Bookselling for Ireland

A Manifesto from the Booksellers Association
Bookselling for Ireland

The book industry makes an important and positive social, economic and cultural contribution to Ireland.

There are over 200 bookshops in Ireland at present. The Booksellers Association of the United Kingdom & Ireland (the BA) endeavours through the promotion of books in Ireland to maintain and grow this number.

Booksellers provide employment for over 2,000 people and enhance the cultural ‘flavour’ of towns and cities.

Bookselling has been an integral part of the cultural landscape of Ireland. Literature is one of the most iconic symbols of Ireland’s culture.

Ireland is unique in the world, as a small country, boasting four Nobel Prize Winners for Literature. In Failte Ireland’s survey of ‘What people enjoy most about visiting Ireland’; 74% stated it was for “the interesting history and culture”.

As such, it is very important that bookselling is supported by Government.

Bookselling is a vital source:

- In supplying the educational needs of the next generation and promoting literacy.
- Underpinning education and research.
- Promoting reading for pleasure.
- Developing future authors, while promoting and extending the reach of those famous Irish writers of the past.
- Enriching our culture and helping inspire other creative sectors – like theatre, cinema, television and music. ‘Brooklyn’ by Colm Toibin being a recent case in point.
- Providing an attractive environment where visitors to Ireland can browse the wealth of Irish literature, in attractive and welcoming bookshops in town centres.
- Helping towns and cities thrive and stay vibrant.

The Booksellers Association (The BA) proposes the following measures for consideration by Government. We believe they will help ensure we maintain a strong, prosperous book industry, capable of working with all interested parties in delivering a highly literate and skilled workforce, a well-supported academic and scientific research base, and globally recognised innovative businesses.
Executive Summary

- Government should properly value the cultural importance of books, bookshops and reading to the Irish economy and the Irish cultural landscape.

- **Business Rates must be reviewed** and made more competitive so they are fairer to businesses across Ireland and flexible enough to respond to the economic cycle.

- Booksellers support the development and preservation of our **Main Streets and Town Centres** so that they further develop as attractive retail locations, creating jobs and bolstering the local economy.

- The Department of Education should look at ways in which more schools can enjoy the benefits of a school library, especially in light of the recent very successful JCSP library project.

- **As a country we need to invest in learning resources** and encourage schools to maintain a minimum set percentage of expenditure on books.

- Booksellers believe in **boosting reading for pleasure** to help create a happier more content society.

- We believe public libraries are a valuable resource in the community and **books for libraries should be sourced from experienced and knowledgeable Irish Library Suppliers**.

- Booksellers have a crucial part to play in the advancing of literacy for children and adults.

- We must take the right steps forward for **the Digital Single Market in EU**.

- The Irish Government should support an enquiry into the online physical and e-book sectors, at the EU level. This would need to pay close attention to the impact on authors, publishers and booksellers (especially those in the independent sector) of the prevailing market conditions.

- We must maintain **NO taxes on reading**.
Fair Markets for Consumer Choice

Remove market distortion and ensure competition in book retailing

The book retail market in Ireland suffers from an imbalance for authors, publishers and booksellers. The routes to market for e-books are too narrow and too few, and the online market for print books is similarly restricted, creating a potential for adverse effect on competition within both markets as well as distorting the overall books market so as to impact on the ability of main street booksellers to compete, and ultimately restricting consumers’ choice of retail opportunities.

Booksellers ensure that works are disseminated as widely and fully as possible, and that print and digital versions are available to consumers. We can only continue to achieve this if markets are fair and balanced.

The Irish Government should:

- Support an inquiry at EU level on the impact on authors, publishers and booksellers (especially those in the independent sector) of the prevailing market conditions.
The Cultural and Literary Heritage of Ireland

Bookshops play an important role in the cultural and literary heritage of Ireland

Ireland – a state founded by what is often termed the ‘Poet’s Revolution’ – is a country in which the standing of literature has always been prominent in the national psyche.

Irish bookshops offer a cultural showpiece for the native Irish, the diaspora and other visitors to the island; Irish bookshops also have e-commerce websites selling many Irish books abroad.

