

NEW WRITING  
NORTH

NORTHERN WRITERS'  
AWARDS

The Value of  
Writing:  
The Northern  
Writers'  
Awards  
2000–2018

*“New Writing North has been at every stage of my writing development, pushing me in the right direction.*

*The big difference with the Northern Writers’ Awards is all the ancillary stuff that goes on – the coaching in interviews and pitching at the start, and then being involved with the activities and the feeling of being part of the New Writing North community.”*

**Northern Writers’ Awards winner**

# Summary

This research explores, for the first time, the various impacts of the Northern Writers' Awards (NWAs) on its winning authors, their writing practice and subsequent professional development. The research is based on the results of an online survey of previous Northern Writers' Awards winners conducted by Professor Katy Shaw of Northumbria University. The survey was designed to examine impact, identify elements of best practice, and consider opportunities for future enhancement of the awards. The survey was sent to 168 respondents in February 2018 and generated a 55% return rate. This report also draws on demographic and other data collated by New Writing North as part of their own monitoring of the awards.

## Key Findings

Responses to the research evidenced how the Northern Writers' Awards:

1. Contribute to the ecology of regional writing and create a talent pipeline to the UK publishing industry by identifying and supporting writers in the North and connecting them to both regional and national opportunities and literary industries.
2. Redress barriers to engagement and disparities of representation for authors from underrepresented groups through specific and accessible engagement opportunities and grassroots development programmes.
3. Provide validation and recognition for writers by connecting them into a network of fellow authors and industry professionals regionally and nationally.
4. Enhance the income and professional development of authors by facilitating access to new career and employment opportunities.
5. Offer a sustainable and cost-effective model of investment by mobilising cross-sector partnerships, professional expertise and modest amounts of funding and sponsorship.



Writer networking at the Summer Talent Salon, 2014

Imtiaz Dharker, poetry judge 2018



# New Writing North

New Writing North was the first regional writing development agency in the UK. Established in 1996, it has grown into a major powerhouse for the development of new writing in the North. Originally founded by Arts Council England (then operating as the regional body, Northern Arts), New Writing North was tasked with working with writers practising in all literary forms, from poetry and playwriting, to film and fiction. This mission has given the agency a unique national profile and positioned it advantageously to develop partnerships and new models of working. From its base in Newcastle upon Tyne, the agency works across the North of England developing talent and producing festivals, awards, campaigns, publishing books and producing engagement work with communities and young people.

## New Writing North's Mission:

To empower people from across society in the North to become writers and to support their work so that it finds local, regional, national and international audiences, and to support readers to become more adventurous by providing access to literature of the highest quality to enrich their lives.

## New Writing North's Vision:

That people from across society are free and able to fulfill their creative ambition and potential and that work emanating from and reflecting the North is enjoyed regionally, nationally and internationally. We want to support writers in the North to develop their creative work and support them to engage with publishers, broadcasters, funders and producers so that they can contribute to a thriving UK literary culture.



# The Northern Writers' Awards

The Northern Writers' Awards are recognised as a proven identifier of emerging writing talent from across the region and are one of New Writing North's flagship activities. The programme was established in 2000 when New Writing North took charge of a small amount of funding which was ring-fenced for the development of writers in the North East by Northern Arts.

Until 2012 the awards programme was modestly sized and focused on supporting writers from the North East. In 2008, New Writing North established the format of taking winning writers to London to participate in an event where they were introduced to literary agents and publishers. Before this event, writers were provided with a training workshop to develop their confidence and pitching skills.

In 2012 two major developments impacted on the awards: New Writing North took on the challenge of working across the whole of the North of England with enhanced funding from Arts Council England, and Northumbria University became a key supporter of the awards, enabling the programme to reach writers from across the North of England for the first time. This collaboration between New Writing North and Northumbria University has grown into a wider partnership that aims to strengthen the infrastructure and environment in which writing thrives in the North of England. The Northern Writers' Awards are central to this collaboration.

The Northern Writers' Awards have grown significantly in scale and ambition since 2012 and have established partnerships with supporters, sponsors and individual donors. Current industry partners include the Society of Authors, Arvon, Hachette, Oneworld and TLC. The programme also offers awards for young writers under the age of 18.

