

A WRITING CHANCE EVALUATION REPORT

Professor Katy Shaw,
Northumbria University
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“I thought I might as well have wanted to become an astronaut as become a writer for all the chance I had.”

Maya Jordan, writer



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MICHAEL SHEEN ON A WRITING CHANCE



“As I sat in my kitchen during lockdown and chatted with Professor Katy Shaw over zoom I could never have imagined what our conversation would lead to and all the extraordinary work and possibilities that would eventually flow from it.

This groundbreaking report is a witness to what has been achieved through the A Writing Chance project so far and points the way to what can and must happen in the future.

It is imperative for the cultural health of our whole society that no community be shut out of our national conversation. For this to remain the reality, (and, as described by the experiences of those represented in this report, it most certainly is), diminishes us all. We must fight tooth and nail to create and defend pathways for those who are denied the opportunity to tell their stories and have their voices heard.

I have watched as my own pathway has disappeared behind me and it is this sad truth, and the knowledge that when it did exist there were so many who didn't even have access to that, that makes me feel the urgency to push for change.

Reading the work that was submitted to this project was a revelatory experience for me. Voices I had never heard before telling stories of experiences that seemed both alien and, at the same time, strangely familiar. Like something that had been in my peripheral vision or at the edge of my hearing all along but only now brought into a sharp focus. I felt challenged by them, shocked, angered, moved and ultimately, refreshed and inspired. I want this same revelatory experience to be available for our entire culture. It can only make us stronger, richer and more resilient in the long term.

The great strides that happened in the middle of last century to bring the voices of those who had for too long been unrepresented onto the British cultural stage cannot be taken for granted. We can ill afford to allow ourselves to slide back into that one-sided, myopic view of who we are as a nation.

This report, and the implementation of its recommendations, are a critical step towards ensuring that we do not.”

INTRODUCTION: ADJUSTING THE LENS

Representation matters. The media and publishing frame how we think and feel about ourselves and the world around us. The best writing can show us who we are by shining a light on untold stories and experiences, illuminating truths and bringing injustices and structural inequalities into focus. But research tells us that the people writing and setting the agenda do so through a relatively narrow prism of experience. If we can open up the industry, we can all benefit from a richer culture, a better understanding of each other, and more equal representation.

A Writing Chance was launched in June 2021 as an innovative talent development programme open to new and aspiring writers from working-class backgrounds. The programme aimed to offer a positive intervention. It was designed to discover new talent, and to support new writers from working-class backgrounds to break into the creative industries. It also supported publishers and editors to make space for a broader range of perspectives in their publications.

The programme is the product of an ambitious new cross-sector collaboration between industry and the arts, higher education, and the third sector. Levering networks, resources, experiences and capacity, A Writing Chance created a new partnership model by combining different organisations and perspectives to tackle a shared challenge.

This report outlines the origin story of the programme, and its activities and impacts from launch to publication. It offers recommendations on how we can take the learning from this work forward to offer others the writing chance that is needed now more than ever.

A Writing Chance is designed to support positive change in the industry and to ignite interest in how better to enable access to writing as a career for a wider range of people. If you work in the writing industries and are inspired by this report, please get in touch via the website at [AWritingChance.co.uk](https://awritingchance.co.uk) and join our growing body of cross-sectoral supporters to help create opportunity and widen representation for the writers of tomorrow.





Tom Newlands is a Scottish writer living in London. He is a winner of the London Writers Award for Literary Fiction and the Creative Future Writers' Award. He is an alumnus of several writer development programmes including Penguin's WriteNow, Creative Future's Next Up, and the Curtis Brown Breakthrough Writers' Programme. Tom is also a painter and visual artist, and worked as an auction consultant and art technician before writing.

While he was a participant on A Writing Chance, Tom was mentored by novelist David Peace, and his novel, *Only Here, Only Now*, was bought as part of a significant two-book deal by editor Francesca Main for the Phoenix imprint at Hachette. He is currently working on a second novel and a memoir.

“I was only able to start my novel because I had time off work due to furlough. The nature of my disability meant that all my energy went on holding down my job, so when I returned to work last year, the novel had to be shelved. As momentum built in terms of getting an agent and more positive feedback on the manuscript, I had to make a choice to leave my job and try and finish it or shelve it for good. A Writing Chance is the only programme I have taken part in with a financial component, and I want to thank you for paying us as writers during the initiative. This money, coupled with my own savings, allowed me to leave work and pay the rent for six months as I finished editing the novel.”

Tom Newlands

There remains a dearth of diversity in UK journalism and publishing, and addressing this problem has proved a long-term challenge for the sector. The issue of who gets to write in the UK, and which perspectives and voices are heard, has been highlighted by a growing number of industry, government and charity research and reviews across the last two decades.

Snapshot of key facts

- 47% of authors and writers are from the most privileged social starting points, contrasting with only 10% from working-class backgrounds. (Office for National Statistics' Labour Force Survey, 2014)
- 12.6% of those working in publishing come from working-class social origins, compared with a third of the population. (Cultural Capital: Arts Graduates, Spatial Inequality, and London's Impact on Cultural Labour Markets, 2017)
- Newspaper columnists, who significantly shape the national conversation, are drawn from a particularly small pool, with 44% attending independent school, compared to 7% of the population; and 33% coming through the independent school to Oxbridge 'pipeline' alone, compared to less than 1% of the population. (Sutton Trust, *Elitist Britain*, 2019)
- Just 0.2% of British journalists are Black, compared to 3% of the population and 0.4% of British journalists are Muslim, compared to nearly 5% of the population. (City University, 2016)
- The Diversity, Inclusion and Belonging report (Publishers Association, 2020) found that the representation of BAME groups has not changed from 13% in 2017. Even within London, where opportunities are concentrated, only 2% of people in publishing industries identified as Black/BlackBritish, compared to 13% of the London population identify as Black/Black British.

- In 2021, a UK Publishing Workforce survey by the Publishers Association found that more than three-quarters (80%) of respondents were living in South East England. This was significantly higher than the proportion of respondents that grew up in those areas (40%). Outside of London, 7% of respondents were living in the East of England and 5% in the South West of England. All other regions and nations put together were home to 8% or fewer of respondents. The centre of gravity for publishing remains London-centric.
- The representation of people with a disability in the UK Publishing Workforce has increased over the years from 2% in 2017 to 8% in 2020, to 13% in 2021. (Publishers Association, 2021)
- Socio-economic background continues to present major barriers to inclusion, with around two-thirds (67%) of the UK Publishing Workforce of respondents being from professional backgrounds. (Publishers Association, 2021)
- 19% of the UK Publishing Workforce were privately educated compared to 7% of the population, and those educated to a degree level (83% compared to 26% of the general population) continue to be overrepresented in the workforce in relation to the population. (Publishers Association, 2021)
- The National Union of Journalists states “disabled members in the media industry are overwhelmingly concentrated in the lowest-paying, low-status or freelance jobs. This makes it particularly difficult for them to get time off to attend meetings or to afford the related costs that disability can bring”. (2016)

A Writing Chance was launched in February 2021, to new and aspiring writers from working-class backgrounds. We sought fresh perspectives and great stories from writers whose voices have historically not been heard in the mainstream publishing and media, drawn from across all four nations of the UK.