Irish bookshops promote Irish publishing and together represent the new Ireland of the 21st century. It is crucial that bookshops are seen as a resource to develop and support Cultural Tourism.
“If ever the great web of [...] bookshops were to pass away, it would be like the loss of the library at Alexandria. They are an essential bright thread in the tapestry of civilization, tying into the heart and soul of a country.”

Sebastian Barry

### Literary Festivals in Ireland

- Kildare Readers Festival, Co. Kildare
- Mountains to the Sea Festival, Dun Laoghaire
- Listowel Writers Week, Co. Kerry
- Doolin Writers Weekend, Co. Clare
- Ennis Book Club Festival, Co. Clare
- Cúirt International Festival of Literature, Galway
- International Literature Festival, Dublin
- Dublin Book Festival, Dublin City
- Maria Edgeworth Literary Festival, Co. Longford
- Dalkey Book Festival, Co. Dublin
- Hay Festival Kells, Co. Meath
- West Cork Literary Festival, Co. Cork
- Red Line Book Festival, South Dublin
- Cork Spring Poetry Festival, Co. Cork
- Limerick Literary Festival, Co. Limerick
- Lennox Robinson Literary Festival, Douglas, Co. Cork
- Gort Literary Festival, Co. Galway
- Eigse, Michael Hartnett, Literary and Arts Festival, Newcastlewest, Co. Limerick
- Franco-Irish Literary Festival, Dublin
- Yeats Summer School, Sligo
- Strokestown Art & Poetry Festival, Co. Roscommon
- Borris House Festival of Writing & Ideas, Co. Carlow
- Sound Eye Poetry Festival, Cork
- Frank O’Connor, Cork International Short Story Festival
- Immrama Festival of Travel Writing, Lismore, Co. Waterford
- Waterford Writers Weekend, Waterford
- Féile Litríochta Gaeilge, Baile Átha Cliath
- Athlone Literary Festival, Co. Westmeath
- Kerrygold Ballymaloe Literary Festival of Food and Wine, Co. Cork
- Focal, Wexford Literary Festival, Co. Wexford
- Gerard Manley Hopkins Literary Festival, Co. Kildare
- Graiguenamanagh ‘Town of Books’ Festival, Co. Kilkenny
- International Summer School in Irish Studies, UCC, Co. Cork
- Annual Patrick Kavanagh Literary Weekend, Inniskeen, Co. Monaghan
- Dromineer Literary Festival, Co. Tipperary
- Samhain International Poetry Festival, Gortahork, Co. Donegal
- Rolling Sun Book Festival, Westport, Co. Mayo
- Wild Words Book Festival, Carrick-on-Shannon, Co. Leitrim
Reforming Business Rates
Helping Irish business compete

The present Business Rates system is too high.

In the bookselling sector there has been a considerable shift from consumers making book purchase in a physical shop to making the purchase online. Books were one of the first products to be offered for sale over the internet, helped by the fact that each book had a unique product identifier (the ISBN – the International Standard Book Number).

Partly as a consequence of Business Rates the total number of independent booksellers in Ireland has fallen.

The Government should consider exemptions for smaller booksellers – especially as booksellers are low margin businesses with high rents. This would also help to maintain employment.

Today, whilst the business of bookselling has transformed considerably, Business Rates remain unreformed and represent one of the most disproportionate and burdensome costs that a book business has to face.
Developing Our Towns and Inner Cities

Bookshops are havens for everyone, building community character and contributing to the distinct flavour of a neighbourhood as literary and cultural hubs. Booksellers give substantial support to local and national causes and events, including reading groups, schools, libraries, arts organisations, festivals and charities. Bookshop events are well known to attract consumers to the Main Street, especially families, and they increase ‘dwell time’.

If we wish to retain a vibrant Main Street, that are not mere ‘clone towns’ but act as the true heart of a community, then we need outlets that promote art, literacy and entertainment.

We hope the Government will seriously take on board cultural and social aspects when considering how Main Streets might best be supported.

