

## Beyond the Benchmark

Ten years after the English Subject Centre's *Good Practice Guide* and five years after NAWE produced the first Creative Writing Subject Benchmark, we are pleased to be launching a new publication that reports on the state of the discipline today and considers its future. "Good Practice" and "Benchmark" both refer to standards; "beyond" suggests the more exciting realms that can open up. NAWE, naturally, is concerned with both. We are grateful to the Higher Education Academy, and particularly Dr Nicole King, not only for commissioning and publishing the document, but also for supporting its dissemination at our conference this year.

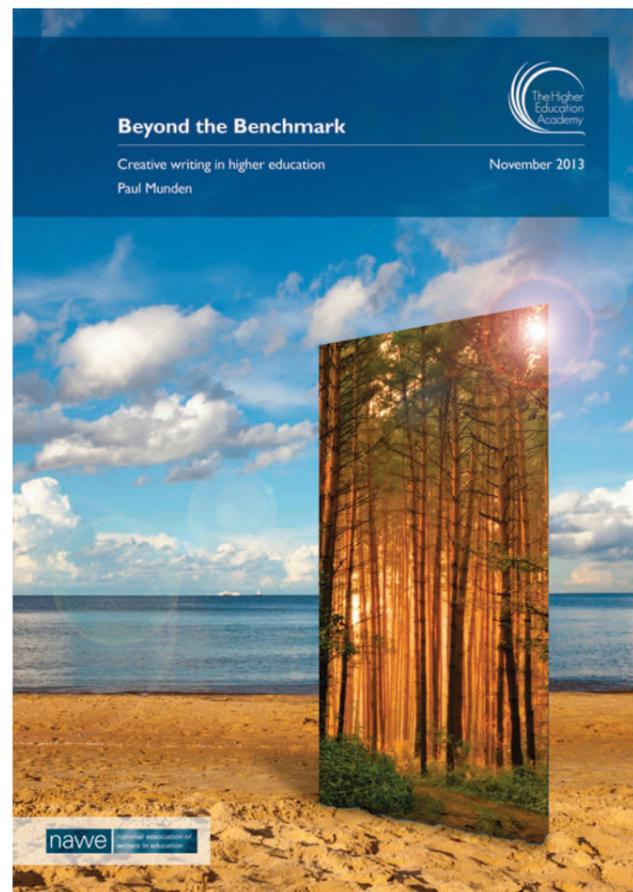
A number of recommendations emerged as a result of the research, and NAWE intends to take responsibility for taking these forward, led by a new HE Committee. Though HE focused, the report connects with the new Creative Writing A Level, and students' progression into employment. NAWE's work in schools, in supporting young writers beyond education, and in helping writers of all ages to build and sustain their careers, is all relevant to how the discipline itself is progressed.

## A Forum for National Debate

Of all our events, it is the NAWE Annual Conference that is most significant in addressing this broad reach, enabling members in all educational and community contexts to have a "practical conversation" about their work developing writing and new writers. This year, thanks to Sarah Byrne at Mosaic Events, we are delighted to have secured additional sponsorship for our conference from AQA, the awarding body that has introduced the Creative Writing A Level this Autumn. The arrangement means that AQA will have a presence at all our events over the year, also in our publications. More significantly, both NAWE and AQA will benefit from an ongoing exchange of expertise.

## "Good Practice Gets Better"

Within our conference, we are highlighting the work of our Navigator partnership (with other national associations



representing all the arts) within ArtWorks, a Paul Hamlyn special initiative "developing practice in participatory settings". As the project moves into its concluding phase, our focus is on ratifying codes of practice, both for artists and employers, aiming to ensure that contracts are productive, with all parties bringing well-informed expectations to the equation, together with the necessary skills – and creative ambition. Benchmark, and beyond.

**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.**



@NaweWriters

## Membership and Finance

In this first full year without public funding, membership remained stable at just over 1500, but subscription income was up from £47,000 to £72,000, as the full effect of the increased rates kicked in. Furthermore, our financial reserves remained intact. In the current “difficult” financial climate, we believe these figures speak for themselves. The strong membership base and secure financial footing have together enabled us to pursue an extensive programme on all fronts.

