

Hora Fugit

So reads the sundial on a wall at Clare Cottage, one of the literary houses involved in NAWE's recent landmark project, Writing on Location. Capturing the fleeting year in this annual report is rarely easy – not least because various years are in play: the calendar year, financial year, and the year leading up to our AGM in November when this report is presented. There is always a degree of looking both back and to the future, but never was this more relevant or poignant than now.

At the time of writing (and since compiling the latest edition of *Writing in Education*) we have just received the Independent Review of our complaint against the Arts Council's funding decision, which upholds our view that there was 'no evidence of the endeavours of ACE to balance the reach of NAWE as an organization operating nationally with ACE's objective of developing a portfolio of activity across England.' This, together with other comment, vindicates our reaction to the ACE decision, though without upholding our complaint. We are therefore taking the complaint yet further, to the Parliamentary Ombudsman, where we trust that we will actually be *consulted* as part of the review process, unlike the procedures to date.

Reams could be written on that extraordinary chapter alone, and maybe will, but this report focuses on summarizing recent highlights and our immediate plans for a new future. We do present extensive reading for members through the year, and this document aims by contrast to be brief. Anyone looking for more detailed reflection on the work of NAWE is, however, well catered for this year, with a history of our organization scheduled to appear in the next edition of *New Writing, The International Journal for the Practice and Theory of Creative Writing*, published by Routledge. It was a hugely rewarding chapter to write, and I hope that members both old and new will find it interesting to read.

A Literature Blueprint

Having played a full part in the consultation, we were pleased to see NAWE widely referenced in the Literature Blueprint, an analysis of the workforce development needs of the sector, published by Creative & Cultural Skills.



NAWE Conference at Walpole House, St Mary's University College, Twickenham. A history of NAWE's first 25 years is being published in a special issue of *New Writing* (Routledge, 2011)

Despite some alien language ('workforce?'), it is a document we endorse: we recognize the challenges for those whose livelihoods are at stake and we know, too, how NAWE can play a major role in their support. Our vision is that of an organization whose members are at once both patrons and beneficiaries of our work – writer development, in all its contexts.

NAWE is the Subject Association for Creative Writing, aiming to further knowledge, understanding and enjoyment of Creative Writing and to support good practice in its teaching and learning at all levels.

NAWE Membership

Our membership has continued to rise over the past year – from 1175 to 1384. We trust that this impressive trend will continue, despite the inevitable increases in fees that we must now introduce. The new rates are described in full on the website, in the magazine, and in a new publicity leaflet. We believe they still offer exceptional value for money, and there are a number of new benefits being introduced to make them even more appealing. We are, inevitably, no longer offering services such as the e-bulletin free of charge, but members will surely approve of our resources being protected in this way.

We are keeping some very low-cost options available, not least for students and anyone wishing to get to know our operation. We are however underlining the importance (and value) of Professional Membership, which we believe to be the appropriate level for all writers making their living in educational or community work. For schools and other employers, it is an important mark of a writer's professional standing; for NAWE itself, it is the basis on which members are promoted through the Professional Directory (with more vigorous marketing now being planned).

By the same token, we believe that teachers – certainly those seeking 'outstanding' status through the new Master Teacher standards – should as a matter of course show a commitment to their subject specialism through membership of the appropriate Subject Association. For English teachers, this means NATE (National Association for the Teaching of English, with which NAWE has good links), but as Creative Writing gains subject recognition, then so might we expect to recruit many more teachers to our own association.

Formal Education

The landscape both for schools and universities is shifting fast, with a new emphasis on 'traditional' subjects, and yet – seemingly against all expectations – we are pleased to be playing a part in the revived development of a Creative Writing A-Level, and look forward to making an announcement in the near future. Members of the NAWE Higher Education Committee have been quick to endorse the move, stating how it would not only provide much needed preparation for students and raise the level of teaching in the subject at university, but would also offer a popular and widely transferable set of skills to a much wider group. At a time when universities are fiercely competitive, our HE Committee continues to show an extraordinary level of collaboration – liaising on matters

such as the Research Assessment Exercise, and planning the major research project that many believe the subject still needs in order to establish itself at the highest level. This collaboration extends internationally, for example in developing a code of ethics for writers in the academy, and in challenging the copyright terms of academic publishing, in conjunction with our colleagues in Australia.



a display in an upper room of Jane Austen's House Museum at Chawton, one of the literary houses and museums involved in NAWE's Writing on Location project

The Wider Community

Our biggest single project during the past twelve months took writers, teachers and pupils out of the classroom and into the inspirational domain of literary houses and museums. Almost as soon as the project was announced, so too was the demise of the Museums, Libraries and Archives Council (MLA) that had initially proposed it, but with backing from the British Library (as part of its Literature in Context project) we worked successfully with ten venues across England and have established a rich range of resources and expertise on which we intend to build. Working with museum curators represents just one of the fruitful partnerships between writers and those outside formal education which NAWE aims to foster.

NAWE Publications

This year we commissioned a variety of new resources: information sheets on funding for professional development, national resources for writers in Northern Ireland (in association with LitNet NI) and for Scottish writers; a new title in our Briefings series focusing on how to make an effective submission; and four resources (from

the Turning the Next Page event, see right) on the subjects of community workshops, freelance journalism, business writing and promoting your book. In the pipeline is a briefing on writing residencies which we are co-commissioning with Poetry Ireland, Scottish Book Trust and, we hope, Literature Wales, and introductory guides to working as a writer in schools, the community, and health and social care (the latter in association with Lapidus).