In addition to the Business Rate changes mentioned above, the BA suggests the following areas should be addressed:

- Action on parking charges (some free parking for an hour or two would help, as would a cap on charges).
- More subsidised public transport and more park & ride schemes.
- Development of partnerships with local authorities to plan a mixed use of cultural and leisure activities as well as just pure retail.
- Use of empty shops to promote arts activities and artisan crafts – booksellers would be more than willing to offer support.
- Local people to have a say in what kind of retailers they would like to have on their Main Street.
A Library in Every School

Encourage school library provision

The benefits of every school enjoying a well-maintained, curated library service would ensure that every child in Ireland, wherever they live and whatever their background, has access to a full range of reading materials, in both digital and physical forms at their school.

Booksellers provide books, e-books and other digital resources to school libraries, ensuring that there are plentiful reading materials for children of all ages to enjoy in the classroom, in the library and at home.

The Department of Education should:

- Look at ways in which more schools can enjoy the benefits of a school library with sufficient books available for all its children and have a nominated library specialist among its staff.
- Encourage schools to work with their local authority public library service to establish a school library fund and create efficiencies in the provision of books to children.
- Encourage schools to talk to and work with book experts in local bookshops in relation to providing books and book-related events for children.
- Consider creative ways of allowing booksellers to extend the love of reading through engagement with books in school libraries.

“The indications are that a failure in literacy is one of the main reasons why students drop out of school.”

Mark Morgan, Department of Education (JCSP presentation)
Invest in Learning Resources
World-class teaching and learning materials for schools

National and international research clearly demonstrates that print and digital textbook-based learning is a major factor in delivering a consistently positive impact upon a country’s education system. High quality, pedagogically sound, carefully prepared teaching and learning resources in digital, physical or mixed formats, are the most important factors in determining outcomes, whether in the PISA-table leading Far East or in European countries.

The bookselling sector is ideally placed to assist the Government in delivering the best for Irish children and their schools.

In order to ensure that Irish schools continue to perform to their best potential for pupils, the Department for Education should:

- Ensure that a minimum percentage of set expenditure be spent on books.
Boost Reading for Pleasure
Work with industry and charities to get more people reading and drive up everyone’s literacy levels

The OECD Adult Skills Survey shows that 17.9% (or about 1 in 6 Irish adults) are at or below level 1 on a five level literacy scale. At this level a person may be unable to understand basic written information. Ireland ranks 15th out of 24 participating countries.

Literacy is like a muscle. If you don’t use reading and writing skills every day you can get out of practice.

Booksellers have decades of strong engagement with the various literacy and reading for pleasure charities operating in Ireland, providing financial, material and in-kind support to their programmes in schools, libraries, prisons and the wider community, such as providing free and discounted books for distribution in schools and libraries. In recent years we have stepped up this engagement and are working harder than ever to co-ordinate the efforts and communications of the whole sector to ensure that every part of society – children, adults, those with English as a second language, those in prison – have the opportunity to learn, read and go on to enjoy reading.

The Government should:
- Maintain a commitment to achieving 100% levels of literacy in children.
- Consider additional ways to support charity campaigns to boost children’s literacy levels.
- Encourage greater reading in prisons, in order to help offenders after their sentences to return to society better equipped and to reduce offending levels.
Public Libraries for All

The Irish public library service is a source of national and historic pride. Building on the wonderful contribution of Andrew Carnegie, the Government invested heavily in new Libraries over the past 15 years, with wonderful new libraries in Dun Laoghaire, Blackrock, Tubbercurry, Waterford, Doordoyle and many others. It is important that such a national resource is used to its fullest.

The Library Supply Sector in Ireland contributes in no small way to the selection of best book stock, efficient delivery of special titles and the promotion of Irish publishing for the public libraries.

The issue of Government procurement is critical to the future viability of this sector, which is a significant employer to local communities, in cities and towns around Ireland; Leixlip, Sligo, Dublin and Limerick.

The Government is currently planning ‘One Blanket National Tender’ for book stock, in September 2016. Whilst we recognise the economic rationale behind the original decision, we believe that this is, in fact, counter-productive and will result in serious economic damage to small bookshops and specialist Irish Library Suppliers. It will also do damage to the range of Irish published material available in Irish libraries, especially if, as with the recent Academic Books Tender, the award is given to a UK or US company.

