

NEW WRITING NORTH

Saturday 12 June 2021

Claire Malcolm awarded MBE in Queen's Birthday Honours 2021

Claire Malcolm has been awarded an MBE for services to Literature, Young People, and the North-East of England. Claire is the founding Chief Executive of New Writing North, the writing and reading development agency for the North of England.

Claire grew up in York in a working-class household and was the first person in her family to go to university. She studied Fine Art at Northumbria University and later gained an MA in Cultural Leadership from City University. A keen reader all her life, she began her career working with writers and developing new work at the West Yorkshire Playhouse in Leeds.

Claire returned to Newcastle in 1996 to set up New Writing North and has grown the organisation and its work since that point. It was the first regional writing development agency of its kind in the UK and remains at the forefront of the sector, where it innovates with commissions, awards, prizes and development programmes that celebrate new writing and create opportunities, especially for those from underrepresented backgrounds. The organisation is now an Arts Council England NPO turning over £1m a year and employing 14 staff alongside many freelancers. New Writing North won Creative Business of the Year at the North East Business Awards 2019 and was shortlisted at The Charity Awards 2021 for its Young Writers programme.

Throughout New Writing North's 25-year history, Claire has been at the helm. She is a visionary leader, whose creative approach to supporting today's writers and inspiring the writers of the future has long been recognised within the industry. She leads a highly skilled team that delivers a wide-ranging programme including the Gordon Burn Prize, the Northern Writers' Awards, Durham Book Festival, the David Cohen Prize for Literature and the organisation's award-winning work with young people.

Recent projects that Claire has originated at New Writing North include the industry inclusivity interventions, A Writing Chance, Common People and Sky Writes, all of which support working-class and underrepresented writers to enter the industry and New Narratives for the North East, a commissioning project to think about the future of the region.

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Claire leads the company's external partnerships with higher education and with industry partners such as Faber and Faber, Hachette, Sky Studios and Channel 4. She is editorial director of NWN's occasional publishing programmes and leads on the commissioning of original podcasts at New Writing North. She writes regularly for the industry press, appears on podcasts, speaks at industry conferences and hosts literary events.

Claire is an experienced non-exec and charity trustee and currently serves as a trustee of the reading charity, BookTrust and the Community Foundation for Tyne and Wear. She is also a board member of the North East Culture Partnership and a member of the North East England Climate Coalition. In 2019 she was shortlisted by the Institute of Directors as a Director of the Year for her work in the charity sector.

David Roche, chair of New Writing North, said: "Claire Malcolm is both a critical figure in the creative industry of the North of England, and a pivotal one nationally. Under Claire's leadership, New Writing North is not only the literature development agency for the North of England, but is the most successful in the UK, consistently setting the agenda for innovation.

"Claire has vision, and also a rare skill in her ability to bring together and develop partnerships that have delivered a track record of success over more than two decades. She passionately supports writers from diverse backgrounds and helps them to move forward in their careers. Claire not only champions the case for the importance of representation but gives real, live opportunities for talented writers who may not otherwise have been discovered to have their voice heard. She has ensured people are picking up pen and paper and telling their stories. And she has done this all with humility, a real desire to change the world, and with diversity and inclusion at the core of everything she does.

"Claire's deep love and enthusiasm for literature is unquestionable; what really marks her out is her understanding, not only of the publishing industry itself, but of what reading and writing really mean to people. She bursts with ideas for bringing people in to the literary and cultural life of her region, and her work is inclusive, diverse and all about sharing the joy of writing and reading. Throughout her career Claire has helped thousands of people, whether that is through raising funds or simply offering words of encouragement to those who need it. She has done this tactfully and

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quietly, and not always with the resources allocated to other creative organisations. She is also great fun to be around, and her optimism is contagious. She is one of those rare figures who seems to improve the lives of everyone who comes into contact with her.”

Claire Malcolm said: “The North East warmly welcomed me in 1996 and I love this region and value all of the people here who have helped me and New Writing North to blossom and come of age. It’s very gratifying to be recognised in this way but I share this honour with the team and trustees and with all of the writers and young people that make what we do so exceptional. I’m lucky to have a job that I love and to get to work with inspiring and energetic people every day. This honour rewards achievement but will also fuel ambition. New Writing North has big plans for what literature and writing can do for the region post-Covid and I’m excited for the work ahead”.

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