

Creative Writing: A Good Practice Guide

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Creative Writing: A Good Practice Guide

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Foreword

The English Subject Centre Report Series aims to provide contextual information about the condition of the subject, its relation to national HE policies, and the practical and academic concerns shared by English Departments at the present time. Thereby, the series intends to assist departments in their planning, and in their understanding of their own positions.

This, the sixth in the Report Series, is a summary of the work on Creative writing undertaken by Dr Siobhán Holland, Project Officer at the Subject Centre. Between 2001 and 2002 Dr Holland worked extensively with a representative spread of academics working in this rapidly expanding province of activity. The Guide's findings are drawn from a series of events and discussions arranged by Dr Holland including seminars, workshops, a conference, virtual discussion groups, and liaison with the National Association of Writers in Education (NAWE). While these events have been sustained through lively and informed discussions issuing from different viewpoints and contexts, it is also the case that the academics and practitioners involved in Creative Writing share a broad consensus about good practice in the field. With so many English Departments currently diversifying their work to develop Creative Writing, and expressing an interest in the best principles of such development, the Subject Centre has taken the opportunity to capture this broad consensus, and summarise it here, together with a representation of the discussions which, in part at least, were responsible for its manifestation.

The report makes some firm recommendations about the academic practice of Creative Writing, most clearly in the area of its resourcing, and in the necessity for such programmes to place practising writers in the classroom. While Dr Holland is keenly aware of the different inflections of Creative Writing programmes, she has concentrated in the recommendations on fundamental issues such as assessment criteria, the nature of the student body, and the marking of work which are common to them all. The report is supplemented by three brief essays from eminent practitioners in the field: the first a salutary commentary on marking; the second a manifesto for the subject; the third describing the nature of postgraduate work. We are most grateful for these contributions, and to all those colleagues and departments working in Creative Writing who have been so generous with their time, and with the benefits of their experience.

As Creative Writing continues to expand, the English Subject Centre will undoubtedly continue to sustain the strong and developing dialogue. It is evident that English and Creative Writing have common factors and sharp differences, yet both regions offer fertile ground for mutually beneficial developments. In particular, many English academics are showing interest in the pedagogies of Creative Writing, in the ways in which students are engaging there in their studies, in the practices of formative assessment, and related matters. Of course, the cognate locations of English and Creative Writing (in most instances) mean that such traffic runs both ways.

An electronic version of the report can be downloaded from the English Subject Centre website at www.english.ltsn.ac.uk. Hard copies will be distributed to all departments.

Professor Philip Martin
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December 2002

1. Aims

Creative Writing is a flourishing discipline within the academy. Twenty-four HE institutions are offering named undergraduate programmes in Creative Writing in the academic year 2002-3, a number which increases if programmes in Creative Arts or Creative Studies with writing elements are included.¹ Outside these named programmes, undergraduates can often take individual modules. Graduates can choose between 21 taught and 19 research-based postgraduate degrees in Creative Writing and both Masters and doctoral programmes are available.² Many of the enquiries about learning and teaching received by the English Subject Centre since its inception in October 2000 have focussed on Creative Writing as an academic discipline, and this Guide aims to bring together some of the most commonly requested information as well as to contribute to some of the established debates in the discipline which are concerned, among other things, with the relationship between Creative Writing and English Studies, resourcing and assessment criteria.

The Guide is not prescriptive: it focusses on good practice rather than best practice. It is not offered as a 'benchmarking statement' for Creative Writing, but rather as a tool for lecturers who are developing, or planning to develop, curricula in this area and as a prompt for debates in Creative Writing and the related disciplines of English Language and Literature. It may provide a useful starting point for colleagues who are intending to develop courses in Creative Writing.³ Equally it introduces new and established lecturers in Creative Writing, English Language and Literature to a range of views belonging to practitioners who are engaged in active debates about the learning and teaching of Creative Writing in the academy.