The project was co-funded by actor and activist Michael Sheen and the Joseph Rowntree Foundation. Our partners, *New Statesman* and *Daily Mirror*, provided significant in-kind support, mentoring and media space. The project was designed and produced by New Writing North, with literature development organisations nationally supporting the recruitment. Research funding was provided in-kind by Northumbria University. The Authors' Licensing and Collection Society supported the costs of a round table and final celebratory event at the House of Commons.



Our Aims and Objectives

1. To test the appetite and demand for such a programme amongst writers from working-class backgrounds from across the UK.
2. To understand the barriers working-class and under-represented writers face in relation to pursuing a career in writing.
3. To bring together a cross-sectoral partnership to support the programme and identify ways in which systemic change can be achieved.
4. To identify and test the ways in which identified barriers can be reduced.
5. To have a positive impact on the career prospects of the writers involved in the programme

Steering Group

A Writing Chance was led by a steering group of the following partners:

- Professor Katy Shaw, Northumbria University
- Claire Malcolm, New Writing North
- Michael Sheen, Actor, Social Activist and Philanthropist
- Husna Mortuza and Luke Henrion, Joseph Rowntree Foundation
- Anna Leszkiewicz and Jason Cowley, *New Statesman*
- Clare Fitzsimons and Nick Webster, *Daily Mirror*



The programme delivery was designed to be iterative. There were mentoring, masterclass, workshop and training opportunities, as well as guaranteed publication opportunities available to all the writers from the outset. However, the programme was set up to build relationships with each individual writer, who could then inform the direction of the programme and related support.

The same approach was taken by the partners, who used their knowledge and influence to make opportunities available to the participants as the programme developed. This reflective, co-creative approach to programme delivery meant that learning was embedded in the programme from the outset and informs this report.

The evaluation process draws on the following data:

- Questions asked at application stage about barriers to the writing industries.
- Demographic information from all applicants.
- Interviews with participant writers at the beginning of the programme and a questionnaire at the mid- and end-points of the programme.
- One-to-one conversations with the writers and New Writing North.
- Case studies of each of the writers.
- Questions and reflections from mentors and partners.

This research-driven approach aimed to identify a series of recommendations that could change, for the better, entry routes, pathways for development, and conditions within the media and publishing industries for writers from working-class backgrounds. It would also suggest models of good practice that could be replicated elsewhere, and contribute new ideas to the debate on class in the media and publishing.

CASE STUDY: TAMMIE ASH



Tammie Ash hails from Bradford, West Yorkshire, and is of Indian heritage and a working-class background. She studied Civil & Structural Engineering at the University of Leeds and worked as a civil engineer before changing career to work in factual TV on shows for the BBC and Channel 4.

Since being a part of A Writing Chance, she has written for the *New Statesman*, the *Mirror* and *Business Insider* as a freelance writer, and has gained a place on the Lyra McKee Investigative Journalism Scheme in 2022. She was mentored by Anoosh Chakelian of the *New Statesman*.

“A Writing Chance introduced me to an entire industry that I was oblivious to before. I knew people wrote books and that journalists wrote articles but that was the extent of my knowledge. I always thought that you can only get into the industry if your dad knows the editor of a magazine.”

“The New Writing North team are exceptionally supportive and sensitive. This is a team that genuinely care about the programme, its participants and what it stands for. There are big-name, well-funded organisations and companies out there that open schemes for under-represented applicants, but then leave them hanging afterwards because they’ve hit their diversity quota and that’s their bit done. New Writing North couldn’t be further from this.”

“Aside from the knowledge, contacts and support, A Writing Chance has given me confidence in my writing. As someone who has had very little validation for their writing throughout their life, this was a huge confidence boost for me. Without this foot into the industry, I would never have pursued writing professionally and it would’ve forever stayed an unlocked potential.”

Tammie Ash

CASE STUDY: BECKA WHITE



Becka White lives in south-east London and works in the human rights sector. During the programme she grew her confidence to develop and begin writing a book of essays supported by an ongoing mentorship-turned-friendship with Ellen Peirson-Hagger of the *New Statesman*. Becka won a London Writers Award in 2022 for narrative non-fiction.

“The impact of A Writing Chance has extended beyond my writing, and into my career. I work in the charity sector which, like publishing, is predominantly middle class. Over the course of the programme, my confidence grew not only in my writing but in my sense of self –including my working-class identity. I have felt able to ‘bring my whole self to work’. I had been unconsciously code-switching and masking my background, including my accent, to fit in and progress in the workplace. I now feel able to be open about my background and raise issues of class inequality. I speak more naturally now too – I drop a few Ts and Hs in the knowledge that my accent does not affect my capability, intelligence or professionalism.”

I know how powerful it can be having role models and peers from working-class backgrounds in your workplace, your newspaper, your books. I hope someone else who is masking their background hears and sees me and finds comfort in the fact there are other working-class people in these spaces, and that it’s OK to be your authentic self.

In this sense, A Writing Chance has been life-changing for me. There are far-reaching ripple effects of someone giving you a platform, and someone saying, really believing, you have a talent and something worth saying.

I have since been promoted at work to a team where my background is seen as an asset, and I have been asked to lead a (paid) session on ‘class and communications’ at the Human Rights Centre Clinic of the University of Essex. With these conversations, the ripple effects continue and, hopefully, lead to change.”

Becka White

Following a rigorous selection process, 11 writers were identified for the scheme. Some wanted to specialise in journalism and non-fiction, others in fiction. Each writer received a bursary of £2,000 to support their participation in the programme.