The Northern Writers' Awards support writers from the North of England with cash prizes, professional development and industry engagement, and bespoke mentoring programmes. The awards programme has expanded further through an innovative and pioneering partnership with Channel 4 that identifies and supports talented TV scriptwriters in the North of England. The awards aim to enable writers to develop their work and bring their writing to publication. Significantly, the Northern Writers' Awards focus on work in progress – writings at a developmental, or pre-publication stage – rather than on completed, published works. As such, the awards encourage both new and established writers to develop their work towards publication, and help more established writers to buy time to write and to support the development of new work.

The Northern Writers' Awards have supported over 220 writers since they were established in 2000. Each year the awards are judged by a changing line-up of industry professionals and writers.

The results of the annual awards are celebrated at an awards dinner that is held in Newcastle upon Tyne. Winning writers are then presented at a Summer Talent Party in London, which is attended by up to 50 agents and publishers each year.

The Northern Writers' Awards have an impressive alumni of published and successful writers including Chloe Daykin (Faber & Faber), Mark Illis (Quercus), Andrew McMillan (Guardian First Book Award), Carys Davies (Frank O'Connor International Short Story Award), Andrew Hankinson (Crime Writers' Association prize), Benjamin Myers (Portico Prize and Walter Scott Prize), Carolyn Jess-Cooke (HarperCollins), Carmen Marcus (Harvill Secker), Sarah Dunnakey (Orion) and Yvonne Battle-Felton (Dialogue Books).

# SURVEY FINDINGS

Survey results offer new  
data on how the  
Northern Writers' Awards:

# 1. Contribute to the ecology of regional writing and create a talent pipeline for the UK publishing industry

- 69% of NWA winners claim that the award developed their professional networks.
- 65% of winning poetry and short fiction writers claimed that their award led to the publication of their work.
- 38% of fiction writers claimed that winning an award led to them securing a literary agent.
- 56% of winning fiction writers claimed that their NWA directly led to a publishing contract.
- 9% of NWA winners have changed career as a direct result of winning an award.
- The total number of individuals applying to take part in the awards has increased significantly from 99 people in 2008 to 1,393 people in 2018, a rise in participation of 1308%.

*“I was awarded a New Poets Bursary in 2013–14 and had a fantastic year being mentored. In June this year Penned in the Margins are publishing my first collection, a large chunk of which was written or started during that mentorship. I’m now developing the collection into a performance with the help of an Arts Council England grant. I’m so grateful to New Writing North for showing interest and faith in my writing and giving me these opportunities to develop my work.”*

**Kate Davis**





## Winner Profile

**Chloe Daykin won a Northern Writers' Award for Children's Fiction in 2014. She lives in Northumberland.**

Winning a work-in-progress award had enormous benefits for me. From a financial point of view my Northern Writers' Award money meant that I could take time off work to write my novel and from an emotional perspective it gave me the confidence to do that. On a practical level it introduced me to the industry – I met my agent at the London Talent Party – and the award gave me continuing contact with New Writing North, who offered the support I needed every step of the way.

It also helped with building my profile. From the day I won the award I started describing myself as a writer!

The Northern Writers' Award has been essential to my path in becoming a published author. On release my debut novel *Fish Boy* was *The Bookseller* book of the month, *The Sunday Times* book of the week, one of *The Guardian* best books of 2018, nominated for the Carnegie Medal, longlisted for the UKLA and shortlisted for the Children's debut of the year Branford Boase award.

Now I earn all my living from my writing, touring schools, bookshops and festivals nationally and taking part in residencies and exchanges internationally. In 2018 I was also awarded a wonderful Arts Council Award to support the travel-based research and writing of my third novel (also inspired and supported by the New Writing North team). Winning my Northern Writers' Award was the first major step into making all of this possible and was essential for my career. I wouldn't be here without it!