The English Subject Centre's active involvement in debates about teaching and learning enables us to draw on the very active discussions already current in the discipline which have been cultivated by organisations such as the National Association of Writers in Education (NAWE) as well as by more informal networks.⁴ This Guide has been prepared in consultation with a number of writers and academics with considerable experience of Creative Writing in Higher Education. Our thanks go to Professor Robyn Bolam (St Mary's College), Dr Maggie Butt (Middlesex University), Richard Kerridge (Bath Spa University College), Professor Archie Markham (Sheffield Hallam University), Paul Munden (National Association of

Writers in Education) and Professor Victor Sage (University of East Anglia). The Guide also draws on discussions surrounding an earlier draft which were conducted at the conference on 'The State of the Art: Creative Writing in Higher Education' which was held at the University of Glamorgan in September 2002. Maggie Butt, Graeme Harper and Michelene Wandor have kindly written articles for inclusion here which introduce some of the debates current in the Creative Writing subject community.

2. Context

When the Quality Assurance Agency commissioned benchmarking statements which would outline the skills graduates in specific disciplines might expect to share with each other, Creative Writing was included under the aegis of the *English Benchmarking Statement*.⁵ While the statement has been generally well-received by lecturers who teach Literary Studies programmes, it presents some difficulties for people who want to use it to inform programme specifications and other documents which outline the features and intended outcomes of Creative Writing courses. Although the statement refers severally to ‘imaginative writing’ it does not identify many of the distinctive attributes of Creative Writing as an academic discipline.

The lack of focus on Creative Writing can, in part, be attributed to the swift and relatively recent expansion of Creative Writing within and alongside undergraduate programmes in English Language and Literature.⁶ Masters level programmes have been available in Britain for many years and the role of Creative Writing in the academy has a long history, but provision at undergraduate and doctoral level is now also becoming commonplace. The current HE climate requires practitioners to account publicly for the practices and processes involved in delivering Creative Writing within the academy. The rapid expansion and increased documentation of Creative Writing has led not only to increased visibility for the discipline, but also to the clarification of its relationships with, and differences from, English Literature and other disciplines in the Humanities.

This diversification of programmes across different levels of achievement is affecting the ways that individual Creative Writing programmes are developing. It has provoked discussions about progression and relative levels of assessment, as Graeme Harper notes elsewhere in this Guide. The growth in the availability of programmes and awards has also led to increased specialisation so that, for example, it is possible to study for a Master’s degree in Writing for Children at King Alfred’s College Winchester, or to complete an MA through an online distance learning process at Manchester Metropolitan University.

Creative Writing is a discipline which now encompasses many different kinds of writing including writing for academic and professional purposes. Many courses focus on poetry, prose and drama initially. Life-writing is a growth area in many courses and journalism, which obviously involves a real element of professional training, is also often integrated into courses with Creative Writing elements. It is likely that future developments in Creative Writing programmes will encourage prospective students to make increasingly detailed choices about the courses they apply for and undertake.

3. Creative Writing in English departments

There has been a considerable shift in the relationship between Creative Writing and English Studies, as some English departments have come increasingly to rely on Creative Writing modules and programmes for recruitment purposes. Many of the new programmes being developed by English departments reflect a commitment to developing writing as well as reading, and as recruitment patterns reflect student interest in writing, teaching teams in Literary Studies are, in some cases, taking an interest in collaborative work.

In some institutions, Creative Writing is taught alongside English, often by writers who also teach on the Literary Studies programme. Creative Writing programmes in English departments often retain a substantial presence for reading and textual work. Where Creative Writing is taught outside departments focussed on Literary Studies, it is often taught in a 'Creative Arts' or performance-based context. It is important to note that the subject does not appeal exclusively to students who have chosen to study Language and Literature. Productive relationships can be set up between Creative Writing programmes and other departments or schools in an institution, though this should not force Creative Writing teams into a position where they occupy 'service' roles.