## Publications

Conference papers, presentations and workshops were once again covered in the Spring edition of the NAWE magazine, *Writing in Education*. Subsequent editions have been guest edited, one focusing on working with young writers out of the classroom, another on writing and dementia. We are currently exploring the idea of introducing an additional, peer-reviewed edition to be published annually online. A further, major proposal is to publish a resource for teachers (and students) relating to the new A Level.

We continue to support other publishing initiatives, notably the Creative Writing Studies series published by the Professional and Higher Partnership Ltd, and *Meniscus*, the new international literary journal. We are particularly excited to be unveiling, at our conference, the new short story publishing website, *Cut a Long Story*, which we have co-developed over the past twelve months.

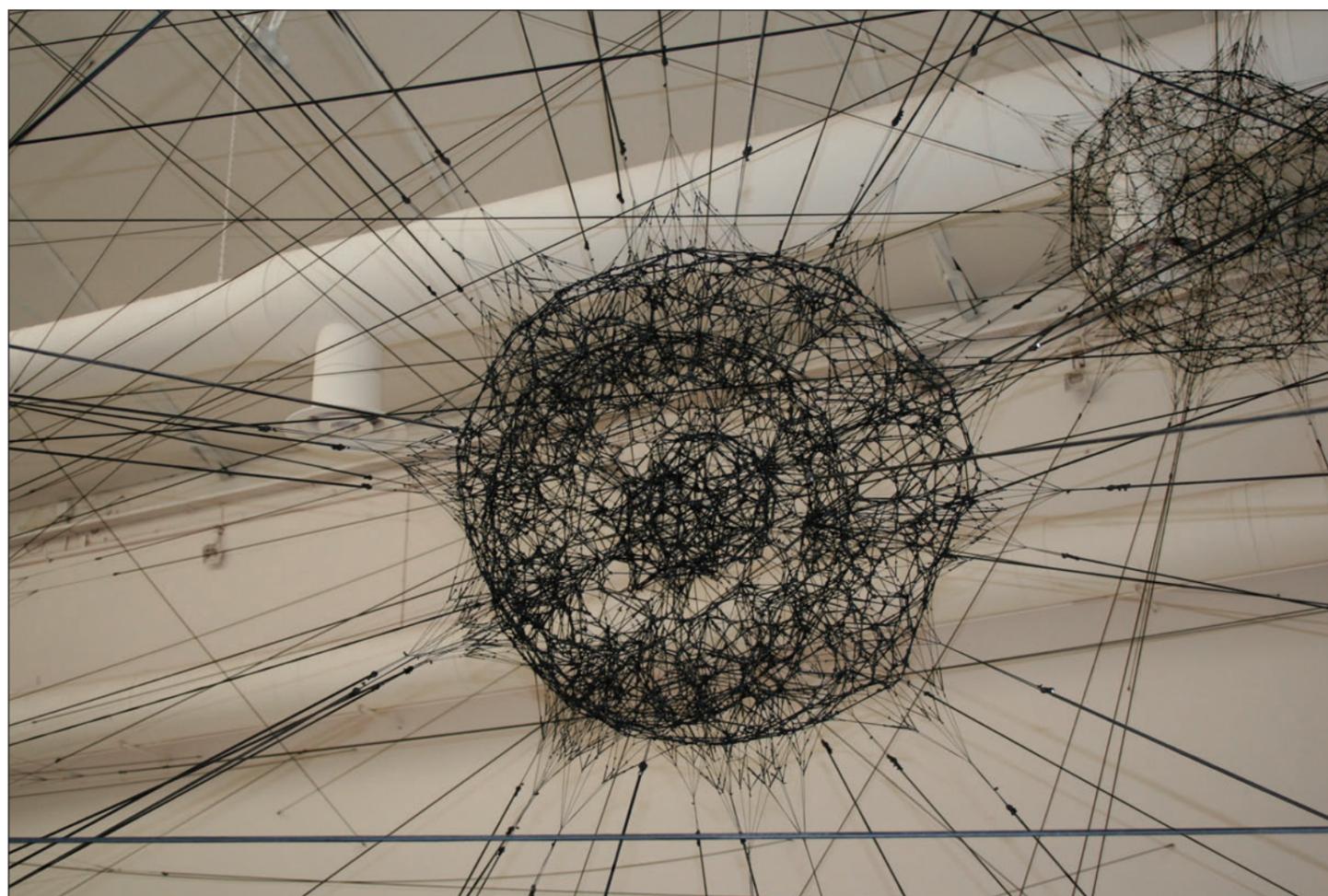
## Higher Education

A substantial part of our membership now works within higher education, with a specific committee serving their needs. A modest but vital financial contribution from the HEA transforms what might merely be an ad hoc email exchange into a formal forum for the subject community at which emerging matters of importance can be discussed in detail, the meetings taking place face to face, for a full three hours, three times a year. As a new committee is being introduced, I should like to thank the outgoing committee for their input, particularly Steve May as Chair. Thanks to Steve’s negotiations, NAWE is now a part of the Common English Forum, which includes all related subject associations and through which we contribute to discussions on curriculum and qualification reform. Steve’s work for us will continue, since he is part of the English Benchmark review group and has lodged an official request for the NAWE Creative Writing Benchmark to be approved.

NAWE continues to promote UK Creative Writing programmes abroad, with 750 booklets distributed this year at the AWP Conference and Bookfair in Boston. A similar plan is in place for the event in Seattle, 2014.

## Writing in Schools

Based on our commissioned guide for “Getting Started as



**Tomás Saraceno, *Galaxy forming along filaments, like droplets along the strands of a spider's web* (2008), exhibited at the 53rd Venice Biennale. At a Poetry by Heart seminar for teachers, I used this as a model for how poems are similarly “strung”; the connections between every line, phrase and word can be felt across the structure as a whole. It is also models how NAWE’s work across the whole spectrum of education and participatory practice is interconnected.**

a Writer in Schools”, we ran a very successful seminar in conjunction with Writing West Midlands, which was followed by a further Skill Sharing day, this time in the South West, in partnership with Bath Festivals, KEAP and Literature Works. As one participant remarked: “Being around others who are engaged in writing with and for young people has been enormously enthusing. It has crystallized some ideas and given me a very practical list of things to do to make work happen.”