Programme Elements

- 30 shortlisted writers paid to produce extended pieces of work for consideration
- An open-access video event for the 700+ writers who applied for the programme, hosted by Michael Sheen with leading working-class writers, journalists and editors
- A mentor from New Writing North to support them through the programme
- A writing mentor from either the *New Statesman* or the *Mirror*, or a playwright or fiction writer
- Two industry insight days led by the editors and staff from the *New Statesman* and the *Mirror*
- Masterclasses led by staff from the *Mirror*, the *New Statesman* and the Joseph Rowntree Foundation and publishing partners
- Masterclasses and workshops co-programmed with the participants e.g. how to write an Arts Council application and how to pitch an idea
- Guaranteed publication in the *New Statesman*
- Opportunities to pitch articles to the *Daily Mirror*
- An event in Cardiff at which Michael Sheen and others read pieces by each writer
- A BBC Sounds podcast series with episodes about each writer and readings of their work
- An event in the Houses of Parliament supported by the Authors' Licensing and Collection Society the All-Parliamentary Group for Writers, featuring a round-table discussion with industry professionals and partners, and an evening reception at which writers performed their work
- Membership of the Society of Authors

Objective One: Test the appetite and demand for such a programme from writers from working class backgrounds from across the 4 nations of the UK

A Writing Chance launched its search for new working-class and under-represented writing talent in February 2021. The initial launch was explicitly conducted without mention of major project sponsor and partner Michael Sheen to ensure that applicants submitted expressions of interest based on the aims of the programme rather than the celebrity supporters involved in its inception. The launch was shared via the online networks of the steering organisations, regional writer development agencies and associated industries and amplified through two pieces of journalism published in the *Daily Mirror* and on the New Writing North website that offered personal reflections from industry experts on why writers should consider taking part. Regional literature development agencies, the Arts Council, organisations representing writers, publishers and media organisation as well as key literary influencers including working-class writers also shared the opportunities with their networks and encouraged participation.

744 writers applied for the scheme responding to the following callout:

We are looking for new and aspiring writers from working class and lower income backgrounds to take part in A Writing Chance.

We especially welcome submissions from people facing intersecting challenges including but not limited to Black, Asian and minority ethnic, disabled and /or any other historically marginalised backgrounds.

Class

At the application stage we collected a range of quantitative and qualitative data to identify class status. A quantitative approach to identifying working-class origin is important to ensure fairness. In the past we have found counting solely on self-definition can result in misidentification, so we used an objective metric. We used the questions that were identified in 2016 by the Cabinet Office and have since been widely adopted as a way of identifying the socio-economic background of applicants.

Through this metric we concluded that 354 (48%) of applicants who completed the questionnaire were from working class backgrounds, that is: Lower supervisory and technical occupations, Semi-routine and routine occupations, Long-term unemployed.



Analysis of submissions produced the following calculations:

Class	Label	Total	% of Total
1	Managerial, administrative and professional occupations	166	22%
2	Intermediate occupations	51	7%
3	Small employers and own account workers	62	8%
4	Lower supervisory and technical occupations	81	11%
5	Semi-routine and routine occupations	193	26%
	Missing data	191	26%

Of the 191 (26%) submissions not classified due to missing data, 147 submissions provided employment status as:

Long-term unemployed	80	42%
Prefer not to say	25	13%
Inactive	24	13%
Not applicable	14	7%
Retired	4	2%

44 or 23% of total submissions provided partial answers or no answer[s].

In addition:

Said they were eligible for free school meals	316	42%
Went to state school	642	86%
Had parents or guardians with no formal qualifications	194	26%
Had parents or guardians with qualifications below degree level	301	40%
Had spent time in the care system	45	6%
Have or have had refugee or asylum status	11	1%
Were registered as a carer as a child.	14	2%

Intersectional Barriers

Ethnicity

White British, English, Scottish, Welsh, Irish and Northern Irish	516	69%
Black African, Black British or Black Caribbean	81	10%
East Asian British, East Asian Chinese or East Asian Japanese	12	2%
Mixed Black African and White, Mixed Black British and White, Mixed Black Caribbean and White, or Mixed East Asian and White	32	4%
South Asian / British, South Asian / Bangladeshi, South Asian / Indian or South Asian / Pakistani	47	6%
Arab	8	1%
Latinx	5	1%
Gypsy or Irish Traveller	3	0%
Other	87	12%
did not answer	13	2%

Applicants were able to provide more than one response to this multiple choice question and 804 responses were received in total.

Disability

Did not describe a disability	314	42%
Self-described as having a disability	378	51%
Did not provide a response	52	7%

154 of the 378 applicants self-describing a disability provided details of multiple disabilities/long-term health conditions.

Applicants with a disability self-described:

Mental health	203	27%
Physical disability	61	8%
Hearing impairment / d/Deaf	19	3%
Visual impairment	17	2%
Cognitive or learning disabled	38	5%

Sexuality

Heterosexual or straight	516	69%
Bisexual	81	10%
Pansexual	12	2%
Gay	32	4%
Lesbian	47	6%
Queer	8	1%
Questioning	5	1%
Other	3	0%
Not answered/prefer not to say	87	12%

Gender

Female	470	63%
Male	209	28%
Non-binary	20	3%
Trans	4	1%
Described other genders	27	4%
Did not answer	14	2%



David Clancy is a hairdresser in the festival town of Ulverston in the Lake District. He is interested in writing non-fiction and drama about LGBTQI+ lives, interests and issues. David's work has featured in both local and national publications and has been broadcast on BBC Radio Cumbria. David is currently working on his first novel. During the project, he published pieces in the *New Statesman* and became the focus of national media attention for a piece that he wrote about reclaiming his school nickname for his hairdressing salon, which led to appearances and coverage on the national BBC news, in the *Telegraph* and an appearance on morning television. David was mentored by Brian Reade from the *Daily Mirror*.

"... He's a natural. But he could also quickly take on board advice and action it."
 Brian Reade, mentor

"I feel like this whole project has been amazing for lifting my confidence right from the initial email telling me I'd been longlisted and was getting 'paid' to up the wordcount. Getting a place on the project, getting feedback from my mentor, having a monthly Zoom with Claire to discuss my writing future. Making impossible-sounding goals seem achievable – that has been invaluable for self-belief. Also, being interviewed by Eamonn Holmes on breakfast telly was a boost."

David Clancy

Assessment Process

Entries were assessed anonymously by external readers drawn from a wide variety of backgrounds and from across the country. Entries were assessed on the quality of the writing only. Entrants were asked to submit 500 words on the theme of 'Life in 2020'.

From the 744 entries, a shortlist of 30 were chosen. We publicly named and celebrated these writers and asked each of them to write a further 1,000 words, for which they were paid £50. A panel drawn from members of the steering group's organisations and invited writers read these pieces alongside the entrants' personal statements. The final 11 participants were selected based on the quality of their work.

"I was hopeful but nervous about what the work might be like as it came in. However, the pieces totally blew all my expectations out of the water. It was a truly revelatory experience for me and to this day I'm still affected by the work of not only those who became our first cohort but many of those who didn't."