## 2. Redress barriers to engagement and disparities of representation for authors from underrepresented groups

- Data collected by the impact evaluation survey suggests broad trends towards the increased diversification of Northern Writers' Awards winners. The number of Black, Asian, other ethnic groups, White Irish and White "Other" winners has comprised almost a third of total recipients over the last eight years.
- Diversifying the awards continues to be a key aim. In 2017–18 New Writing North ran Significant Ink, a pilot scheme that worked closely with champions from within communities in Bradford, Preston and Middlesbrough to identify aspiring writers from underrepresented groups. 147 people took part in 15 taster sessions and roadshows, while 45 people participated in three professional-development programmes; 20% of participants were BAME, 18% identified as disabled and a significant proportion were from working-class backgrounds. Taiba Amla, who came through Significant Ink in Preston, went on to win one of two Northumbria University/Channel 4 Writing for TV Awards at the 2018 Northern Writers' Awards.
- 9% of winners to date are self-declared disabled, a figure that remains significant for a UK literary and publishing sector in which this group of writers are underrepresented.
- 35% of Northern Writers' Awards recipients to date fall into the 30–40 year olds category, but the total spread of winners to date demonstrates a broad demographic of age ranges, most likely as a result of the award scheme's broad application criteria.
- The Northern Writers' Awards Roadshow events take place every autumn around the North of England and offer an accessible and barrier-breaking way for new writers to make contact with New Writing North and learn about award opportunities. Former winners are fore-fronted at these events to tell their own stories of success and to act as role models for other writers.

*"It meant so much to take part, and was a really exciting few weeks. Like living another life. Thank you again for choosing me and for providing such excellent tuition. It was a wonderful experience, which I think may prove life changing."*

**Participant in Significant Ink**



# NORTHERN WRITERS' AWARDS

WRITING NORTH

## Winner Profile

**Carolyn Jess-Cooke won the Northern Promise Award in 2008, the Northern Writers' Award for Poetry in 2013 and for Fiction in 2016. She lives in Tyneside.**

I have received a Northern Writers' Award three times in both the poetry and fiction categories. The financial reward meant that I could invest in my professional development.

The confidence my awards brought me was invaluable, and meeting with publishers and editors at the London event in 2009 changed my life. I ended up getting a two-book contract in 23 languages.

Following on from my wins, I've managed to get published with big publishers (HarperCollins, Little Brown and Seren in the poetry world).

The Northern Writers' Awards are a lifeline and an essential part of the literary lifeblood of the North East.

### 3. Provide validation and recognition for writers by connecting them into a network of fellow authors and industry professionals regionally and nationally

- 66% of respondents said that their NWA had a positive impact on their writing practice.
- 58% of recipients claim that winning a NWA increased their confidence and ability to call themselves a writer.

*“Since winning I have been more confident – and much more skillful – in discussing my work with potential readers and/or publishers, which is a hugely important improvement for someone who is naturally shy and slightly awkward about putting myself forward in conversation with strangers [...] I put all these developments down to winning my Northern Writers’ Award.”*

**Fiction Award Winner**



Northern Writers' Awards 2017



## Winner Profile

**Benjamin Myers (pictured with judge Sarah Hall) won a Northern Writers' Award for Fiction in 2013. He lives in West Yorkshire.**

For me, the benefits of winning a Northern Writers' Award were twofold. On a practical level the financial award meant I could breathe out for a few months. The other benefit was just knowing that someone saw worth or value in what I was doing. Because that type of encouragement is almost as vital as food and money to a writer.

My Northern Writers' Award was the very first award I won and enough of a boost to send me spiraling off into a creative out-pouring that resulted in more books, more awards, and a publishing deal. Until then I had been operating in a vacuum. It's fair to say that my Northern Writers' Awards was the foundation stone upon which was built what very loosely might be called a 'career'.

The Northern Writers' Awards is a vital lifeline, a beacon in the dark night of the long and slow creative process.

## 4. Enhance the income and professional development of writers

- 38% of recipients claimed that their NWA led to teaching work and to other jobs directly related to writing.
- 25% of recipients claimed that their NWA led directly to paid writing work (not including teaching or publishing).
- 19% of NWA winners claimed that their NWA led to writing residencies and fellowships, or funding and grants.