Further schools-based work this year derived from our partnership with Poetry by Heart (of which more overleaf).

## Writing in Health and Social Care

Our Retreat this year was in partnership with Lapidus, the “words for wellbeing” organization with which we share many members. This gave an interesting, added dimension to the event, one that was reflected in various other undertakings. Our work within ArtWorks explored the role of writers working with people with dementia, and we are

looking to extend this with a new mentoring programme. Our Navigator partnership has been bidding for work within the care system generally, an area where we know writers have much to offer.

As part of the Hippocrates Initiative for Poetry and Medicine, NAWE this year supported the inaugural Hippocrates Prize for Young Poets. It is not within our financial reach to sponsor the prize on an ongoing basis, but we are pleased to have helped place it on the map of opportunities and incentives for young people engaging with poetry.

## The Writer’s Compass

Our popular, accredited coaching course (in partnership with the Arvon Foundation and RD 1st) is now running on a biennial basis, but in this interim year we hosted a much appreciated networking day at the Art Workers’ Guild in London for all those who had previously trained, a blend of refresher course and peer support.

Our one-to-one coaching and professional development planning services continued to be in demand, delivered by Anne Caldwell and also Philippa Johnston, who once again pioneered new work for us north of the border, with funding from Creative Scotland. Working in partnership with a number of organizations including CCA, Glasgow Life, Scottish Book Trust, Scottish Poetry Library and St Mungo’s Mirrorball, we turned our focus on Scotland’s emerging poets and debut novelists, running two highly successful events under the banner *Turning Another Page*.

Eighty poets from across Scotland came together as delegates and speakers for the first of these, *The Poet’s Compass*, to explore how today’s poets can get their poetry seen and heard as well as in print. Neil Astley, editor of Bloodaxe Books, was our keynote speaker, giving an invaluable insight into the state of poetry publishing today. We also heard about poetry online, working across platforms, being a spoken word performer and producer, poetry residencies – so much, in fact, that we decided to commission a number of written pieces from the speakers so that others could benefit from the day. These will be available shortly as free downloads from the *Turning Another Page* section of the NAWE website, together with the wealth of resources gathered in previous phases of this project.

