



## Is there a writer in the house?

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Philippa Johnston of literaturetraining looks at the opportunities for writers to work in schools and other educational and community settings

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### Rewarding work

There has never been a better time for writers to share their passion for writing and reading – whether it is in schools or the community, in prisons or health and social care, on regeneration projects or teaching creative writing in adult, further and higher education.

New initiatives like Find Your Talent, a government programme currently being piloted in England which aims to ensure that all children and young people have access to five hours of culture in and out of school every week; the plans for an 'A' Level in Creative Writing, which The National Association of Writers in Education (NAWE) has been actively involved in developing; Scotland's new Curriculum for Excellence with its emphasis on creativity and working with outside partners; the extra funding for Young People's Writing Squads in Wales; the growth of Specialist Schools and Academies; and the increase in university creative writing courses all mean that there are lots of opportunities for writers in all disciplines. Playwrights, screenwriters, non-fiction writers and journalists, in particular, are finding themselves increasingly in demand.

There are lots of different ways to be involved. You may find yourself producing a prison soap as part of a Writers in Prisons residency;

exploring Greenwich Peninsula with local residents; working with teenagers on a poetry and emotional health schools project; or devising murder mysteries in rural village halls in your role as reader in residence for a crime writing festival.

One word of caution, though. Many writers find such work hugely rewarding, and it will certainly help to pay the bills, but it's not for everyone. It can mean that you have less time and energy left for your own work and, of course, just because you're a great writer, you're not necessarily a natural speaker or an inspiring workshop leader.

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### Training

To work in the field, you will need to be a published or produced writer who is making a living out of writing. You don't need to have any particular qualifications. In fact, there is no accredited training available although there are plenty of courses around to help you hone your skills. NAWE, for instance, offers its members a year-round professional development programme which includes seminars (the next one is on working in museums and galleries), a reader feedback and professional development planning service, and an annual writing retreat. The Poetry School has recently launched its first course for advanced writers on how to run your own poetry workshops.

Escape Artists runs a course in using creative writing with vulnerable groups and Artsplan delivers an extensive youth arts training programme. And many of the literature organizations that run education and community programmes provide training and mentoring support for their writers. The Writers in Prisons Network, for instance, offers full training for its writers in residence and the Scottish Book Trust has an innovative three-way writers in schools mentoring programme that brings emerging and established writers together with teachers. At the degree level, you can choose between the MA in the Teaching and Practice of Creative Writing at Cardiff University or individual teaching modules on Creative Writing MAs at universities such as Sheffield Hallam and St Mary's University College, Twickenham.

If you're interested in working in health and social care, it's well worth reading the paper about the 'core competencies' required for working in this field on the Lapidus site. These include having some form of counselling qualification to ensure that you work safely. Lapidus members teach on the Diploma in Creative Writing for Therapeutic Purposes at Bristol University and the MA in Creative Writing and Personal Development at Sussex as well as the annual short course in writing in healthcare at Ty Newydd in Wales.

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## Experience

Getting the necessary experience can be a bit of a Catch 22 situation but there are ways to get round it. You may know writers already working in the field who you can shadow or there may be some activity in your region you can go and observe. Or you could offer to run a workshop for a local writers group or a school and charge a discounted rate in return for feedback and hopefully some glowing references!

Novelist and screenwriter Catherine Johnson (and no, not the Mamma Mia one!), started a children's book week at her children's primary

school. 'This meant fundraising, but it also meant I could see how the experts did their thing in front of an audience. It was a great learning tool for me.' Malika Booker, who writes poetry and plays, and is a self-confessed writing course junkie, found that her 'addiction' provided her with an excellent foundation as a creative writing facilitator. 'I was able to study the approach of different tutors to teaching and have since incorporated what I liked into my own teaching style.'

