

# ACHATES

## ***Industrial Strategy Response: The Future of Literature***

*This response has been compiled with key voices from the literature, publishing and translation sectors.*

The literature sector needs more investment to support diverse voices, and to nurture and develop authors and to ensure a diversity of independent publishers and independent retailers.

With the new governments priorities on ending inequality and driving inclusive growth, the importance of investing in creative industries that provide these pipelines, such as literature, has never been more important.

Literature and reading for pleasure are central for peoples life chances and for building empathy. Yet, one in seven primary schools doesn't have a library. Public libraries are closing. Writers are struggling to make a living from their work. More 700 independent book shops have closed since the repeal of the Net Book Agreement in the 1990s.

France which has the same population size as the UK has 3.5 times more independent book shops. Independent publishers and independent book shops are cash poor.

But there is hope. The Creative Industries and publishing are strong (question 5). The English language continues to be dominant. We have a well-established publishing culture and there is a thriving pipeline of plays for theatre and radio, TV and filmscripts as well as the richness of our wider cultural landscape such as our art centres and festivals.

Looking to the key enablers and barriers to growth (question 6), publishing and literature depends on talent and talent only emerges abundantly when it is nurtured and supported. This could be done both by providing grant funding for emerging writers and/or a 'basic income for artists'.

Ireland leads the way on this. From the 1980s, an artist could apply to join Aosdana, once accepted they could apply for a Cnuas (living grant) which covered basic income.

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This original scheme is now being followed up by a pilot offering 'basic income for artists.'<sup>1</sup> It's no wonder the creative industries in Ireland are thriving.

In terms of barriers to investment (question 7), publishing is notoriously unpredictable. One of the things that would be most practically helpful in a world of closing distributors, would be for government to support distribution of books.

Even though the editing and design of books has been streamlined by computer technology, production and distribution of physical books remains a challenge for UK publishers, especially for small to medium sized publishers. Wherever a publisher is based geographically, they will always want to know that they can get their books to every part of the UK, so it would make sense to invest in a distribution centre in the centre of the country.

Looking to the Clusters referenced (question 26), there are clusters, and one can see it in the arts in regional centres like Newcastle upon Tyne, Leeds, Norwich, Bradford, Liverpool, Manchester, Bristol, Birmingham, Edinburgh, Glasgow, Cardiff and Belfast, but there are also towns and smaller cities scattered across the UK, like Barnsley, Reading, Swindon, Milton Keynes, Durham, Lancaster, Hereford, Kendal, Dundee, Aberdeen, Derry, Aberystwyth, etc., which are important centres locally. Though not major centres, these smaller towns and cities also produce clusters so it's not only a matter of looking at major clusters based on large centres of population centres, but consideration of scale too.

We believe that there is a pivotal opportunity to support our industry in helping make creativity and creative writing something that becomes central to people's sense of purpose in life. We need to address the view that is often spread that a career in the creative industries isn't a financially sustainable option and create a rich and diverse pipeline for our industry for the future.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/6d4e1-basic-income-for-the-arts-pilot-scheme-faqs/>