*“After years of teaching myself how 2write4TV, writing endless practice scripts, entering many comps, it’s finally here. 2nites @Hollyoaks has my name on it &am so happy.*

*ThankU @NewWritingNorth 4the amazing opportunity 2b mentored @LimePictures by @thekevinrundle @Channel4 6:30:blush”*

**Drew Hubbard via Twitter**

*“I got a two-book deal, and the first one, The Impossible, is out now. And I don’t think it would have happened without the Northern Writers’ Award. So once again, thank you so much, and of course there will be an acknowledgement in the book!”*

**Mark Illis**



Northern Writers' Awards winners 2017



## Winner Profile

**Yvonne Battle-Felton won a Northern Writers' Award for Fiction in 2017. She lives in Lancaster.**

My Northern Writers' Award afforded me time and resources to be able to complete the novel to publishing standards. It granted me access to an agent (now my agent) who was able to place my novel with an inspiring publisher. It also offered access to other industry professionals through the summer publishing party and the workshop on pitching.

Another benefit that I had not anticipated is a continued relationship with New Writing North. I feel like they are invested in my success and I love that. Possibly largely because of the relationships and opportunities the award has afforded me, I've been awarded a visa based on exceptional talent.

I have a growing reputation as a writer and access to more contacts. Because of this access, I have just completed three children's non-fiction titles for Penguin Random House.

## 5. Offer a resilient and cost-effective model of investment

- 25% of NWA winners claimed that their annual income has increased as a result of their award. A further 5% said that while their annual income has not increased overall, a larger percentage of their earnings now comes from writing work.
- 9% of NWA winners claimed that their award led to further writing awards or competition wins. These awards include: Crime Writers' Association Dagger Award, Society of Authors Award, US Pushcart Prize, Geoffrey Faber Award, the Polari First Book Prize and a Hawthornden Prize.

*"My award led to a two-book deal worth £14,000."*

**2014 Northern Writers' Awards Winner**

*"I could not have demanded time away from family and work commitments without the proof that I can write – my Northern Writers' Award gave me the funds and justification to take self-imposed time alone to write."*

**2015 Northern Writers' Awards Winner**



# Conclusions

The majority of responding Northern Writers' Awards winners reported that their award had provided them with excellent outcomes for their personal and professional development.

The model of the Northern Writers' Awards is both resilient and cost-effective as a result of mobilising small amounts of funding and the professional expertise of New Writing North to create multiple outcomes, including economic enhancement for winners, and a national profile for the region as a site of literary excellence.

The impact evaluation survey evidence suggests that the Northern Writers' Awards enjoys a high return on investment, a significant social value to writers' personal and professional development, and several wider impacts on UK publishing and the creative industries.

The research also reveals impressive impacts on the widening of participation and diversity of applicants, suggesting that the awards provide an effective design that could be used as a model for other literary prizes.

The significant rise in the number of writers applying to the Northern Writers' Awards is an indicator that the work done by New Writing North to extend the number and range of awards on offer, and to promote the NWA scheme through innovative new engagement initiatives such as the Northern Writers' Awards Roadshows and the Significant Ink programme, is encouraging more, and more diverse, applications from writers.

The Northern Writers' Awards constitutes a successful model for profiling writings from the North. It creates a national vision of Northern literary culture, and has both exposed and begun to address a pervasive problem in the UK national publishing industry and its underrepresentation of regional voices.





# Recommendations

The report identifies several areas in which the future impact potential of the Northern Writers' Awards could be enhanced, including:

- Investing in targeted schemes to identify writers who are currently underrepresented in the UK writing industries.
- Enhancing resources and sponsorship to ensure the longevity and capacity of the Northern Writers' Awards to support and facilitate new writings from the North of England and to address the growing number of talented writers applying for support.
- Offering wider support and longer-term engagement to Northern Writers' Award winners by extending and formalising networks and exploring new ways of working with writers to aid professional development.
- Committing to the longer-term monitoring and evaluation of the Northern Writers' Awards via an annual survey of winning writers to create an ongoing archive of data about the awards programme and to track the benefits to writers.
- Developing further academic research into the Northern Writers' Awards and how they establish new talent for the UK literary industry.



Northern Writers' Awards Winners 2018

# Credits

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Northern Writers' Awards 2016

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