In the NAWE History for Routledge, I mention how rewarding it is, receiving handwritten notes that arrive from those who read our magazine, valuing its contribution to their working lives. *Writing in Education* continues to go from strength to strength as our flagship publication, and we have welcomed Keith Jebb and Hilary

Jenkins as new members of the editorial board. This year we were delighted to publish another of our occasional special editions – retitled, in fact, according to the project to which it was devoted: Writing on Location. Thanks are due to the British Library and also the English Subject Centre (now sadly demised) for the funds that enabled us to produce it in full colour and in additional quantities.

NAWE Events

We would tend to agree with Jane Austen's comment about seizing the pleasure (quoted from *Emma*, see left), though we trust our own preparations are designed precisely to counteract folly. NAWE's programme of events is based on the principle of peer learning, nurturing enthusiasm together with skill. New this year was the Skill Sharing Day for writers in schools, at which members from across the UK came together to give freely of their time in order to learn from each other's practice. It proved to be a vibrant yet highly economical gathering, and a second event has now been scheduled for 2012, again in partnership with regional agencies.

The NAWE Conference has been a major success story over the past four years but we will now be reviewing some aspects of its format and arrangement in view of the growing restrictions on institutional budgets – not to mention those of freelance writers without any such support. Block booking of accommodation achieves excellent value for delegates but represents a high level of financial risk for NAWE. Other events continue to tread familiar ground, precisely because there are always new writers joining our fold who value the 'introductory' seminars that help them get started as writers in education. Our annual retreat also continues to be highly popular. We are however always developing new partnerships and approaches, and this year we worked with the Arvon Foundation to run the first ever accredited Coaching Course for Writers. The course was over-subscribed; feedback from participants was probably the best that NAWE has had for a training event and we shall undoubtedly aim to repeat the course soon.

In Scotland, over 60 graduates from the country's Creative Writing Masters and PhD programmes gathered together with early career writers at the CCA for our Turning the Next Page event, which featured workshops and panel sessions exploring ways of making a living as a writer and looking at the realities of being published and produced. Resources from the event are now available to download from the website. NAWE was asked to organize this event by Creative Scotland, the major funder, in partnership with CCA, Glasgow Life, Gutter and Scottish Book Trust.

Young Writers' Hub

The Hub started out – a mere year ago – primarily as a means of providing young writers with relevant news and information but it has rapidly grown in its scope and ambition. Wes Brown, as Co-ordinator, has set up various partnership projects and an editorial internship scheme through which young writers have been assisting with our plans to take a more active role in publishing new creative work. The Enabling Fund has already supported a number of young writers in their ventures, including a new edition of the poetry magazine, *Cake*, a podcast for young writers, and the inaugural Leeds Independent Presses Poetry Festival. The Hub played a key role in creating the Big Issue in the North short story competition and partnering the promotion of the award-winning film about Leeds Young Authors, *We Are Poets*. The latest development – emerging from the recent 'Next Generation' discussion day – will be a mentoring scheme enabling new writers to be supported by those with more experience. In many ways, young writers are leading the way for others, particularly in their use of digital technology, and the work of the Hub will undoubtedly become an increasingly crucial part of NAWE's work across all sections of the writing and education spectrum.

The Writer's Compass

Equally important to our central role in writer development is the Writer's Compass – our information, advice and guidance service for writers generally, be they tutors, students, or simply writers sustaining their own careers. We shall, however, need to limit this service to members. Interestingly, this does by definition broaden the description of our membership, in a way that the phrase 'in education' has been stretching towards for many years. We are particularly pleased to be involved in a new partnership project, Navigator, which has received funding from the Paul Hamlyn Foundation Special Initiative Artworks: Developing Practice in Participatory Settings.

The NAWE Team

Partly as a result of our reduced budget and enforced restructuring, we shall be losing two valued members of our team. Fiona Firth, responsible for keeping the website listings up to date and producing the e-bulletin, has already left to pursue her own studies and freelance projects. Philippa Johnston, who has on our behalf – and almost single handed – introduced professional development planning services to the UK's literature sector, will be leaving by April 2012. Wes Brown, our Young Writers' Co-ordinator, will now be dealing with our overall information management, and Anne Caldwell will be maintaining our commitment to professional development services. Other members of the team are, for this transitional year, all generously working for less money.



HORA FUGIT: the sundial at Clare Cottage

When the Arts Council funding news hit the headlines last Spring, Richard Morrison (*Times*2, 30 March) referred to the Arts Council's axe having "fallen on dozens of umbrella organizations: bureaucrats who, no matter how useful, don't actually produce art." His comment missed the point that many so-called 'umbrella' organizations, such as our own, support considerable numbers

of artists in their practice. Moreover, the so-called bureaucrats running this entire operation (a staffing level equivalent to 3.4 full-time) are mostly writers themselves, supporting their own creative work through the business of promoting writers' educational ideals on a national level and, increasingly, internationally too.

We are pleased to display the Arts Council funding logo, below, in recognition of its much appreciated support over this and previous years. We are, however, rather more proud of our members, who will from now on be supporting our organization for themselves. Thank you all for your passionate commitment – in particular our Committee and its exceptional Chair, Dr Maggie Butt.

Paul Munden, October 2011



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