

Director's Report 2019-2020

Introduction

This report covers the period April 2019 to March 2020, a year that began with purpose, excitement and a renewed sense of commitment to building NAWE's future, and ended in the uncertainty of a global pandemic. How NAWE adapted and changed in the face of Covid-19 will be covered in the Directors' Report for 2020/21. We would, however, like to recognise the work of our current team in getting through such a challenging year, revising plans, coming up with new ideas, making sure members continue to be served, and adapting to the new online writing and educating environment.

Our thanks go to all our members for continuing to support NAWE, and to our staff, committee members and contractors. Philippa, Lisa, Mosaic Events, all the members of our Management, Higher Education and Community Writers' Committees, and of course you, our members, for continuing to support NAWE. We hope that we've provided some continuity as well as a space to reflect in such challenging times.

Programmes:

Regional Networks

We continued to deliver projects with partner organisations that will be of lasting benefit to the discipline: disseminating the outcomes of the Paper Nations project and the Creative Writing Benchmark. We piloted Regional Networking events in Cornwall, Leeds, Norwich and London with the aim of bringing members together to share information, experience and practice. Feedback and attendance were extremely positive. Our thanks to all our members and non-members who attended these free events, and to our regional partners at The Writers Block (Cornwall), Leeds Trinity University (Leeds), the National Centre for Writing (Norwich), Arvon, Apples & Snakes, Ministry of Stories, and Goldsmiths (London).

MaxLiteracy

In 2019 the third iteration of the MaxLiteracy Awards culminated in a sharing day at The Whitworth Gallery in Manchester for those involved in delivering the project in schools,

museums and galleries. A special plenary session at the NAWE Conference in York was also held to showcase this exciting interdisciplinary work to a wider audience.

The 2018/19 awards worked with the following galleries/museums and writers: Attenborough Arts Centre and John Berkavitch; Kirkleatham Museum and Kate Fox; Bristol Museum and Art Gallery and Caleb Parkin; The Whitworth and Johnny Woodhams.



The awards included: a unique project supporting non-verbal students with profound learning difficulties (Attenborough); intergenerational conversations developing boys' literacy through creative writing and co-production of content for a major new exhibition celebrating local industrial heritage (Kirkleatham); an innovative pilot project exploring how to develop legacy boxes for primary school children (Bristol); and a unique partnership aimed at raising self-esteem and building young people's resilience and literacy across all subject areas (The Whitworth).

Our thanks to all the children and young people, writers, arts educators and teachers involved. Special thanks go to the project funders, the Max Reinhardt Charitable Trust, and to our partners Engage. More information on the schools, partners and projects can be found at <https://www.maxliteracy.org/>.

Community Writers Sub Committee

Following an initial meeting at the NAWE Conference in 2019, we were delighted to set up a new forum for writers involved in community projects. Our thanks to Michael Loveday for leading on this, and to our partners at Bath Spa University for helping to facilitate.

NAWE Conference

Our 2019 Conference took place at the Park Inn Hotel in York, and our keynote speakers were Paul McVeigh and Imtiaz Dharker. We welcomed 143 delegates from 9 countries: UK, Australia, Canada, Finland, Germany, Ireland, Italy, Oman and Spain for a lively weekend of talks, workshops, discussions and social events. Highlights included:

- A partnership with the Aesthetica Short Film Festival
- Our very first International Writers' Breakfast
- A meeting of the NAWE PhD and Higher Education Network Meeting
- Our first 'freelancers' breakfast' specifically for writers involved in Community Writing projects
- A special plenary presentation on the MaxLiteracy Awards
- Apropos Open Mic hosted by Yvonne Battle-Felton
- Workshops on pitching and funding



Though preparations had begun for our 2020 Conference in Bristol, the Covid-19 pandemic meant a postponement to 12-13 March 2021. This will now be an online conference. The theme of the conference is 'WHAT NEXT? Writing in Education and Communities in 2021 and Beyond.' We know how important the annual conference is

to our members who can attend, but we also know that time, money, geography and life commitments prevent many of our members from attending. We hope that many more of our members will be able to participate.

