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Bright beginnings, end of term

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NAWE HE Committee Chair's Column – Derek Neale

Bright Beginnings, End of Term

A new Higher Education committee has been elected and this is my last column as Chair. Having served on the committee for over ten years, I am now stepping aside, though I will keep in regular contact with the committee via my work with *Writing in Practice*. As you can see from the complexion of the new committee, confirmed recently at the conference – see below – it is a little larger than previously, with more members from the North and Scotland. This is most welcome and a bright beginning to the work that lies ahead.

The last three years have been busy, as you will see – I can only apologise for the indigestible mounds of acronyms I am now going to flash before you (a hazard of the sector). Many of the features I mention have links to specific NAWE website pages, listed at the end of this article.

Every committee is inherently reactive – responding to requests and queries – and proactive – aspiring to be farsighted by launching initiatives. There have been several strands of work undertaken during this committee's term of office, some extremely interesting developments and clear achievements, along with one or two major break-throughs. One such moment: NAWE was asked, as Creative Writing's subject association, to nominate panellists for REF 2021, the national periodic assessment of universities' research activities. This comes as a badge of acknowledgement (yet another) that Creative Writing has made it as a University discipline. We have not been asked before. So far, Steve May has been appointed as a Creative Writing's first ever panellist. We very much hope there will be more in the next round of appointments in 2020.

The committee undertook work to update and augment the Creative Writing Research Benchmark. This was a major development, that involved working up the meagre three pages devoted to research in the original 2008 NAWE Creative Writing Benchmark. The new text – which might be considered a live, ongoing document - offers updated guidance on practice research and might be especially useful as guide for PhD study - for departments, supervisors, examiners and students - helping to define what a Creative Writing research project and thesis might be. The committee has continued to support the NAWE PhD network, facilitating connections for Creative Writing candidates who might find themselves stranded at a home university with limited Creative Writing research culture and in need of writerly connections. Over the past three years the committee has co-organised successful, audio-recorded events, in collaboration with the OU. Two of these are related to PhD study and to the REF and practice research.

We have been involved in AHRC strategy consultations and advised on updates to the 2016 QAA Creative Writing (teaching) Benchmark Statement. You will recall that several members of a previous committee were in the working group that wrote this first ever statement. The outgoing committee advised HESA on adjustments to the JACS codes – the combination of letters and numbers that identify our subject various statistics and in the UCAS system. We have continued to liaise with the Practice Research Advisory Group (PRAG), committee members attending events and posting blogs on the PRAG website. This might prove to be a fruitful 'other' community, alongside our common links to English Studies, because it establishes connections to fellow practice research subjects such as Dance, Theatre Studies, Fine Art, Music and Design, subjects and an affiliation that embrace the growing acceptance of practice research within academic departments and research schools across the UK.

We have maintained fruitful contact with sister associations – EACWP in Europe, AWP in the US, AAWP in Australia – and contributed to the launch and further development of the English: Shared Futures venture, with several presentations at the inaugural conference in Newcastle and more planned for Manchester in 2020. We have maintained links to English Studies with attendance at University English and Arts and Humanities Alliance meetings.

We established a directory of external examiners – at all levels – for undergraduate, MA and PhD vivas. This was particularly pleasing, sponsored as it was by NAWE members' suggestions at the conference. Creative Writing as a subject area tends to employ many part-time or associate staff, leading to the committee drawing up good-practice guidance on such part time and short term teaching, which hopefully informs writer-teachers as well as academic departments. That space should certainly be watched going forward, with the proliferation of short-termism and pressure on university resources. Another space to be watched – and an area that formed a strand of the committee's recent work – the move towards Open Access (OA) academic publications and how this might affect our subject, which has an obvious conflict of interest. Members of the committee have voiced those concerns – and will need to continue doing so, as the OA policy moves into its next stages.

The committee forms the editorial board of *Writing in Practice: The Journal of Creative Writing Research* which is happily, uncontroversially an open-access publication. It remains one of committee's major and enduring legacy achievements (being formed by the previous committee but planned for and dreamt of for ten years before that). It has grown considerably through its five issues, helping to nurture a sense of subject community, attracting academics and writers from around the world, while also proving an attractive venue for UK writer-academics, and Creative Writing PhD students. It fosters discussion, deep and labyrinthine consideration of writing as art form, as creative process and as multi-faceted intellectual activity that is both mystery and practical endeavour. We are in the process of editing Volume 6 as I write. Volume 7, to be co-edited by Jose Barnard, will devote a special section to multimodal writing (though submissions unrelated to multimodality will also be accepted). This journal relies on your support – your submissions and your peer-reviewing skills. I warmly thank those of you who have supported us in either or both ways in the past and would encourage those who haven't yet submitted work to do so, and those who aren't yet registered in our peer review college to put your names forward.

As you can see from this bustling list, the committee engages in many interesting matters, if at first glance the acronyms make that interest hard to decipher. They are important matters to our subject. Matters that continue to define what Creative Writing is and can be. They are matters that require our continued attention, and at this end-of-term juncture, looking at the re-invigorated committee, with its wonderful mix of continuing and new names, of experience and expertise, we can feel supremely confident and optimistic about the term ahead.

References and Links

Advice on lodging doctorates and embargos <https://www.nawe.co.uk/writing-in-education/writing-at-university/research/lodging-theses.html>

Directory of Creative Writing External Examiners (requiring your NAWE membership password) <https://www.nawe.co.uk/membership/members-area/external-examiners.html>

NAWE Creative Writing Research Benchmark 2018 <https://www.nawe.co.uk/writing-in-education/writing-at-university/research.html>

NAWE incoming HE Committee members list <https://www.nawe.co.uk/writing-in-education/writing-at-university/he-network/he-committee.html>

NAWE guidance on short-term academic contracts <https://www.nawe.co.uk/writing-in-education/writing-at-university/contracts.html>

OU/NAWE events (audio recorded) on Creative Writing and the REF and Creative Writing PhDs <http://www.open.ac.uk/arts/research/contemporary-cultures-of-writing/events/contemporary-cultures-writing-seminars-spring-2018>

QAA Creative Writing Benchmark (teaching) 2016 https://www.qaa.ac.uk/docs/qaa/subject-benchmark-statements/sbs-creative-writing-16.pdf?sfvrsnd4e2f781_10

Writing in Practice - submission to Vol 7 <https://www.nawe.co.uk/writing-in-education/writing-at-university/writing-in-practice/submissions.html>

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