

Submission to: Comhchoiste na Gaeilge, na Gaeltachta agus Phobal Labhartha na Gaeilge.

Thank you for this opportunity to share my experience as a publisher of leisure reading material in Irish.

Summary

The field of Irish language publishing comprises of a few small, but active, publishing houses. Since Dalen joined these creative ranks in 2014, we have continuously developed a range of works to delight and entertain a wide range of audiences and consumers.

Our own creative ecosystem focusses on developing exciting works of an international nature for Irish language readers, concentrating on the quality of content and delivery, repackaging works for the benefit of our audiences, working in fruitful partnerships with established and new artists and cultural organisations.

The nature of the small-language environment in which we operate means, to a great degree, that we are values-led rather than finance-driven. Whilst we acknowledge the commercial value of the skills, work and effort which our commissions and titles entail, we are also aware that the imperative is often a desire and willingness to make works happen, to create excellent interactions for audiences, to expect high-quality material in the Irish language because second best is not good enough.

Although to a great degree publicly-funded, our works are produced within trade frameworks, with professional rates of remuneration, commercial fees, contracts and costs. Consequently it is imperative that our approach to works is commensurate with publishing industry standards.

As one of the few publishing houses regularly sourcing content and material from European markets, ours is a unique contribution to the Irish language publishing ecosystem, delivering

such material in the language to consumers, and bringing internationally acclaimed series to the Irish language market which in turn raises the profile and perception of the language at home and abroad. In bringing content from foreign cultures and markets, our role as repackagers and creators of this content in Irish is to use language, imagination and critical analysis to transform new and unfamiliar narratives into material which are culturally relevant to our audiences, and which can be enjoyed and appreciated by them.

In this respect our texts can contribute to discourse and opinion surrounding linguistic and cultural perception and value, cultural self-identity and appreciation within an international context, and in shaping literary, linguistic and cultural behaviour about the positioning of the Irish language and its sense of place within national and international contexts.

Our work brings together a group of new and experienced Irish language writers, translators and editors, giving them an opportunity to work on high-quality material in under-represented genres. All of our titles require extensive consideration and revision in order to present the most creative and inventive Irish texts possible. Literary translation is much more than transliteration of words from one language to another. It is about reflecting the nuance of dialogue, of introducing relevant, natural and original humour, of cultural relevance and appropriation where justified, of creating text that can stand as proud as any other piece of original work. I believe Dalen has demonstrated its ability to achieve this with works which now have a respected place in the Irish literary landscape.

At the core of our ambition is the aim of creating reading material which is attractive to those who may otherwise ignore literature — and Irish language literature in particular — appealing to sometimes underserved audiences, in particular teenage and young adult (with a degree of emphasis on literary and linguistically reluctant males). Each of our titles has its own literary merit for its intended audience, ranging from the classically notable to the contemporary ‘trashy’; from clever artistry and storytelling, to engaging pseudo-history, and unabashed mass-audience entertainment. The stories we bring to our audiences are selected for their discerned quality, potential attractiveness to readers, and unique potential in the Irish language book market.

Background

My prime experience lies with publishing in Welsh for audiences in Wales, and specifically bringing the European comic book genre to audiences. This is also the main genre which Dalen publishes in Irish. Our audience is ranged from young readers to adults, with different material targeted at different age groups, from children's books, books with wider appeal across all ages, and more adult-themed material.

Personally, I have always been interested in languages, and from my personal background I have always had a specific awareness of the position of wider Celtic languages and culture. I was drawn into the world of literary translation at a young age whilst still at school in the 70s, which I subsequently developed into part of my career.

The attraction of developing material from the comic book genre as leisure reading in Celtic languages lies in their ready acceptance by reluctant readers. It enables us to provide literary works of high quality and linguistic sophistication to readers who may otherwise not tend to choose to read our languages. It forms part of the normalisation of lesser-used languages in our otherwise anglo-centric environments.

It is said that one will never make money from publishing in lesser-used languages. To a great extent this is true, especially in certain genres. Very often it comes down to individuals, who possess the conviction, goodwill and ambition for the language to 'make things happen', to spearhead the development of such works. This is as true in Wales as it is in Ireland — "if nobody else is doing it, I will".

The main stumbling block of producing high-quality works in lesser-used languages is cost. Bringing titles such as *Asterix* and *Tintin* to our audiences is expensive. By collaborating with established international publishing rights holders, we will necessarily be subject to commercially expensive cost of sales, in terms of rights, royalties, artwork, adaptation, print production and distribution. However our cost of sales should not ignore the value of those prepared to go the extra mile to enable works such as ours to appear in Irish. Goodwill can be a useful contribution to the development of works, but in the real world we cannot rely

on it as the prime contributor to enabling new titles; we need to be able to offer competitive fees to our contributors.