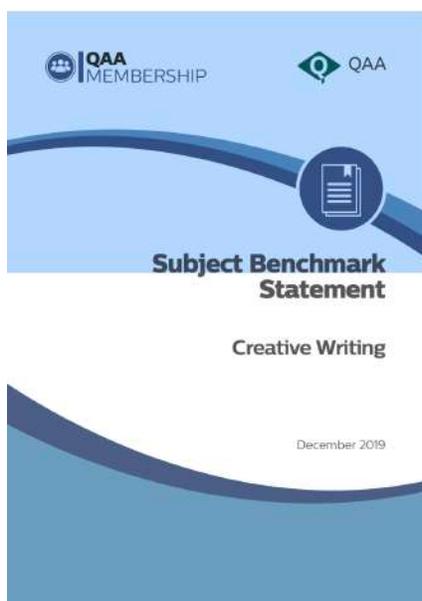
Other Networking and Subject Supportive Activity

We continued working with subject associations and learned societies, responding to concerns around policy changes in education at all levels. These included the English Association, University English, the English and Media Centre, the Common English Forum, the Arts and Humanities Alliance, the Council for Subject Associations, Artworks Alliance and PRAG UK.

We worked with many of these partners in the wider discipline of English in planning and supporting the second English: Shared Futures conference in Manchester in June 2020. This was postponed due to the pandemic, but an e-version of the conference was held which we contributed to, and resources are available on the English: Shared Futures website.

Higher Education

The HE Committee continued to meet during 2019-20. Elections for the new HE Committee took place before the November 2019 conference and an effort was made to make the group more representative of the whole nation by contacting a series of known Creative Writing contacts in universities not recently represented on the committee. This successful approach means we now have several Scottish, Welsh and North of England committee members and the group is fully refreshed with a happy mix of old and new faces.



In December, the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education published the second edition of the Subject Benchmark Statement for Creative Writing, which was revised by QAA to align the content with the revised UK Quality Code for Higher Education, published in 2018.

Members of the HE committee, who were part of the original benchmark statement group for creative writing from 2016, verified and approved the revisions.

The HE Committee maintained representation on national and international forums and bodies such as PRAG, HEFCE, English Shared Futures, University English, AWP, EACWP and AAWP.

In February, Derek Neale stepped down as Committee Chair and Andrew Melrose was unanimously nominated as the new incumbent. Our thanks to Derek for his leadership and service during his tenure.

Work was done during the year to establish the issue editors for forthcoming volumes of peer reviewed journal, Writing in Practice. The committee was informed that as members form the editorial board of the journal they also join the peer review college, so may be called upon to assess submissions. Volume 5 of Writing in Practice was published. Derek Neale was principle editor and will remain so for volumes 6 and 7 before handing over the baton.

International Creative Writing Partners

NAWE maintained close links with international creative writing partners EACWP, AWP and AAWP.

Organisational Update

Finance and Resources

We continued to work to ensure the financial health of the organisation, delivering programmes to bring in additional income. Our accounts for 2019/20 will be presented to the membership at the 2020 AGM. The year ended on a budgeted deficit of £14,835. Turnover for the year was £112,763 and expenditure £127,598, of which £ 27,760 was staffing. Conference income was £ 40,906 and conference expenditure was £ 40,065. We received £66,083 in membership income, on a par with the previous year. A priority for 2020/21 is to address financial resilience through a broader approach to income generation. At the time of writing, NAWA is now a registered charity, meaning new access to funding from charitable trusts and foundations. We're also restoring our relationship with Arts Council England. We forecast a small surplus in 2020/21.

Governance

Both the Higher Education Committee and the Management Committee continued to meet and work effectively. The Management Committee finalised the process of updating NAWE's governing documents and constitution, and new articles of association were adopted by members at our AGM. This paved the way for NAWE to apply for charitable status in 2020/21 opening up new sources of funding. The Management Committee also refreshed our aims, mission and values to ensure they are fit for purpose. NAWE's new mission is "...to advocate for Creative Writing: enhancing knowledge and understanding of the subject, supporting writers and good practice in teaching and facilitation in all settings."

Elections for both committees took place at the NAWE AGM as part of the conference, with the AGM moving to a new slot to encourage participation. We were pleased to welcome several new members to both committees. The new committees will serve until 2022, and full details can be found on our website.

We were in the process of developing a new strategic plan for NAWE when the pandemic struck. This work continues, responding to the new challenges ushered in by Covid-19.

