



# Editorial 224

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[224](#) [2]

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What a long time a month is in politics. After the turmoil of last year just as the landscape was beginning to clear, a General Election looms. The national parties once more flex their muscles and voters look anxiously as the manifestos are launched. The issues attracting the attention of voters tend to be what are seen as the big issues ? the NHS, immigration, employment, taxes. Books do not often get mentioned, and those whose business is books and information are on the whole invisible. CILIP is using the [Facts Matter](#) [3] campaign asking political parties and candidates to endorse the vital role of facts and evidence in public life, targeting policy priorities through the three connected policy goals : ambition, opportunity and fairness. These are big concepts and they are relevant to all the major issues ? not least to the question dominating the polls ? Brexit.

The consequences of Brexit will affect business, and that includes the publishing world ? the effect on the profits as trading routes become less flexible, markets narrower, as the exchange rates become less stable. It will affect the workforce especially those who have come to the UK from other countries and have adopted this country as their home. Here it touches on personal lives. For Axel Scheffler who arrived in the UK in the ?80s, ?The UK has been my home...and I intended to stay...My future as an EU citizen in this country has been put into question...I myself and many of my fellow Europeans in the UK are seriously considering whether we shall stay. It doesn?t feel as if we are wanted any longer?.

Other implications are more subtle. This is a time when issues around diversity, representation and inclusion are being taken up. When the low number of books in translation published for young people is being challenged and concepts such as empathy are being explored, Brexit implies a turning away, a drawing back, a narrower focus. This is not what children?s authors or librarians working with young people want or need. There is a real danger that publishers and the book-buying public will turn back to favouring the status-quo, taking the ?safe? road. As Axel says ?Culture needs openness to thrive?. There is now an imperative to ensure that writing and publishing for children do not fall into the insular trap. Organisations such as **IBBY ( the International Board on Books for Young People)**, initiatives like **In Other Words** from **Book Trust**, publishers prepared to take risks, all promoting diversity in the widest sense, become even more important. It is not just a question of ensuring young readers can find themselves represented in the books they read, it is also about welcoming different voices from different countries and cultures ? of providing a wide-angled lens on the world and ensuring that different styles, different voices are part of the reading world for children. This is as pertinent to the information books that are being published. While fiction may allow an emotional assessment and connection, young people also need balanced information clearly presented and access to different viewpoints. They need spaces where this can happen ? libraries, both public and school. Libraries, access to a wide range of books and information needs advocacy. Someone to shout.

?In my view , you can?t call yourself a school if you don?t have a library? ? so Children?s Laureate, Chris Riddell, making the case to the School?s Minister, Nick Gibb at the **Department of Education** in February. Nor was this the

first time he had raised his voice. The previous year, in an open letter, he demanded the government investigate school library closures. The original template for the role of Children's Laureate when it was established in 1999 was to create a role for someone who could act as a figurehead to promote the importance of children's literature and reading and respond to national issues. All nine Laureates have taken it seriously, none more so than Chris. His tenure has been marked by his activity ? constantly on the move meeting people, young fans and adults, travelling around the UK and, indeed the world, linking up with the Laureates from other countries ? most recently [Leigh Hobbs](#) [4] from Australia, talking at International and local book festivals, meeting adults and children. As political cartoonist for the **Observer** he has had a presence outside the world of children's books, though the roles have been very separate. His has been a strong voice using his art as well as his words to get the message out. All the Laureates have been vocal, but by embracing contemporary technology, Chris has been especially visible across a wide range of social media. Now his tenure is drawing to an end. On 7th June, the day before the Election, Chris will hand over his crown. The Laureateship is ready to move on, active and political ? and its role is even more important and relevant today.

Page Number:

1

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