Michael Sheen



Website

A landing page for the project was launched on the day of the call-out. The page carried introductory information about the programme, articles by some of the steering group, free resources for new writers and a special free ten-week course for under-represented writers called The Writer's Plan. Over 500 writers went on to take the course.

Access Event

A free online access event was provided for all 744 entrants to A Writing Chance, in recognition of the efforts involved in participating in the recruitment and selection process. The event was broadcast live and was also recorded to ensure asynchronous delivery to participants who could not attend on the day. Hosted by Michael Sheen, the event included talks and a question-and-answer session with journalist and editor Terri White, agent Natalie Jerome, novelist Eloise Williams and playwright Siân Owen. The panel spoke about their experiences of entering the writing profession from non-traditional backgrounds and answered audience questions about how to access and achieve success in the industry.

"This has been a masterclass in writing development. Marvellously inspiring, so candid and relatable. You tell people you're trying to be a writer and people think you're talking about a nice hobby – like knitting. For the first time I've not felt like I've blundered into an exclusive party without an invite."

Access event participant

Conclusion

There was demand for this work amongst working-class writers. There are aspiring writers out there who are writing, and they can be reached through the right messaging and networks. The partnership was very effective in helping to reach those networks. The judges felt the quality of the submissions was high and were excited about the talent they saw.

The programme organisers worked hard to put in place a rigorous and fair recruitment process, which provided a metric to identify class background. This quantitative approach was enhanced by reading personal statements alongside the metric.

There were a range of reasons why applicants felt a long way from the writing industries. These were also echoed in the accounts of the 11 final participants themselves.



Mayo Agard-Olubo is a writer and poet based in London. His poetry has been published in several anthologies and he has published articles in the *Bookseller* and the *New Statesman*. He is a winner of a London Writers Award in the YA/children's writing category and a graduate of the HarperCollins Author Academy. His unpublished picture book manuscript was longlisted for the inaugural Jericho Prize. He is currently working on a YA novel called *We Must Slay Giants* that explores the themes of climate change, colonialism and corporate greed using a fantasy narrative. A recorded extract from the novel is available on BBC Sounds. Mayo was mentored by the leading children's author Sharna Jackson.

"The pride of seeing my mentee succeeding was a highlight."

Sharna Jackson, mentor

"A Writing Chance opened a door to a world that I had wanted to be a part of for a long time but was never quite sure how to access. The world of publishing seems very opaque when you're on the outside. This programme made that world feel much more accessible and enabled me to see a path to a writing career."

New Writing North has been supportive in helping me build professional connections within the publishing world. I was paired with an amazing mentor and have been introduced to many industry professionals who have been incredibly generous with their time and supportive of my work."

Mayo Agard-Olubo

Objective 2: Understand the barriers working-class and under-represented writers face in relation to pursuing a career in writing

According to the quantitative data provided, upon application around 50% of applicants were from traditionally under-represented backgrounds. The data we collected through A Writing Chance shows us a range of complex barriers that writers from working-class backgrounds face in relation to pursuing a career in writing.

However, we also asked applicants to explain in their own words why they felt that they were under-represented or experienced unique barriers to participation in the writing industries. A content analysis of the replies to this question evidenced the dominant themes.

Survey of Barriers

Applicants to the programme were asked to identify up to six statements that applied to them in relation to the barriers they experienced entering the writing industries. Many of the barriers intersect. Broadly, we have categorised those barriers as follows:

Knowledge and Permission

Many applicants grew up being told that careers in journalism and writing were not for working classes, had no access or encouragement to find internships, relevant work experience, a lack of professional mentors and role models and feelings of imposter syndrome.

'I grew up thinking that a job in these industries was not attainable for someone from my background.' (47% identified this as a barrier.)

'I do not have enough knowledge about how to enter these industries.' (41% identified this as a barrier.)

Information on how to pursue careers in writing is important in reducing barriers to access. However, there are still many barriers for working-class writers within the industry once that knowledge is accrued and access routes identified.

37% of entrants identified the 'lack the lack of financial resources to attain the correct qualifications, work experience or training to get a job in the industry'.

Lack of Networks

The second most common barrier identified by entrants was 'I do not know anyone who works or has worked in these industries' (46%). This lack of social capital is cited as a barrier that prevents people from pursuing a writing career. If people are not surrounded by others who feel they have permission to pursue a writing career, it takes a lot of confidence and determination to be the only one in your circle to believe it's for you.

"I feel like journalism is an exclusive club that I don't meet the criteria for – I don't know the right people or have the best connections, I haven't been to the 'right' school. Even the people who write for the more left-leaning publications seem to be Oxbridge educated – a lot of them anyway."

A Writing Chance Entrant

"I don't know where you get in, or how you get in, or once you get in what's on the other side of the in. If there is a door to go through, I don't know where the door is, or how to get to it, and if I do find it, I haven't got a key."

A Writing Chance Entrant

Geographical Access

The geographical location of centres of media production and the closure of local newspaper outlets and local libraries was also noted as a factor. Many writers live far away from opportunities and find it difficult to access information. Many writers lack opportunity to access affordable training and learning opportunities

25% of people who applied identified 'that they live in a part of the country where there are fewer opportunities' as a barrier.

"I live in a northern town in the UK that is underfunded and where very few people seek education, so there is little scope for writing spaces. Half of our library has been converted into council offices and our newspaper headquarters have been shut down – I feel this says a lot about how much writing is valued."

Tammie Ash, A Writing Chance participant

Money, taking risks and the precarity of writing

Earning money and often working multiple jobs is a necessity that doesn't give much time for the development of more complex career aspirations or time to write. The freelance culture of pitching and late payments is too financially precarious. The need to relocate to London or other major centres of production to network and find work is prohibitive for many due to family and financial reasons.

100% of the participants on the A Writing Chance programme felt they had more knowledge of how the industry works following their involvement with the scheme. However, following the programme, at least four of the participants suggested that the 47% of original applicants who selected the statement 'a job in these industries was not attainable for someone from my background' were right.

"Substantially, I feel much more understanding about the industry. Unfortunately, that includes the barriers and how difficult, to impossible, it would be for me to work full time as a writer and make a living."

Grace Quantock, A Writing Chance participant

"My mentor from the New Statesman has explained not only 'how it works' but also about the dynamics, contracts and salaries. This is not a sustainable career for emerging working-class people, especially those with families, dependents or caring responsibilities."

Becka White, A Writing Chance participant

The lack of resources to engage in the traditional ways in to the writing industries has been well documented. This includes the need to live in London to work in these industries, and to develop the networks and profile necessary to access the industry. There are many schemes to address this within the industry, including bursaries, paid work experience opportunities etc. We agree that more of this, and more comprehensive and co-ordinated approaches to this, across industry is required. However, the lack of financial stability amongst people from working-class backgrounds makes it difficult for them to pursue a stable career, even after they have found a way in.