Creative Writing is best understood as a practice-based rather than a vocational or service-based discipline and there are positive connections that can be made with other subject communities in the performing arts, for example, as well as with other disciplines beyond the humanities.⁷

It is possible that distinct Creative Writing departments will emerge in their own right, either because of positive academic choices or because of institutional decisions. However, the current staffing base of the subject in HE would make this kind of split problematic in many cases because so many staff members have research and teaching specialisms in Literary Studies as well as in Creative Writing. The link between English and Creative Writing can be a positive one for both disciplines and can lead to positive curricular developments.⁸ In some departments, these kinds of reconceptualisations are already well-established and students are encouraged to engage with writing as a craft. This is evident in the use of 'creative rewriting' as an assessment task which requires students to engage in critique and reflection through Creative Writing, for example.⁹ At the University of East Anglia,

where Creative Writing is taught as a minor award at undergraduate level, all students in the English department are required to do some writing because Creative Writing is integrated into the second-year core module on 'Texts and Textuality' which concentrates on writing and texts about writing.

This kind of cross-disciplinary work is suggestive in terms of future collaborations and there is room for real dialogue between creative and critical approaches to literature. However, the suggestion that dialogue will be productive should not be interpreted to mean that Creative Writing courses need input from critical theory, or English Studies specialists, to succeed. Creative Writing is a critical discipline in its own right. Lecturers in Creative Writing differ in their views on the value of critical theory as a tool in the development of students' writing and such diversity in approaches to teaching Creative Writing is to be welcomed. Academics who specialise in teaching English literature are often asked to teach on Creative Writing programmes, and while they can play a valuable role, as Michelene Wandor observes, it is generally recognised that practising writers must be responsible for teaching writing itself because they bring to students types of expertise distinct from those which can be supplied by literary critics.

4. Students

Students of Creative Writing often develop a strong sense that they have ownership of their work, and of their development, throughout their programmes. This can be attributed in part to the level of control students have over their study and assessment on Creative Writing programmes, and the extent to which learning and assessment processes are closely linked.

While these factors often help to foster a motivated and positive student body, students can, when they first apply to Creative Writing courses, mistake the discipline for a soft option. As Michelene Wandor notes elsewhere here, students can assume that they will need to do little or no reading, and will be able to write coursework without careful drafting and preparation. (Giving current students opportunities to contribute to the textual content of course handbooks provides one means of dispelling popular myths about the subject.) It is important to stress to students that Creative Writing courses will require them to read at least an amount equivalent to that required on Literary Studies courses.¹⁰ The location of Creative Writing in the academy ensures that writing is conducted in a rigorous scholarly environment which requires students to base their experiments in a detailed and broad programme of reading. Creative Writing teams may sometimes find, along with their colleagues teaching literature and language, that the need to encourage students to read widely and write to a high standard is of primary importance. It will therefore be beneficial if strategies for encouraging high-level reading and writing practices are explored collaboratively across cognate disciplines.¹¹

Although many Creative Writing courses are able to recruit selectively, they do not exist solely for those students who are already gifted writers. The discipline also has a responsibility to students without great imagination or facility with words. It can help all students to improve their writing skills and experiment with rhetoric. Creative Writing is a practice-based discipline but it is not vocational in any simple sense, and programmes cannot claim that all of their students will be able to make careers as professional writers, or teachers of Creative Writing. It is therefore important that courses equip students with a broad range of transferable skills which will be likely to include a facility in oral presentation and group work as well as in skills associated directly with writing.

5. The Creative Writing workshop

The Creative Writing workshop provides the most common form of delivery for Creative Writing programmes at undergraduate and MA level. One-to-one teaching, and online forms of delivery are also frequently used, and the workshop does not in itself necessarily equip students for the process of working independently.¹² Nevertheless, the workshop remains an important part of most programmes and, within them, has much the same status as the seminar has in English programmes. Michelene Wandor suggests here that lecturers in Creative Writing should 'Jettison the term "workshop" and use "seminar" instead. It carries more serious weight.' However, it would perhaps be more productive for English departments to recognise the workshop as a distinct and important teaching environment. Practices in Creative Writing workshops vary, but normally tutors circulate samples of students' work before the workshop and the subsequent contact time provides the writers with the opportunity to receive detailed feedback from their peers and from tutors. All students spend time writing during the workshop as well as developing and providing feedback for their peers.