When Dalen was first established in 2005, I harboured an ambition to develop material similar to the Welsh list for audiences of other Celtic languages. The Dalen Éireann imprint followed in 2014. This decision was not without its challenges for a lesser-used language publisher who is only, of necessity, superficially familiar with the languages and cultures of other Celtic nations — and to an extent unfamiliar with the book trade in those countries. As a Welsh publisher I chose to extend my horizons because of my awareness of the challenges of publishing titles such as *Asterix* and *Tintin* in any lesser-used language, and in particular the Celtic languages. Collaboration across languages can have real economic benefit. For instance, with *Asterix* and *Tintin* we have negotiated a package of lower advance rates, artwork material charges, studio design and lettering costs, and print costs across the 5 languages we publish. It has worked for Dalen because our *modus operandi* was primarily to develop and publish the same work simultaneously across several languages. To achieve this, we have brought together teams of writers, translators and editors who are the cornerstone of the success of Dalen's titles in Irish.

Publishing landscape

Wales is blessed with the extensive work undertaken by the Books Council of Wales, not only in enabling publishers and authors through grant funding to achieve ambitious projects, but also providing professional book trade expertise, practical editorial job-creation support, marketing, and by running an effective commercial sales and distribution system within the book trade in Wales and beyond. This means that books actually sell commercially, at an acceptable cost to publishers. Wales has a very large Welsh language book market, but in turn this means that sales of individual titles are thinner.

The system for Gaelic in **Scotland** is not as well developed, and although generous grant funding is available for works in Gaelic, the infrastructure has not been established to enable small publishers, perhaps remote publishers such as Dalen, to reach retailers and audiences. This has to be done through purely for-profit commercial businesses.

Consequently, much of the value of the work done out of conviction at low or no cost, is devoured by commercial fees.

Here in **Ireland**, the situation for Dalen is different again. Our initial work in Irish was speculative at our own cost. We chose to develop *Asterix* and *Tintin* in Irish, following a perceived demand subsequent to our Scottish Gaelic versions, on the back of what we were publishing in other grant-supported languages. The main challenge was establishing a strong team of translator and editor partnerships to ensure the quality of the text. As Publisher it was evident to me that my knowledge would be insufficient to give an educated editorial opinion. My contribution is in formulating detailed guidance on desired outcomes, suggestions on development, and querying decisions when things sit uncomfortably. Dalen's editorial team has grown and evolved, providing regular work for a number of editorial freelancers in Ireland who, I believe, have developed an understanding for what Dalen is trying to achieve. Our editorial structure was built on existing contacts and by forging new relationships with experts in the field of publishing in Ireland.

Funding and sales

Once we had established that an audience existed for our initial titles, we began to seek funding support from grant-awarding bodies to help us extend our lists and grow our number of titles. Because of the kind of works we were developing, Clár na Leabhar were unable to support us, but we were exceptionally fortunate to be awarded generous grant funding over several years by the Arts Council, from Literature Ireland, and more recently from COGG. This has allowed us to develop *Asterix* and *Tintin* as long-running popular series, and to build on these with some more classic literary titles from Europe — *Níoclás Beag* and *Agatán Sacs* — and to this year release other short series such as *An Triúr Triallach* and the forthcoming *Art Abú*. With recent development in digital printing techniques, we are now able to print shorter runs of books at the high quality expected by ourselves and our rights holders, rather than depend on reducing costs by the longer runs of the co-edition model. This gives us more flexibility in developing and finding attractive titles to bring to audiences in Ireland. Because, to a very great extent, the cost of sale for our kind

of books is higher than the return in revenues, without such grant funding we would be unable to achieve what we do to the extent we do in Irish.

ÁIS has been an important base customer, willing to take substantial stocks of new titles as firm sales and to take them to market via their repping provision. We have also worked with Repforce Ireland and Argosy to introduce our titles to the mainstream book trade.

Reception

The reception our titles in Irish have received has been outstanding. I would like to think that in part this is due to the quality of the work of my editorial teams and attractiveness of the works — our *Tintin* title *Taisce Raga Rua* won the 2021 Gradam de Bhaldráithe — with sales of titles in Irish often outperforming any of our other languages. For instance, since 2014, our *Asterix* and *Tintin* series in Irish have achieved combined sales of nearly 14,000 copies and on occasion been reprinted following sell-out of their initial print runs.

This success may be due to the continued relatively small size of the Irish language publishing industry and the types of books published — perhaps fewer titles for the crucial and more discerning early teens and young adult audience.

Dalén doesn't publish 'original' works; we concentrate on adaptations of some of the best titles available in the world. To a great extent, these titles are not available to readers through an English edition. As such we can give Irish readers 'ownership' of works, often culturally appropriating the works to Irish culture, language and background. For instance, our *Asterix* and *Tintin* adaptations works will be significantly different to the English editions as we use the original French as our source. Whilst keeping the spirit of the original, our adaptations will tell their stories in a way not experienced by any other language.

The goal is to give an Irish voice to some of the best literature from other cultures, to publish works which will reflect Irish outlooks, works which audiences might not necessarily realise have been brought from other traditions.

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