The precarity of the industry for all but the most successful make it difficult to forge a full-time career without a financial cushion elsewhere.

"Being from a lower-income background means that it's difficult to take risks. Attending expensive courses or going on work experience is out of my reach. I'm from a town that's hours away from any city with opportunities [...it's] five hours away from London. The writing jobs I've seen seem precarious, and being from a lower-income background means that taking a three-month contract in London just to find nothing to follow it up would put me in a financial hole. I would be far away from my family, and I would have to live in a house share with strangers."

A Writing Chance applicant

CASE STUDY: STEPHEN TUFFIN



Stephen Tuffin was born on a council estate on the south-east coast of England. He is a working-class writer writing stories inspired by the remarkable and raw world he has lived and worked in for most of his life. He also teaches creative writing. Stephen worked on a novel and a memoir outline during the programme and successfully placed pieces in the *New Statesman* and the *Daily Mirror* with support from his mentor Kevin Maguire. Following an introduction from New Writing North, he has signed with literary agent Jo Unwin. With support from the programme Stephen was successful in achieving a Developing Your Creative Practice grant from Arts Council England, which will support him with the time to write to complete his memoir.

"I was immediately struck by the power and eloquence of Stephen Tuffin's voice and quickly became convinced it must enjoy a wide hearing. What started as mentoring is now friendship and I get as much, arguably more, from the relationship as Stephen."

Kevin Maguire, mentor

"It would be difficult to pin down exactly all the ways in which New Writing North's A Writing Chance has impacted on me. I could make a list, but it would run off the page. The positivity and encouragement I've received has finally convinced me I might actually be able to call myself a writer. The more invested I became, the more encouragement I had, the closer I felt I was getting to achieving something, the more the pressure built up. It was a bittersweet experience."

Stephen Tuffin

Lack of Confidence

Confidence, as found in many other studies, was a frequently cited barrier to engagement. As identified by Sam Friedman and Daniel Laurison in *The Class Ceiling: Why it Pays to be Privileged* “confidence is a catch-all term which itself needs to be unpacked”.

‘I lack the confidence to send my work off’ was identified as a barrier by 24% of applicants.

‘I don’t think the industry will be interested in what I write’ was identified as a barrier by 23% of applicants.

This and testimony from the participants, suggests that confidence is an issue, but people don’t worry as much about the quality of their writing as they do culture and networks within the industry. Almost all the A Writing Chance participants described feelings associated with Imposter Syndrome - the feeling you don’t have the right to be in the room, or to call yourself a writer as a constant companion.

“It was at university that I first met people who were middle class. I felt like an outlier and completely out of my depth... but it was also transformative in many ways – merely by exposing me to people who were from more affluent backgrounds, some of whom I still consider good friends. The experience opened my eyes to new possibilities, although the access to opportunities has never come easy. It’s a strange dichotomy; the experience of university seemed to broaden my horizons but also seemed to compound our class differences and a feeling of inadequacy and of not fitting in within certain spaces.”

Elias Suhail, A Writing Chance participant

“I’ve thought long and hard about my lack of confidence and the fact imposter syndrome clings to me like a bloody limpet to a rock. Trying to take a positive from it, I think it might be that imposter syndrome plays a significant part in what it is that motivates me. The constant desire to be better.”

Stephen Tuffin, A Writing Chance participant

Other Barriers

Amongst the personal statements from applicants, the following barriers were also prominent:

Home and Family Life: Many applicants grew up in a single-parent household, experienced violence or abuse within the family, suffered from precarious accommodation and/or had parents with poor literacy.

Age: For many working-class writers, beginning to write seriously happens at a later stage in life when their children and family responsibilities ease up and time becomes available to pursue creative expression. This brings the disadvantage of a lack of access to entry level roles in the industry and to pursue a freelance career. This was particularly dominant for female writers.

Health and Disability: Many writers reported that disabilities such as autism, ADHD, dyslexia, mental health challenges and sight loss impacted on their ability to pursue careers, often due to the perceptions of those hiring and commissioning work. Physical access to training and learning opportunities and to paid work was also identified, including by those with chronic fatigue.

Intersectionality: Many respondents had intersectional barriers including ethnicity, gender, disability, English as a second language, literacy issues, family and cultural gender expectations of careers, and feelings of cultural marginalisation. The perception that writing is an ‘old boys’ club’ was also expressed.

Impact of the Pandemic: For many applicants, the experience of the pandemic had made things more challenging financially due to unemployment and experiences of furlough, and the need to support family members who had lost jobs and employment during the period. Many have even less time to write as the need to earn money and to work longer hours has increased. Overall, this has made people more risk averse to taking chances on pursuing creative goals.

CASE STUDY: GRACE QUANTOCK



Grace Quantock is a writer and counsellor living in Wales. Her work has been published in the *Guardian*, the *New Statesman*, the *Daily Mirror* and the *Welsh Agenda*. Grace was shortlisted for the Nan Shepherd Prize and the Artists and Writers Working-Class Writers’ Prize in 2021 while she was undertaking the A Writing Chance programme. During the programme, she contributed to the Parthian travel anthology, *An Open Door* and was selected for the Tin House Winter Workshop by Terese Marie Mailhot in 2022. She worked on a collection of non-fiction essays during the programme and was signed by literary agent Abi Fellows at The Good Literary Agency, who now has her memoir, *Madwomen Are My Ancestors*, out on submission. Grace was mentored by Lola Seaton of the *New Statesman*.

“I think it was good for me to feel a little out of my comfort zone – and enriching to be working with and trying to support (as well as learning from) someone whose life and experience, professional and otherwise, were very different to mine.”

Lola Seaton, mentor

“The programme gave me the confidence to apply to be in an anthology, contact an agent, get signed and finish my book proposal. It gave me the confidence to write my first feature for a national newspaper. As someone who loves writing reported pieces, interviewing, and writing from a journalistic standpoint, it’s long been a hope to be able to be a freelance writer.

I am now working with a literary agent, which New Writing North was instrumental in helping me to navigate those conversations.”

Grace Quantock

Objective 3: Bring together a cross-sectoral partnership to support the programme and identify ways in which systemic change can be achieved

The success of A Writing Chance would not have been possible without the cross-sectoral partnership that collaborated to produce it.

Reach

The partnerships meant that we were able to reach working-class writers who may not ordinarily put themselves forward for such initiatives because the opportunity was advertised widely, including in the national media (via the *Daily Mirror* and *New Statesman*) but also through a more targeted approach via regional writing agencies. The profile of the project and the debate underpinning it continued to gain exposure in the national media when Michael Sheen was identified as the supporter behind the project.