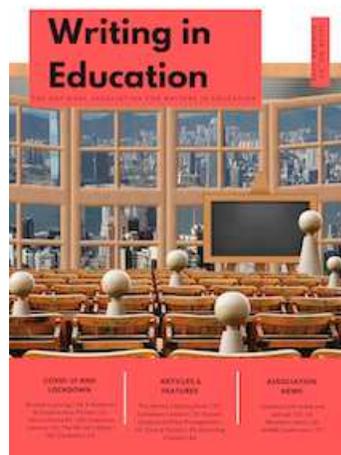
Membership

Our membership remained stable in 2019/20, with 1423 members in April 2019 and 1411 in April 2020. As some felt unable to renew, new members were joining, with 26 joining in March '20 and 23 in April '20. Members cited retirement or other shifts in work or personal circumstances as their reason for no renewing. Although a stable membership is reassuring, it is vital that NAWE continues to articulate and promote the benefits of membership to the growing population of writers working in education and community settings, especially writers currently underrepresented in the membership, and this will be a priority in 2020/21.

In March 2020 we surveyed the membership about the future shape of the conference, in particular whether to stick with the current 2.5 days or shift to a 1.5 day format. 97 members responded and the majority stated a preference for the latter. We were due to trial this format in November 2020, but in response to Covid-19 we postponed to March 2021 and the conference will now be online. We thank the membership for engaging in the survey.

Publishing, Marketing and Communications

We recruited a new Publications Manager, Lisa Koning, to refresh *Writing in Education*, consulting members on the look and content of the magazine, and redesigning it to meet members' needs. Following feedback from members, we changed the online format of the magazine to improve readability and access. Our thanks to Lisa for all her work on this.



Volume 5 of *Writing in Practice*, our online peer-reviewed journal, was published in May 2019 and at the close of 2019/20 volume 6 was in process, also with a redesign by Lisa Koning. Derek Neale remained as Principal Editor and at the close of the year, Vol 7 – a special issue on Multimodality – which Derek will co-edit with Dr Josie Barnard, and which is due out in May 2021 – was open for submissions.

We continued to provide a much-valued information service through the weekly members' e-bulletin; our thanks to Philippa Johnston, Information Manager for her work on this.

Staffing

We were delighted to welcome Lisa Koning, as our new Publications Manager, and Fiona Mason, who joined in March as Interim Director whilst Seraphima Kennedy was on maternity leave.

What we're doing in 2020/21: Activities to serve our members and the wider sector

At the time of writing, we cannot address what we're doing in 2020/21 without reference to current events. With the arrival of the Covid-19 pandemic and lockdown it was an uncertain and unpredictable start to the 2020/21 year. Our Interim Director, Fiona Mason, had just started in post and immediately had to respond to the unfolding situation, adapting plans and priorities and doing what we could to meet the needs of members and the wider sector whilst ensuring NAWE's sustainability.

Our approach has been to focus on development opportunities for writers and developing NAWE. We will report in detail about this period in next year's Director's Report, but in summary, NAWE is now a registered charity and we secured 'Emergency Response' funding from Arts Council England.

Regional Networking Events have become virtual, with plans to roll these out across the UK throughout the year.

We launched a pilot 'Action Learning Programme' for writers in education and plan to expand this programme, along with a range of other professional development opportunities, from the new year.

An Open Space event in November will be an opportunity for the sector to come together in a big conversation about the future.

The NAWE Conference will be online on 12 & 13 March 2021, meaning many more people will be able to attend than ever before.

Further applications will be made to Arts Council England and, with our new charitable status, we will be expanding our fundraising efforts across trusts and foundations, to enable NAWE to develop new programmes of work.

MaxLiteracy will roll out in 2021 with a adapted programme in light of the pandemic.

We'll continue to grow our relationships with the national and regional writing development organisations and other partners and supporters across the UK and internationally.

Summary and Thanks

NAWE ended a packed 2019/20 with renewed vigour for the future. We entered 2020/21 having to quickly adapt to a new normal. Huge thanks to the dedication of the members of the Management Committee, the HE Sub-Committee and the Community Writers Sub-Committee, all of whom give their time for free to ensure that NAWE steers a steady course and continues to meet the needs of members and the sector. Thanks also to the team at Mosaic, our membership and administration partners, who continue to provide an outstanding service and excellent value for money. Last but not least, thanks to the small, part-time NAWE core team for ensuring that our members and the sector as a whole have the support and resources they need to deliver high quality creative writing opportunities in communities and at all levels of education. We look forward to serving the sector in 2020/21 and beyond.

Seraphima Kennedy (Director), **Fiona Mason** (Interim Director), **Jonathan Davidson** (Chair), November 2020