

A WRITING CHANCE

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Publishing and media partners unite to improve chances for writers from working-class and lower-income backgrounds

A Writing Chance 2024-25 programme opens for applications

A WRITING CHANCE – the pioneering programme for change, produced by New Writing North and co-founded by actor and philanthropist Michael Sheen and the Joseph Rowntree Foundation – is back.

The project returns for 2024-25 to create more career-changing opportunities for new writers from working-class and lower-income backgrounds.

The initiative follows the success of the 2021-22 programme, and subsequent academic research which revealed that access and entry to the highly competitive publishing and media industries continues to favour those from more privileged backgrounds.

Research led by Professor Katy Shaw evidences how London-centric industries; low-paid internships and starting salaries; the casualisation of work; and a reliance on informal networks and personal contacts all make launching and sustaining a writing career disproportionately difficult for people from working-class and lower-income backgrounds.

What's more, people from these backgrounds often face intersecting challenges due to historic under-representation in publishing and the media, including but not limited to ethnicity, disability, sexuality, gender identity, age and religious beliefs.

High barriers to access and poor representation across these industries not only affect individual writers' careers and opportunities, but also have a more insidious effect in shutting out these voices and experiences from wider mainstream attention and public discourses. The research has gone on to make significant policy impacts, both in central government and in the publishing industry.

A Writing Chance was co-founded in 2021 by Michael Sheen, Joseph Rowntree Foundation and New Writing North. A Writing Chance 2024-25 is produced in partnership with Faber & Faber, the Daily Mirror, and Substack, with audio sponsorship from Audible. The programme is supported by research from Northumbria University and Bath Spa University.

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By uniting partners across the charity sector, media and publishing industries and challenging the status quo, A Writing Chance aims to continue to build a movement for lasting change – allowing all writers to fairly benefit from opportunities and progress that better reflect their talent and abilities.

Michael Sheen said: “When we first launched A Writing Chance, I was bowled over by the quality of work that was submitted and by the writers that we selected for the programme. It’s clear to me that we need to continue to work hard to enable access for talented people into the arts and creative industries and to understand and remove the real barriers that prevent this. I’m proud of the work that the project has done to draw attention to what these are and look forward to seeing this project grow into a much bigger programme for change as the work continues.”

Husna Mortuza, Associate Director, Public Engagement, Joseph Rowntree Foundation said: “We are proud to continue to support ‘A Writing Chance’. This powerful project is much needed if we are to break the class ceiling in our media and publishing industries, and to bring on talented voices who need to be heard.

“Hearing voices from all parts of our society matters, and both writers and readers will benefit from a widening of the lens. Unfortunately, talented storytellers from working-class and lower income backgrounds have too often found it difficult to break into the industry without the networks or connections to learn and get published.

“This project helps to open those doors and to showcase the talent and perspectives of more writers over the coming years.”

Claire Malcolm, Chief Executive of New Writing North, said: “We have worked hard to build the next stage of A Writing Chance and our ambition is to not only support a new cohort of 16 writers to enter the industry but to continue to work with industry partners to look at how we can together ensure that opportunities are widened out for all in the future. I’m heartened that new partners have joined us this year and how we’ve raised the funds to develop some new areas of work around the programme this year, which we’ll reveal in 2024. We welcome partnerships from across industry, so please do reach out if you’d like to join our movement for change.”

Tracey Markham, Audible UK Country Manager said: “Audible is delighted to sponsor A Writing Chance and support the inspiring work by New Writing North, Michael Sheen and the Joseph Rowntree Foundation. As a company, we believe it is vital that voices from all backgrounds are championed in the arts and we are proud

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to support an important initiative that helps stories from working-class and lower-income backgrounds be heard.”

A Writing Chance 2024-25 is now open to applications from new or emerging fiction and non-fiction writers and journalists from working-class and lower-income backgrounds.

16 successful applicants will be mentored one-to-one over 12 months by an experienced writer or editor from either the Daily Mirror, Faber & Faber or Substack. They will also become part of a writers’ network, learn how the industry works, undertake a residential writing retreat with Arvon, make contacts, and receive a bursary of £2,000 to support their participation. This programme runs April 2024-March 2025 and is open to writers aged over 18 and based in the UK.

Alongside support for individual writers, A Writing Chance will also offer free open-access resources and opportunities for all working-class and lower-income writers which will launch in 2024.