Knowledge, Support and Networks

To some extent the partnership could be said to have performed the role of the high-status networks many from more privileged backgrounds enjoy. The partnership manufactured the social capital and networks that are required to 'get on' in the writing professions which the public-school-to-Oxbridge route provides.

The A Writing Chance writers gained knowledge about how the industry works through structured masterclasses, workshops and insight days led by partners or by the contacts of partners. One of the most successful aspects of the programme was mentoring, and in the most successful cases, these mentoring partnerships became trusted relationships. The partnership helped connect the writers with well-established professionals – the sorts of people who have not, in the past, been available to them in their friendship groups or informal networks. The mentoring relationships were friendly and

informal, and the trust built between mentor and mentees meant that the writers felt at ease expressing insecurity, uncertainty or just asking advice about their work and career.

Publication and Production Opportunities

Another key benefit of the cross-sectoral partnership was the opportunity for publication and production. To some extent, getting a break in publishing and journalism is reliant on the confidence of commissioners to take risks on unproven talent. A track record helps the commissioner to take that risk. The partnership guaranteed commission opportunities for writers in the *New Statesman*, and later, because of the networks and influence of the partnership, a BBC Sounds podcast commissioning opportunity. This meant material additions to their CVs and, in some cases, access to agents and further commissions.

The influence and reach of the partnership was also able to move the debate on. The writers, alongside representatives of the partnership, were able to speak to politicians, funders, publishers and wider industry professionals about the lack of class diversity in the industries, whilst also showcasing their talents.

"Who gets to tell their story, and how they get to tell it, is incredibly meaningful. This narrative power shapes our sense of self, our confidence, our identity."

Supporting talented writers from working class background creates richer conversations for all of us, as A Writing Chance demonstrates not just how we can do more to break down barriers, but why we should.

"We are incredibly proud to support an initiative, built on a unique partnership working across different sectors. It exemplifies how change is possible when we work with partners who are creative, collaborative, and generous with their time, networks, and expertise."

Husna Mortuza, Associate Director, Public Engagement, Joseph Rowntree Foundation

Programme outputs included:

Margins to Mainstream with Michael Sheen, with BBC Sounds

Michael Sheen worked with Working Word productions in Cardiff to create and pitch a podcast series based on the project to BBC Wales. The project was enthusiastically supported by BBC Wales and commissioned for BBC Sounds as a podcast series. The 11-episode series consisted of ten-minute episodes introduced by Michael and featuring participant writers and their mentors and extracts of new work from each writer. The featured work was recorded live at a special event at the Royal Welsh College of Music and Drama in Cardiff, where it was read by leading actors in front of a live audience of over 300 people. This was a very special event, at which many of the writers met in real life for the first time. The podcast series has been well received and is now available as part of the BBC's output in the US and Canada, helping to spread the word about the project internationally.

New Statesman Special Issue

In March 2022, a special issue of the *New Statesman* was produced to celebrate the project. Guest edited by Michael Sheen, the issue featured a showcased selection of work by all the participants, alongside a range of specially commissioned content that explored British identity and class. The flagship interview was undertaken by Michael with Tony Blair.

House of Lords Round-table Discussion on Barriers and Breakthroughs

With the financial and strategic support of the Authors' Licensing and Collection Society and the All-Party Parliamentary Writers Group, on 30th March 2022 a high-profile round table discussion took place in the House of Lords, supported by Baroness Bonham Carter of Yarnbury. The round table was attended by project partners and guests Sarah Crown (Director of Literature, Arts Council England), Lord Mendoza (Cultural Recovery, DCMS), David Shelley (Chief Executive, Hachette UK), Lisa Milton (Director, HarperCollins), Jess Loveland (Head of New Writing, BBC) and representatives of the Paul Hamlyn and Churchill Foundations.

A Writing Chance Showcase in the House of Commons

Hosted by the All-Party Parliamentary Writers Group, a celebratory evening event took place in the House of Commons to showcase the work of the writers. The event was attended by MPs, government officials and specially invited guests from politics, the media, publishing and the arts. At the event Michael spoke about the project, and all but one of the writers (who had Covid) read their work. To support the events in parliament, the Authors' Licensing and Collection Society supported the publication of a special six-page project evaluation snapshot to share with attendees.

In some cases, the partnership was not able to cater to the needs and ambitions of all the writers. There was a strong journalistic focus and many of the writers wrote fiction or plays. We were able to source mentors for these writers appropriate to their creative ambitions, but there were fewer institutions represented in the partnership which could provide career-progressing opportunities for writers working in other forms. This is something to consider in future iterations of the project.





Elias Suhail is a British-Moroccan writer and filmmaker who lives in Folkestone, Kent. On the programme, he developed journalistic writing and his short film. His film project has received support from the BFI Network and the SAFAR Arab Film Development Programme. He is developing a collection of short stories concerned with themes of cultural margins and liminalities. During the project, he published work in the *New Statesman* and was mentored by Ros Wynne-Jones from the *Daily Mirror*.

"I made a friend in Elias, and it made me dust off my own (shelved) novel and start a new draft."

Ros Wynne-Jones, mentor

"I finally feel like what previously seemed like an out-of-reach pipe dream is now viably within my grasp. Thanks for all you're doing, this programme has had a huge impact on me in many ways. The support waylaid the devil on my shoulder which often tries to convince me that I'm an imposter, or someone somewhere must have made a mistake."

Elias Suhail



Maya Jordan is a working-class writer living in Mid-Wales and has completed a Masters in Creative Writing. She was encouraged by her mentor Siobhan McNally (the *Daily Mirror*) to create a blog, called *Bordering Grey*, to get her writing noticed during the programme. She also attained a regular writing slot on the *Daily Mirror's* parenting blog, *Lemon-Aid*, through her mentor. This work, as well as her performance at the House of Commons, brought her to the attention of literary agent Natalie Jerome at Curtis Brown, who has signed her up. Maya completed her first novel, which is set in Newtown Powys, during the programme and is now working on a memoir.

"I think I had internalised so many of the messages I had received about who could be a writer, that I silenced my own voice. Particularly as a middle-aged working-class woman who had raised a family and lived with disability and chronic illness for many years, the programme has given me a sense of myself again – that there may be professional opportunities for me still. The programme gave me permission to take my writing seriously and to continue writing... That permission to write and be a writer means I'm not just messing about. I am now serious about getting my work published. I now feel empowered to say 'I am a writer', something I would not have felt prior to this."