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## Safety checks

If you're working with children or vulnerable adults, or in healthcare, you'll need to apply for a CRB (Criminal Records Bureau) check or 'Disclosure'. One of the invaluable services that NAWE offers its members is Enhanced Disclosure processing as individuals can't apply directly to the CRB. It will soon be a requirement that anyone working with children or vulnerable people will also have to be registered with the Independent Safeguarding Authority (ISA).

You should consider taking out public liability insurance as writers visiting schools, libraries and other similar settings – indeed anywhere they come into contact with the public – are increasingly being expected to have this. The annual premium can cost over £100 so NAWE is about to introduce a new membership category which will include this cover. You can also get information about how to obtain cover from The British Insurance Brokers Association.

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## Getting work

Once you've got some experience, and gathered some references, you're now all set to start getting some work. There are a number of different ways that you can do this.

You can register your details on national online arts in education directories such as Artscape, which is managed by NAWE and features writers

as well as those working in other art forms, or ContactAnAuthor. There are also regional directories managed by organizations like ALISS in the West Midlands, LONSAS (London Schools Arts Service) and Kernow Arts Education Partnership in Cornwall.

You can look out for advertised opportunities. literaturetraining's own free fortnightly e-bulletin is a great place to find these. It's also worth subscribing to Arts Council England's free e-mailing list, ArtsJobs, and the e-bulletins of organizations like Playwright's Studio Scotland and New Writing North.

Another approach is to contact organizations that run writing in education and community programmes and see if you can apply to become part of their team of writers.

It's best to stick with ones in your region initially. Organizations like Apples & Snakes, Birmingham Book Festival (which runs Write On! Adventures in Learning), The Children's Discovery Centre, New Writing North, New Writing South and The Windows Project in Liverpool are a good place to start. They are all members of the NAWE-supported Writers in Schools Project Managers Network.

The Write On! programme works with around 30 writers. 'Anyone for whom writing is a key part of their professional life and has an element of creativity' says Jonathan Davidson, 'And we're always interested in meeting more writers.' New Writing South's Creative Learning Programme works with a team of 27 writers, all NWS members. They recruit new members annually and will be looking to add to the team next summer. They also host the Pirandello database of writers in the South East which can be used by schools and others to contact writers directly.

Operating on a national level across England is Creative Partnerships, the government's flagship creative learning programme, which is run by Creativity, Culture & Education. Delivery is through a network of area development organizations (ADOs) and you should contact your nearest one to find out about opportunities

to work either as a creative agent, helping to deliver the programme, or as a creative practitioner working directly with students and teachers. Scotland, Wales and Ireland have their own national programmes which provide financial support for writers in schools and the community.

These are managed by The Scottish Book Trust, Academi and Poetry Ireland respectively. And of course there are the likes of The Royal National Theatre, Royal Shakespeare Company and the Poetry Society which all run extensive national education programmes.

If you're interested in teaching creative writing in adult, further and higher education, you'll need to be a published or produced writer with teaching experience and the relevant teaching qualification (see Lifelong Learning UK for information on this). Most universities will also expect you to have a MA in Creative Writing and possibly a PhD. This kind of teaching is generally done on a freelance, part-time basis – many find that teaching on your local community education programme is a good way in. You'll find FE jobs advertised on [www.fejobs.com](http://www.fejobs.com) and HE ones at [www.jobs.ac.uk](http://www.jobs.ac.uk) and on The Times Higher Education Supplement jobs site [www.thesjobs.co.uk](http://www.thesjobs.co.uk). There are also opportunities to teach on residential courses (Arvon and Ty Newydd both offer year-round programmes) and on distance learning courses (the Open University and Open College of the Arts are just two of the many providers). And, of course, many writers set up their own courses. NAWE, which manages the Creative Writing in HE Network, and The English Subject Centre are both excellent sources of support for creative writing teachers.

Lapidus is the obvious starting point if you would like to work in health and social care. Their Professional Member category allows you to have your profile on their SkillSearch online directory and you'll also be the first to hear of any work opportunities. Regional arts in health organizations like the London Arts in Health Forum are a useful source of information.