Alison Phillips, editor of the Daily Mirror, said: "For the past 120 years, The Daily Mirror has played a vital role in holding those in power accountable. We've consistently exposed wrongdoing at the highest levels and we've forced change for the better for British people.

"It is a mission which is incredibly important and rewarding. But it's also a mission that relies on us fully reflecting our diverse society. No writer should ever feel silenced because of their background or situation. No voice should feel unwelcome or unheard. And that's why this scheme is so exciting.

"Last time we discovered some fascinating and fantastic new talents - and we can't wait to see what this year will bring."

Angus Cargill, Publishing Director at Faber & Faber, said: 'We are really looking forward to partnering on this important initiative. With the submissions, we'll be looking for distinctive, engaging voices in the first instance.'

Farrah Storr, Head of Partnerships at Substack UK and Europe, said: “The greatest writers do not always end up writing for the biggest media organisations or penning a best-selling tome. Instead they are quietly working away, often alone and without support and guidance. A Writing Chance is an incredible opportunity for us to find those voices, support them and give them a platform to share their work with the world.”

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Underpinning the whole programme of work is a growing body of research headed by Professor Katy Shaw, Northumbria University, and supported by research associate Sarah France, which analyses the opportunities and barriers for writers across industries and advocates for change at industry and policy level.

Professor Shaw's research from the 2021-22 programme was the subject of talks and roundtables from academic conferences to TED Talks and London Book Fair to the House of Commons.

Professor Katy Shaw, Professor of Contemporary Writing and Director of Cultural Partnerships at Northumbria University, said: "Northumbria University is a founding partner of A Writing Chance and we are delighted to be evolving this important intervention into a second phase. From TED Talks to BBC podcast series and policy papers, the programme has created a wealth of meaningful change in industry and government to date. Our mission as a university is to unlock opportunity for innovation and to invest in cross-sector collaborations with partners to further knowledge and understanding about some of the most pressing challenges facing society today. Through our research and policy-shaping, we can see the power of partnership working to create new knowledge and solution suggestions that will help level up opportunity in the creative industries more widely. Northumbria University is delighted to continue its support for this groundbreaking national programme."

A new body of research will be led by StoryArcs, an AHRC (Arts and Humanities Research Council) programme run by The Story Society at Bath Spa University under the Directorship of Professor Bambo Soyinka.

StoryArcs Associate, Angharad Hampshire, based at York St John's University, will work closely with the team at A Writing Chance for 12 months to research barriers and pathways to inclusion within the literary industries.

Professor Bambo Soyinka, Bath Spa University, said: "This newly commissioned research aims to build further understanding of the socio-economic inequalities that prevent talented writers from breaking into the publishing and media industries. In addition to evaluating the challenges that working class writers face, the StoryArcs research will review and propose solutions for overcoming barriers. Angharad's investigation will follow the progress of 16 working-class and underrepresented writers involved in A Writing Chance. She will use skills in narrative analysis, investigation, and research to gain a deeper understanding of obstacles and strategies for starting and sustaining a writing career. We hope that Angharad's research will contribute to the success of A Writing Chance's mission to create more career-changing opportunities for new writers from lower-income backgrounds."

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Applications for A Writing Chance are now open until 10am, Monday 8 January 2024 at awritingchance.co.uk

Notes to Editors

For all media enquiries, please contact Laura Fraine, New Writing North laurafraine@newwritingnorth.com

- Read Professor Katy Shaw's Evaluation Report on A Writing Chance 2021-22 [here](#)
- Read more about the 2021-22 cohort of A Writing Chance [here](#)
- Find out more about the opportunities for applicants to A Writing Chance 2024-25 [here](#)

About our partners

About Joseph Rowntree Foundation

The Joseph Rowntree Foundation works to speed up and support the transition to a more equitable and just future, free from poverty, in which people and planet can flourish. For more information visit www.jrf.org.uk

About New Writing North

New Writing North is the development agency for creative writing and reading in the North of England. Based in Newcastle upon Tyne since 1996, it is an Arts Council England National Portfolio Organisation.

The organisation works in partnership with regional and national partners to produce a range of literary and performance activities including flagship projects such as the Northern Writers' Awards, Young Writers, the Gordon Burn Prize, Durham Book Festival and the David Cohen Prize for Literature.

As a promoter and producer of festivals and literary events and through its partnerships with schools, libraries, universities and prisons, New Writing North engages audiences with enriching and creative reading experiences.

www.newwritingnorth.com

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