Maya Jordan

Objective 4: Identify and test the ways in which identified barriers can be reduced

Mentoring

Each participant was allocated an industry mentor who supported their writing development. Each participant also worked closely with a New Writing North staff member as a pastoral mentor providing support around creative and career development, and acting as a sounding board for ideas or needs that the programme may be able to facilitate.

The industry mentors worked with the writers to develop their work for publication at the end of the programme, but also functioned as a source of advice, guidance and contacts. The mentors were mainly all volunteers who self-selected from the partner organisations, but we also engaged three specific mentors who generously gave their time in-kind to support novelists and dramatists.

The 11 mentor pairings were:

1. Mayo Agard-Olubo and Sharna Jackson (author)
2. Tammie Ash and Anoosh Chakelian (*New Statesman*)
3. David Clancy and Brian Reade (*Mirror*)
4. Jacqueline Houston and Sophie McBain (*New Statesman*)
5. Maya Jordan and Siobhan McNally (*Mirror*)
6. Anna Maxwell and Siân Owen (playwright)
7. Tom Newlands and David Peace (author)
8. Grace Quantock and Lola Seaton (*New Statesman*)
9. Elias Suhail and Ros Wynne-Jones (*Mirror*)
10. Stephen Tuffin and Kevin McGuire (*Mirror*)
11. Becca White and Ellen Peirson-Hagger (*New Statesman*)



The industry mentors took part in a training session led by New Writing North and the experienced mentor and writer Doug Johnson, and were given a mentor handbook to provide a background to models of mentoring in the creative industries. The mentor training session outlined the basic requirements of the role and asked the mentors to consider programme timelines, how to structure meetings and how to provide effective feedback. Special focus was given to facilitating digital online mentoring and how to replicate the personal benefits of mentoring remotely.

The mentoring aspect of the programme was very positive for most of the writers and helped to address some of the barriers identified above. Where the mentoring relationships worked best, the writer participants were able to get to know their mentors, building trust and feeling able to ask frank questions, express concerns about their work and career, and have an open conversation which helped to demystify the worlds of publishing and journalism. This helped them feel closer to it because of the insider view, and increased their confidence because they were receiving validation for their work and ideas. Some mentoring relationships were more effective than others. 63% of the participants said mentorship was the most beneficial aspect of the programme for them.

Most writers expressed a desire for sustained relationships with their mentors and/or 'remaining part of the New Writing North family' so they could stay close to networks and professional opportunities, as well as more informal support and advice. Many also articulated the desire for an annual 'reunion' so the writers could maintain peer support and 'check in' with New Writing North and the steering group partners to evaluate progress and reflect on the results of the intervention on a more long-term basis.

"The programme has improved my confidence immeasurably. As a brand-new writer, it's difficult to overestimate the impact the programme has had on my confidence. I think imposter syndrome and lack of self-belief hits working-class people harder, which makes the barriers in the industry even more difficult to overcome. I've found having a writing community, a mentor, and a respected organisation like New Writing North behind me has given me so much confidence in my writing ability and potential."

Becca White, A Writing Chance participant

As well as the mentors, the writers also got to know members of the steering group and each other very well. 54% of the writers said that forming peer and professional contacts and networks was the most beneficial aspect of the programme and that this, in many cases, led to further writing work or opportunities.



Jacqueline Houston was born in Galloway, Scotland. She was taking her first steps into writing when she was selected for the programme whilst working as a factual television freelancer. She has built her confidence in her writing craft and development skills, and published two pieces of work in the *New Statesman* during the project. She was mentored by Sophie McBain from the *New Statesman*.

“I’m now thinking like a writer, seeing writing potential in encounters and situations, and diligently recording ideas as they happen. At the start of this project I was so new to writing (I’d written one piece – the competition entry!) that I didn’t even know what flavour of writer I was, and this was very unsettling.

The sense of achievement from having two *New Statesman* pieces published, the opportunity of the podcast, being interviewed by the BBC a couple of times, and speaking at the House of Commons – none of which I expected (or expected I’d have it in me) from submitting those initial 500 words.”

Jacqueline Houston



Networks

Peer networks and support facilitated by the programme created ‘cohort camaraderie’ despite the Covid-context of most of the programme delivery. Through a writers’ WhatsApp group and informal Zoom meetings, the community created for the writers proved ‘invaluable’. While the programme brought them together, the writers themselves co-created new virtual and blended spaces in which peer support and advice networks could thrive. Due to health contexts, not all writers were safe to travel to in-person events, but most participants finally met for the first time in Cardiff and then again at the House of Commons. The value of in-person encounters was also cited as being ‘extra special’ in the Covid-delivery context.

“We are each other’s cheerleaders, commiserators and soundboards. We also share writing advice, resources and opportunities.”

Many factors led 100% of the writers to state that their confidence had increased significantly because of the programme. From being chosen to take part and publicly announced as a new talent in writing, to being able to call themselves a writer and working with professionals in other industries, writers report that their increased confidence has enabled them to pitch their work, and apply for other writing development opportunities and/or awards schemes.

“It’s worked wonders. The positivity and encouragement I’ve received has been like a rubber stamp and having highly respected voices comment on my work has given me the most tremendous boost.”

“I think A Writing Chance has had the biggest impact on my confidence in myself as a writer. I think that at times this is a somewhat tender confidence, but I now see myself as a writer, something I would not have said out loud before... That isn’t to say I won’t slide back again. I suspect I will. I assume nothing and expect less. But I am okay with that. I am armed and ready for it now in a way I hadn’t previously been. I am better at my art and my craft. There are lots of other motivating factors, of course”.

Publication, Production, and Progress

Each of the writers:

- had their work published in a special edition of the *New Statesman*;
- had the opportunity to publish work in the *Daily Mirror*;
- was featured in a BBC Sounds podcast made about their work;
- experienced their work performed by professional performers including Michael Sheen at a live event with the BBC in Cardiff;
- Attended events with publishers and literary agents;
- and performed their own work at an event at the House of Commons.

Although many acknowledge it is still 'early days', the writers note their 'tangible progress' and credit the 'platform and credibility' provided by the programme for enabling them to gain 'respect from people in the industry, which is so hard to come by usually'.

Writers credited the involvement of 'respectable organisations (New Writing North, The Joseph Rowntree Foundation) and publications (*New Statesman*, *Daily Mirror*) and advocates (Michael Sheen) 'backing us' for opening doors and opportunities, as well as giving the writers confidence and permission to change perceptions about who writes and what working-class writers can write about.

For one participant, the range of perspectives and approaches in the writers' published and performed work meant that:

"A Writing Chance has shown the diversity of voices of those who consider themselves to be working class. We are not a monolith and we do not all necessarily have the same perspectives or opinions on things."