You might also like to contact your local NHS primary care trust to see if they operate an arts programme and whether they work with writers. Organizations such as Shape and Artlink, which work to create access to the arts for those experiencing disadvantage or disability, also offer all kinds of opportunities.

For writers interested in working within the criminal justice system, the Writers in Prisons Network should be the first port of call as they are the principal employer in this area – they currently have 23 residencies in English prisons.

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## What can I earn?

There are no nationally recognized minimum rates for working in schools or the community although a minimum daily rate of £250 plus expenses is generally considered to be appropriate. Some of the best known and most experienced writers can, of course, charge much more and will often expect £500 or more a day. If your work comes through one of the national funded schemes, you may find that there is a fixed rate. The type and length of the work, the setting, which part of the UK you are in and so on, will also affect what you earn. And it's important to realize that the work is unlikely to flood in overnight – it takes time to build up a reputation. The Society of Authors website has a useful Rates and Guidelines for Authors section.

The rewards of sharing your passion for writing and reading with others are of course more than just financial, valuable though this is. For playwright Peggy Riley, it's the ideal way to support herself as a writer and put her writing at the heart of her life. She particularly relishes longer term residencies and projects. 'They allow you to develop relationships with participants and to assist the development of their work over time. Residencies can be overwhelming, emotional, and all-consuming, but they can also transform your work – and you – from the inside out.' (Writing in Education magazine, Issue Number 46, NAWE)

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## Key organizations

### **Academi**

The Welsh National Literature Promotion Agency and Society for Authors

Manages three funding schemes (Writers on Tour, Programme Support and Literature Residencies) which support the costs of writers going into schools, youth clubs, libraries, community centres, arts festivals and other venues through out Wales to give talks, lead workshops etc. Welsh and Welsh based writers, writing in the Welsh and English language, can apply to join their Writers of Wales database. [www.academi.org](http://www.academi.org)

### **Lapidus**

Membership organisation promoting the benefits of the literary arts for personal development, health and wellbeing. Eligible writers can apply for their Professional Member category and have their profile on their Skillsearch online directory. Regional groups, online journal and resources. [www.lapidus.org.uk](http://www.lapidus.org.uk)

### **The National Association of Writers in Education (NAWE)**

Supports the development of creative writing of all genres and in all educational and community settings throughout the UK. Year-round professional development programme, information and advice, publications, annual conference and extensive online resources. Offers Enhanced Disclosure processing and public liability insurance cover. Maintains [www.artscape.org.uk](http://www.artscape.org.uk), the national directory for arts in education.

literaturetraining [www.literaturetraining.com](http://www.literaturetraining.com) is a wing of NAWE and is the first stop shop for writers and literature professionals looking for free professional development information and advice. Services include an online directory, opportunities e-bulletin, professional development planning guidance; and specially commissioned resources. [www.nawe.co.uk](http://www.nawe.co.uk)

### **Poetry Ireland**

The national organization for poetry in Ireland. Runs the Writers in Schools Scheme which part-funds visits by writers and storytellers to primary and post primary schools throughout the Republic of Ireland. Eligible writers (fiction, poetry, playwriting, screen) and storytellers can apply for inclusion on the WIS Directory. [www.poetryireland.ie](http://www.poetryireland.ie)

### **Scottish Book Trust**

The leading agency for the promotion of literature, reading and writing in Scotland. Manages the Live Literature scheme which subsidises writer events in schools, libraries, hospitals, prisons and community settings. Eligible Scottish and Scottish-based writers (includes performance poets and playwrights but not currently screenwriters), storytellers and illustrators can apply to join the online Live Literature database. [www.scottishbooktrust.com](http://www.scottishbooktrust.com)

### **Writers in Prisons Network**

Currently runs 23 residencies in English prisons. Writers go into the prison 2 days a week over 2 or 3 years to deliver creative writing, drama, video, music, oral storytelling, journalism, creative reading and publishing programmes. Eligible writers (fiction, poetry, scriptwriting, non-fiction, journalism) and storytellers can apply for new residencies which are advertised annually. [www.writersinprisonnetwork.org](http://www.writersinprisonnetwork.org)

