

## **Literature Wales Writers' Bursaries and Mentoring Scheme**

### **Bursaries Panel Chair's Report 2018**

The Bursaries Panel was once again thrilled to be able to consider so many applications for support from Welsh writers. This year, a number of changes were made to the Bursary award process, and on behalf of the panel I would like to note our heartfelt thanks to Petra Bennett for her guidance and support as we implemented the revised Bursaries and Mentoring Scheme.

The aim of the changes, which were recommended by writers and the Directors of Literature Wales, is to ensure a greater emphasis on developing the writers who receive support from us. The Panel was asked to award up to twenty Writers' Bursaries of £3000 each, with six of the twenty bursaries assigned for new writers, one of which was for a writer under 25 years of age. This clear, strategic and balanced new system was greatly welcomed by the Panel, especially the new step of including a place on a residential mentoring course at the Tŷ Newydd Writing Centre and one-to-one follow-up sessions as part of the Bursaries for 6 new writers. This closer link between the Mentoring Scheme and the Bursaries Scheme underlines the importance and value of practical, professional support in nurturing and developing writers, alongside offering financial support. In addition to the twenty Writers' Bursaries, there were also four places to be awarded on the Mentoring Scheme, and there was also the potential to consider applications for Support Fund Bursaries in order to assist writers who have to deal with disabilities or specific health issues.

We received 110 applications for Bursaries this year, a large number of which (73) were by new writers, and 3 of which were by writers eligible for the Writer's Bursary for writers under 25 years of age. This shows without doubt the value of the scheme in supporting writers to develop their skills, and is a very encouraging sign that new blood is stirring and enriching our literary culture. Only 9 writers had previously received a Bursary (either by the Arts Council, Academi or Literature Wales). In terms of language, 103 of the applications were in English and 7 in Welsh. We also received 4 applications for support from the Support Fund. It was pleasing to see 4 applications from writers who had previously received support through the Literature Wales Mentoring Scheme, highlighting Literature Wales's success in building confidence and offering guidance to writers as they take the next step in their development as writers.

I would like to state two things before expanding on the Panel's decisions this year. Firstly, half the applications received were received on the closing date itself. There were numerous gaps and errors, along with some superficial and rushed answers on some forms, that sometimes put candidates at a disadvantage. I would therefore remind future candidates, considering the highly competitive nature of the process and the high standard of applications, that their completed form should do their application and their literary talent justice. Secondly, the number of applications by Welsh language writers was again relatively low – 7 out of 110. Given the vibrancy of the Welsh language literary scene – reflected in exciting initiatives such as *Y Stamp* magazine, the *Clera* podcast and the brilliant winners of local and national eisteddfodau, it is a shame that we are not seeing more Welsh language writers, especially young people, benefitting from the valuable support that a Bursary could offer. Not a single application was received from a Welsh language poet this year.

Now to the submitted applications. Having whittled the initial list of 110 down to a long list of 43, we came to the difficult second step of deciding which writers exhibited genuine promise and great talent. As well as the high number of new writers of all ages and backgrounds who made it to the long list, there was also a good number of experienced writers, proving that the Bursaries are a crucial source for writers at all stages of their careers. In discussing and weighing up the submitted applications, the panel was painfully aware that, due to the limitations of the budget this year, we would not be able to support some writers whose work deserved further development.

Poetry was almost as prominent as fiction in terms of the genre of applications that reached the long list this year, and in many cases, it was poetry of the highest standard. The Panel was pleased to see strong, high-standard representation of children and young people's fiction, with the best examples including "truly outstanding" writing as stated in a Panel member's report, with Welsh legends often inspiring original and imaginative work. Crime novels were popular once again, with many discussing contemporary social issues and using the urban and rural landscapes of Wales as a backdrop for the submitted fiction. It was also pleasing to see that rare creature, the Welsh language graphic novel, among the top entries. We are in a period of revisiting and refining our relationship with each other and with the world as a result of recent political earthquakes, and so it was perhaps not surprising that exploring all aspects of identity in Wales and beyond – yesterday, today and into the future

– was a popular theme across the genres, from fantasy and dystopian fiction, to all kinds of poetry and novels for young adults. We received intelligent and imaginative – and at times thrilling – responses to the tensions that are scarring communities: prejudice, voicelessness, injustice and alienation.

On behalf of the Bursaries Panel, I would like to warmly congratulate the 21 writers who received Writers' Bursaries (6 of whom also received a place on the Mentoring Scheme), and the 4 writers who received a place on the Mentoring Scheme. We look forward to seeing the fruits of their labour. I would like to thank everyone who shared their work with us and we hope that the writers who were not successful this year do not give up but will continue to develop their skills for the benefit of our literary culture.

**Sioned Williams**

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