We want consideration of social issues in public procurement

In 2015 the Seanad passed all stages of the Public Procurement Social Value Bill. There was unanimous support from both Opposition and Government parties for the Bill which was modelled on legislation already passed by the Scottish Parliament.

In Scotland the Act requires that before a public body buys anything, it must think about how it can improve the economic, social and environmental well-being of its area. This is called the Sustainable Procurement Duty and is a legal requirement when the Act is fully implemented.

Our Government is obliged to introduce the relevant EU Directives in this area. We believe that spending public money in a way which considers social, environmental and employment issues can make big improvements to communities across the country.
We strongly support a sustainable approach to the procurement of library books that recognises:

- The importance of libraries within local communities.
- The future of Irish literature in the context of the Irish Book Industry.
- The future of Irish literature in the context of its worldwide reputation.

We want the awarding of the new National Tender to be delayed until such time as the Dail has enacted the above legislation.

We want future tenders for library supply to be ‘regionalised’, in order to support local communities and the SME sector.

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The Digital Single Market in the EU
The right steps forward

The BA welcomes the opportunity to express its views on the European Commission’s proposals to develop a Digital Single Market for Europe.

We are calling on DG Competition to:

- Examine whether there is an unhealthy domination in the EU book market and, if so, whether there has been an abuse of that dominant position, which has had a detrimental effect on competition.

- Be aware that publishers are already enabling libraries to lend e-books under licence, and want to continue to do so. The extension of Copyright exceptions to e-lending by public libraries would undermine the viability of the eco-system of the nascent ebook market. It would also undermine the capacity of the book sector to keep on investing in innovative digital solutions, for the benefit of readers across Europe.

- Unrestrained e-book lending has the potential to harm jobs and growth in bookselling whilst not necessarily improving footfall for libraries. Rights holders should individually introduce financial models which generate a fair balance between commercial interests (bookshops, publishers and authors) who want to be rewarded for writing, publishing and selling the book, and libraries who loan for free.

- It is important decision makers at European and national level are aware that businesses, and these sometimes include booksellers and publishers, take the decision not to sell to consumers in other member states for sound commercial reasons (e.g. the market is not large enough to justify the investment required to sell across borders; or the Return on Investment and profitability is too low) – and not because of any copyright restrictions.

- As EU countries have different demands from the same content, rights holders should not be compelled to exploit their works in a way which is not beneficial to them.

- Proprietary systems should be ended. Interoperability should be introduced so that consumers can read any e-book on any device in order that e-content can be obtained from any supplier.

- As we have said earlier, e-books should be taxed for VAT purposes in individual member states at the same rate as that currently applying to printed books.

- The EC should propose legislation to the European Parliament and the Council aiming at harmonising as many of the Consumer Protection Rules as possible, but if this proves to be too difficult, the Rules applicable in the home market should apply.

- Profits should be taxed in the location where the value of sales – including digital content such as e-books – is generated.
No Tax on Reading

Keep VAT at 0%

- The zero rate of VAT on physical books is a long-standing feature of Ireland’s tax regime and is a reflection of the belief that tax should not act as a disincentive to reading and learning. The bookselling industry believes this should be retained.
About the Booksellers Association

Founded in 1895, the Booksellers Association is a trade association representing UK and Irish booksellers, based in London. The BA represents over 800 bookselling businesses, accounting for over 4,500 outlets. 200 of those bookselling outlets are in the Republic of Ireland, selling books in all formats to book-lovers of all types – children's, academic, fiction, history, biography, school books, poetry, drama, Irish special interest.

The BA helps its members to sell more books, to operate from a lower cost base, to improve competitiveness, to network with peers, and also represents the interests of booksellers to the wider world.

The BA operates an Irish Branch, the committee of which includes Eason, Dubray, Blessington Bookstore, The Gutter Bookshop, Ennis Bookshop, Maynooth University Bookshop, Book Nest Library Supply and others.

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