In September we held *Pitch Live!* – with fifty talented writers joining our panel of leading literary agents and commissioning editors from commercial and literary fiction publishing for a packed afternoon of talks and discussion about how to avoid the common pitfalls when submitting your debut manuscript and give yourself the best chance of getting published. Seven intrepid writers pitched their novel to the panel in an exciting live pitching session with a further thirty-two writers having the opportunity to have a one-to-one session with a panellist. It was the first time that an event of this kind had taken place in Scotland and it proved very popular. Our panel, which hailed from Edinburgh and London, was hugely impressed by the quality of writing on display and, from what we’ve heard since, it looks likely that some signings and book deals may well result. We plan to keep in touch with everyone over the next year to hear what transpires.

## Young Writers' Hub

The Hub awarded a number of grants to young people, including funding for *The Cadaverine* to develop its website and smaller awards to aid individual young writers and literature producers.

Edited by Wes Brown, our Young Writers' Co-ordinator, the Hub publication, *Myths of the Near Future*, this year became available as an Issue online magazine and Kindle eBook. It features some of the best new writing by the under 25s, together with reviews, opinion pieces and interviews – with Helen Mort, Rosalind Jana (winner of the Hippocrates Prize for Young Poets), David Morley, Kim Moore, Chelsey Flood and NAWE's patron Sir Andrew Motion.

Wes was involved in a number of festivals and events, talking about the Hub and the range of opportunities for young writers. These included the Young Asian Writers Awards, the Movellas Awards, Leeds Book Fair, the Society of Young Publishers, the Northern Lights conference and the University of East London graduation showcase. Wes trained to become an Arts Award Adviser to Bronze and Silver levels, and will complete Gold in December.

We recruited Jonny Aldridge and Jess Bellman to the Hub mentoring programme; both are now working with Wes on a longer creative project and meeting regularly for feedback. Emily Young joined the team as an intern and assistant editor of *Myths*, replacing Hannah Pollard who has gone on to a full-time job in publishing. These are significant opportunities for young writers starting out.

## Poetry by Heart

Our most recent partnership, and one of the most exciting developments for young people this year, was the poetry memorization and recitation initiative led by Andrew Motion and delivered by the Full English. NAWE's involvement in the initial phase of Poetry by Heart was in

running a series of Teacher Days, exploring how contemporary poets and teachers might work effectively together not just in supporting the competition but in finding new ways for poetry to enthuse and be better understood. We are pleased that the project now has further funding and that NAWE will continue to be involved. Supporting teachers in this way has of course been at the heart of NAWE's mission from the start, but it has often proved difficult. It is rewarding to be given a new opportunity on this front, with an innovative impetus.

As with the Creative Writing A Level, of high significance to higher education, Poetry by Heart is not confined to schools. We have already shown, through work at Manchester University, how Creative Writing lecturers can play an invaluable part, and at all the events a marvellous multiplicity of roles was in evidence: poets were teachers; teachers were students; students were poets; and everyone involved was a creative adventurer, willing to take risks. Creative Writing is all about the new, and yet sometimes, dare I say it, our approaches to the subject seem anything but. We slip into false distinctions between process and product, between writing and literature. Poetry by Heart has refreshed my sense of why each is understood through the other.

## The NAWE Team

As ever – but even more so at a time when expenditure on staff has been halved – I should like to thank those who have made the work of our association such a success. In a year when I have taken some "time out", to study for a Doctorate in Professional Studies by Public Works, I am especially indebted to my colleagues, Clare Mallorie, Anne Caldwell and Wes Brown, also to Gill Greaves for managing our conference and Philippa Johnston for her work in Scotland. I hope that my studies will, in return, pay dividends. They have already underlined, for me, the importance of professional development at all stages of a writer's career.

*Paul Munden, November 2013*

The logo for Poetry by Heart features the words "POETRY BY HEART" in a stylized, hand-drawn font. The word "HEART" is written in red, while "POETRY BY" is in blue. The letter "O" in "HEART" is replaced by a red heart shape.