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## **Useful magazines and books**

**Writing in Education** (the magazine of the National Association of Writers in Education) Copies of the Writers in Schools special edition (Issue Number 46, Autumn 2008) and the Writing in the Community, Healthcare and Prisons special edition (Issue Number 47, Spring 2009) are available price £2.00 (includes p&p) by emailing [info@nawe.co.uk](mailto:info@nawe.co.uk)

**MAiLOUT** National magazine for people developing participation in the arts [www.e-mailout.org](http://www.e-mailout.org)

**Our thoughts are bees: Writers Working with Schools** by Mandy Coe and Jean Sprackland (Wordplay Press)

**Free With Words** Ed Clive Hopwood Personal accounts of what it's like to be a writer in prison (Bar None Books)

**Creative Writing in Health and Social Care** Ed Fiona Sampson (Jessica Kingsley Publishers)

**Writing Works: A Resource Handbook for Therapeutic Writing Workshops and Activities** Eds Gillie Bolton, Victoria Field and Kate Thompson (Jessica Kingsley Publishers)

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## **CASE STUDY**

### **Fin Kennedy: How I got into teaching and community work**

Playwright Fin Kennedy is an award-winning investigative playwright. A graduate of the MA Playwriting programme at Goldsmiths' College, he has written four plays, including *How To Disappear Completely & Never Be Found* which won the 38<sup>th</sup> Arts Council John Whiting Playwriting Award. His latest play, *Chimeras*, a contemporary Jacobean revenge tragedy developed with Liquid Theatre, is currently seeking co-producers.

As well as writing plays, Fin has many years of experience teaching playwriting at secondary, FE, undergraduate and postgraduate levels. He works for schools, youth clubs and theatre education teams across inner city London, and is also a visiting lecturer at Goldsmiths College, Brunel University and Boston University.

For the past two years he has been writer-in-residence at Mulberry School in Tower Hamlets, where he teaches playwriting to both students and staff, and writes a new play each year for the students to perform at the Edinburgh Festival.

Fin explains how he first got into teaching and community work. 'I naively assumed that having had my first 'big break' (i.e. full production) things would be plain sailing from there on in. Not a bit of it – if anything it was harder – and I spent two long years out of work, during which I had to be very resourceful.

I found myself developing a specialism as a teacher of playwriting to teenagers, particularly in designing bespoke play-making courses for groups with very specific needs. So I ended up running an after-school drama club for Bangladeshi girls in the East End, or making short films and performance poems with teenage mums in Finsbury Park, or setting up a mini theatre company for kids in care for Hampshire Social Services.

Although at first this work fell into my lap when I was asked to do a short project for the Almeida, I quickly realised what an opportunity it provided, and I've since been very proactive in chasing it. I've forged long-term links with theatre education departments and community arts organizations, often just by writing to them on spec. I've done the same with local schools and colleges, offering my services as a visiting specialist. One job of this kind leads to another, often through word of mouth, and before long I had an impressive CV.

This started off as a means of generating some income whilst waiting for my plays to be read, but it soon became very much the other side of the coin to my writing work. It's very easy for playwrights to work in isolation, cut off from the world we're supposed to be writing about. That makes for bad plays. My teaching work quite soon became a sort of informal research.

After spending quite a bit of time in inner city schools I began developing an idea for a play called *Locked In*, a hip hop musical about pirate radio written entirely in verse. I took the idea to Half Moon who helped me develop it. An idea like that would never have come about if it wasn't for my experiences with London's young people.'

The full *How did I get here?* feature by Fin Kennedy can be downloaded from [www.literaturetraining.com](http://www.literaturetraining.com).

Visit [www.finkennedy.co.uk](http://www.finkennedy.co.uk) for more information about Fin's teaching and community work and his plays.

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