries, and it must not be expected that improved routines and procedures will of necessity have a significant impact on sales volumes in the short term.

Many librarians indicated that major publicity and marketing initiatives should go hand-in-hand with improved sourcing and purchasing arrangements; they are undoubtedly a very necessary prerequisite before libraries would contemplate making additional resources available for the purchase of more copies WWE titles, but as marketing and publicity were not matters addressed within the parameters of this study, there are no recommendations offered in those areas.

3.1 Welsh Books Council services to Welsh public library authorities

For many reasons, mainly those concerned with political and commercial sensitivities, it is not possible or appropriate to recommend that the Welsh Books Council should contemplate establishing a commercial library supply service to this sector. There could be advantages in doing so, not the least of which would be the streamlining and simplification of current practices and arrangements and the provision of a consistent level of service, with similar value added characteristics, to all authorities. However, the evidence assembled by this study reflects the sector's view that is strongly in favour of retaining the best characteristics of the present system in Wales but with certain refinements and developments, and it would not seek any developments that would endanger the existence of local bookshops. The study also established very firmly that it is not the wish of the Welsh Books Council to establish such a service. The key components that public librarians wish to retain from the existing arrangements are the approval copies service, the provision of information and bibliographic services, together with the continued involvement of the local supplier bookshop. These widely-held views and opinions have contributed significantly to the framing of the recommendations offered below.

Public library authorities do also have certain higher aspirations, and they are also reflected wherever possible and feasible in the list of recommendations offered.

It is therefore recommended that in order to improve the sourcing and purchasing of WWE in public library authorities in Wales, that:

- 3.1.1 the Welsh Books Council should continue to provide approval collections of WWE material in all formats;
- 3.1.2 the Welsh Books Council should discuss with those authorities that are not currently using this service whether they wish to avail themselves of it. Only one authority indicated that it would not wish to receive such a service;
- 3.1.3 the frequency of the approval collection service of WWE material needs to be considered. Indications received during the research work suggest that as the number of WWE titles published annually is not great, that a monthly collection of approval copies of WWE publications would meet the needs of libraries. There is also a consensus view that WWE titles should continue to be included with the collections of Welsh-language materials circulated by the approval service as at present;
- 3.1.4 consideration should be given to the provision of the approval collections service to libraries directly by the Welsh Books Council. Collections should no longer be channelled through local supplier bookshops. A substantial body of opinion now exists among librarians that such an arrangement would have advantages to all participating authorities, primarily consistency and speed. It would also simplify and streamline the provision without offering a threat to any participating party since the supplier bookshop would still accrue the financial benefit of sales in due course, and it may break the mould of buying patterns whereby library authorities tend to only buy one copy of WWE material published in Wales. Moving to one model of service for all participating library authorities in Wales would eradicate many of the minor but irritating problems associated with the scheme, and would facilitate significant service enhancements in due course;
- 3.1.5 the content and the quality of the approval collection service should be improved:
- the Distribution Centre and/or the supplier bookshops should discuss the profile of library needs with the authority on a regular basis (annually) to accurately establish needs and requirements, and they should monitor the effectiveness and the accuracy of the service on a regular basis in order to ensure that only relevant and appropriate materials are forwarded to libraries. This could result in the removal and the addition of certain kinds of materials. The Welsh Books Council should initiate discussion of this issue;
 - the information and other supplementary material sent with the approval collections needs to be appropriate and full, and tailored to the contents of the particular approval collection and to the needs of libraries, not merely invoices for the material. Libraries should be advised of the impending arrival of the collection by means of an electronic list of the contents of the collection, noting all necessary bibliographic details, descriptions, reviews or synopses and any suitable graphical material. That information

should be downloadable in order to facilitate further transmission and use within authorities for various purposes and to facilitate communication between servicing facilities, and of course, the supplying bookshop. This is the area of development that will place the greatest additional burden on the Welsh Books Council, - the Council cannot be expected to respond within its existing resources, and the solution undoubtedly is the creation of a specific library-orientated service based on *gwales.com*, suitably funded as a discrete project, as noted in 2.4 above.

3.2 Libraries of the Higher Education sector

The wishes and aspirations of librarians in this sector were outlined in section 1.2 above, and it is recommended that the Welsh Books Council respond to those matters:

3.2.1 by developing communication and information services based on ICT with libraries in this sector so that sourcing of WWE becomes based on services similar in nature and quality to those used by libraries in the sector for the sourcing and purchasing of materials through consortium arrangements;

3.2.2 by investigating the possibility of permitting libraries in this sector to order and purchase WWE materials directly via *gwales.com* via EDI so that the problems being encountered at the present time when purchasing single copy orders are overcome, and by that means the service can be modernised. The nature and the quality of services relating to WWE materials from Wales would then be similar to that obtained by libraries using their consortium purchase arrangements. It might still be possible for the libraries to maintain their relationships with bookshops, and orders could be channelled through them if any library would opt to make such an arrangement, but it would also be possible to consider establishing a preferred bookshop supplier under a consortium arrangement, but the bookshop would have to offer its services via EDI. Libraries would expect discounted prices and value added services under such an arrangement, but many WWE titles are already subsidised at the production stage by grants, and their unit costs are usually lower than books of a similar nature in English, and as such, it would not be reasonable to expect further discounts and subsidies.

3.3 Libraries of the Further Education sector

Reference has already been made to the wishes and aspirations of librarians in this sector in section 1.3. It is recommended that the Welsh Books Council respond to those matters:

3.3.1 by developing communication and information services based on ICT with libraries in this sector so that sourcing of WWE becomes based on

services similar in nature and quality to those used by libraries in the sector for the sourcing and purchasing of materials through consortium arrangements;

3.3.2 by continuing to undertake liaison visits to institutions in this sector;

3.3.3 by considering the feasibility of extending the direct purchasing mechanism proposed for the Higher Education sector libraries (in 3.2.2 above) to libraries in the Further Education sector, as they tend to report the same operational problems. As the institutions in this sector place great emphasis on effective procurement, discounted prices and value added services would be expected. However, as we have noted above, WWE titles are usually subsidised at the production stage, and it would not be appropriate to offer further subsidies and discounts on books whose unit costs are usually lower than equivalent or similar titles in English. The bodies that could best advise the Welsh Books Council on such deliberations would be Fforwm (on behalf of the institutions and their management) and the Funding Council for Further Education in Wales.

3.4 ICT and interaction with libraries

This matter was discussed in sections 1.2, 1.3, 2.4, 3.2 and 3.3 above, and strategic steps are outlined in relation to the development of ICT based platforms for the sourcing and purchasing of WWE. Therefore it is recommended that:

- the Welsh Books Council should initiate a development programme for *gwales.com* so that a full EDI facility could be offered, and that the steps outlined in 2.4 are followed. As a result of such a programme *gwales.com/libraries* would be created, a specialist bespoke service offering a range of services and facilities that would respond to the needs and aspirations of libraries in Wales and bring about greatly improved sourcing and purchasing arrangements for WWE.

3.5 The core list of Welsh writing in English

This matter has been explored in some detail in section 2.5 above, and the evidence supporting the case for developing the concept is strong. It is therefore recommended that the Welsh Books Council should:

- facilitate the development of a WWE core list service for libraries in Wales;
- establish a small group of librarians from the public libraries sector to provide initial advice on the nature and content of the service;
- consider and respond to the suggestions made by librarians as to the manner in which the service should be provided.