"Prior to A Writing Chance it would have been very difficult to pitch ideas to editors, but now with the New Statesman pieces and the BBC podcast we can be seen as credible, and that potentially opens up a lot of possibilities... The experience has also instilled in me the desire to constantly write ideas down when I'm out and about, and to apply for other opportunities (something I wouldn't have done before)."

Jacqueline Houston, A Writing Chance participant



Objective 5: Have a positive impact on the career prospects of the working-class and under-represented writers involved in the programme

As outlined in this report, the programme had a positive impact on participants' confidence, networks and industry knowledge, and 100% of participants have said they now have the confidence to call themselves writers.

In addition:

- three participants signed up with a literary agent
- one participant achieved a two-book deal following a three-way auction
- one participant was shortlisted for the Nan Shepherd Award
- two participants won London Writers Awards
- four participants have written, and been paid for, further pieces for in national publications
- one participant has received further mentoring to support the development of her picture book
- one participant was selected for the Lyra McKee Investigative Journalism Scheme
- one participant received BFI funding for his short film
- one participant achieved a significant grant from Arts Council England to develop his first novel
- one participant established a personal blog on the advice of her writing mentor which won her the attention of an agent who she has since signed with

100% of the writers believe that the programme has created some degree of change or awareness and/or perception of working-class writers within the industry.

Without structured opportunities for networking, publication or production brokered and facilitated by industry partners, it is difficult to see how else the writers would have had this level of exposure and material progress towards achieving a writing career. By constructing the types of advantages socially mobile writers from more privileged backgrounds have, A Writing Chance fulfilled its fifth objective of impacting positively on the career prospects of the working-class and under-represented writers involved in the programme.



Anna Maxwell is a working-class writer based in Lancaster. Anna is a qualified counsellor, and the stories people tell her lead to her writing dramatic monologues dealing with real and often hard-hitting issues. Anna's monologue Square Peg was performed by Michael Sheen for BBC Sounds.

Anna grew up in a village in the North West, in the only mixed-heritage family. Her article Other Tick Box, published in the *New Statesman*, explores this issue and the impact it had on her life.

Anna is currently writing a five-episode series for radio using humour to look at current and controversial issues, alongside a semi-biographical novel. During the project, Anna worked with playwright Siân Owen as her mentor.

"She's got such a strong, unique voice... and I was completely blown away actually."
Siân Owen, mentor

"Hearing my work performed by Michael Sheen has been such a fantastic experience. My confidence has undoubtedly increased since being on the programme and I feel that my writing is taken seriously now because I am treated like a professional. Having the opportunity to read my published article in the House of Commons has been further validation of my work. Personally, A Writing Chance has been a lifeline for me. There have been some very challenging things in my personal life, but having this project to work on has really helped and given me a focus."
Anna Maxwell

Metrics: While social class remains excluded from the list of protected characteristics in the 2010 Equalities Act, the lack of class diversity in the creative industries remains a pervasive issue. We recommend that organisations adopt a metric to identify the class background of employees and potential employees in workforce and recruitment data, so that they can understand their organisation's class profile and set targets to achieve balance.

Mentoring: To diversify who gets to write, professional networks need to be more easily available to those who don't come from privileged backgrounds. Mentoring can play a part in helping to address this. Publishers and media groups should make mentoring opportunities available to a targeted number of people from working-class backgrounds each year. Those mentors should be people with experience, sensitivity and influence within the host organisation, and with a network of contacts that could be of use to mentees.

Network: Working-class writers would benefit from an identifiable network which would support them with information, highlight opportunities, and build confidence. The network should be supported by a comprehensive website for information, advice, job adverts, commissions, development opportunities and free digital events. A new network would also enable the bringing-together of talented writers from across the myriad of short-term programmes and opportunities that exist in both the commercial and subsidised sectors, creating a clear talent pool from which organisations can draw.

Opportunity: A publication track record is key to getting a foot in the door and gaining the confidence of future commissioners. A structured system of guaranteed publication opportunities should be available for working-class writers. This may be through future schemes such as this one, but individual organisations could also allocate a target or create new creative platforms for such opportunities.

Collaboration: There is the will and interest amongst both individuals and organisations in the media and cultural sectors to continue to address this issue. Many individual organisations have time-limited schemes to address the lack of diversity in their organisations, not all of which result in jobs or publication. The cross-sectoral approach of A Writing Chance has the potential to address systemic change due to the range of organisations involved, the influence and expertise of the individual partners, and the reach of the partnership as it came together. We recommend that this approach is further explored and promoted through the wider cultural industries. To support new projects, we recommend that a Challenge Fund is created by a major funder or collaboration between funders. The fund could match fund projects, thus leveraging in a range of resources, expertise, and publication and production opportunities.

Programme Launch

A Writing Chance launched its shortlist of 11 writers with a co-ordinated media campaign supported by CLD Communications Ltd, Sofia Lewis and the PR teams across the steering group organisations. This functioned to amplify the reach of launch activities, and with Michael Sheen as the advocate for the programme, the media attention was significant.

Channel 4 News: [shorturl.at/FGKX0](https://www.channel4.com/news/shorturl.at/FGKX0)

Jon Snow: *“The diversity of writing has actually shrunk [...] there are people who have all the talent to write but haven’t had the chance.”*

Lorraine, ITV: *“I can’t tell you how fantastic this is. A Writing Chance will give people who wouldn’t normally get a chance to be the best they can be. It’s a great idea. I feel very strongly about this. I’m from a working-class background and I don’t think that somebody like me, right now, would have the opportunities that I had. I had mentors, I had a chance, I really did, so that’s why now what A Writing Chance is doing is so important.”*

Bookseller: [shorturl.at/pxOR5](https://www.booksellers.co.uk/shorturl.at/pxOR5)

Mirror: [shorturl.at/bdIO8](https://www.mirror.co.uk/shorturl.at/bdIO8)

Daily Mail: [shorturl.at/rtuBH](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/shorturl.at/rtuBH)

New Statesman: [shorturl.at/jqyZ6](https://www.newstatesman.com/shorturl.at/jqyZ6)

ITV: [shorturl.at/eoqyM](https://www.itv.com/shorturl.at/eoqyM)

Credits

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“I know how powerful it can be having role models and peers from working-class backgrounds in your workplace, your newspaper, your books.

I hope someone else who is masking their background hears and sees me and finds comfort in the fact there are other working-class people in these spaces, and that it’s OK to be your authentic self.

In this sense, A Writing Chance has been life-changing for me. There are far-reaching ripple effects of someone giving you a platform, and someone saying, really believing, you have a talent and something worth saying.”

Becka White, A Writing Life participant