This teaching and learning format, with its emphasis on trust, collaboration and support as well as challenge, plays a role in increasing students' commitment to their programme of study. The workshop process helps students to think about the work they are doing, inside and outside the classroom, as formative. The time spent with the tutor is focussed on preparation for assessment tasks so that there is a consistent connection made between learning, teaching and assessment. The close correlation between what is asked of students in the workshop and in assessment ensures that Creative Writing classes are founded on good practice in learning and teaching. The nature of the workshopping process means that it tends to function best with small class sizes and clearly there are financial implications relating to the issue of workshop size (practitioners recommend a maximum of 15 students per workshop group).

Students benefit from induction into the workshop process and from the process of reflecting on what constitutes a productive dialogue about another student's work. If workshop members are accountable for the comments they make then it is easier to maintain an environment in which criticism is constructive and students can feel comfortable with

risk-taking. Methods for allowing anonymous contributions often lead to abuses of the workshop format and it is generally problematic to allow students to contribute comments for which they cannot be held accountable. While the workshop is in principle a positive environment for teaching and learning, students can be particularly vulnerable in the workshop space because they are making their work available to the scrutiny of the group. Tutors need to set clear guidelines for student contact in workshops, or to develop clear guidelines in collaboration with students at the outset of a module or programme.¹³

The need for Creative Writing tutors to develop positive practices and strategies for dealing with difficulties in the workshop and beyond raises issues about the training and support mechanisms provided for tutors in this area. These mechanisms need to be available to the full-time and part-time lecturers who are involved in delivering Creative Writing courses at undergraduate and postgraduate level. Some support schemes are already in place. At the University of East Anglia, for example, part-time tutors are paid to mentor each other.¹⁴

The need for robust support structures extends to students who may well draw on traumatic experiences in the processes of reading and writing. They should, like all students in our disciplines, be encouraged to make use of the support services available through the institution and external services. However, in order for students to make best use of these services, individual lecturers need to play an active role. (A major recent study at the University of Leicester found that, after their families, students are most likely to approach personal tutors for help.¹⁵) The obligation of departments to develop positive measures to support all students in difficulty or with special needs is clear, and staff training is likely to be necessary to ensure that full-time and part-time lecturers are able to offer appropriate support confidently.¹⁶

6. Assessment

It is important that students who are completing different assessment tasks are offered opportunities to work in different ways and have their levels of achievement acknowledged appropriately. An undergraduate prose fiction assignment, for example, might permit students to submit five short stories or, alternatively, an extract from a novel. The different levels of difficulty encountered by students engaged in each prose-writing task would need to be reflected carefully in marks for attainment and in feedback. The levels of difficulty involved in assignments will also vary according to the programme being assessed and Graeme Harper outlines some of the broad expectations involved in different Creative Writing programmes elsewhere in this Guide.

Of course Creative Writing lecturers are required to ensure that all courses meet the requirements of quality assurance procedures. As Michelene Wandor argues, 'If Creative Writing is to "work" within a traditional academic context, its foundational skills need to be clearly pinpointed. Its approaches, methods, assessments and aims need to be defined as clearly as possible.' However, the need to establish clear procedures should not work to limit students' flexibility and creativity. It would be possible for tutors to be too prescriptive about the form that student work takes or parity in word-length, for example, or to establish criteria which neglect the importance of creativity as the main criterion for assessment.

There are means by which lecturers can ensure clarity and parity in assessment for students of Creative Writing. Obviously, Creative Writing assignments must be marked according to Creative Writing criteria. Debates about the nature and form of these criteria are advanced and a sample set have been developed under the auspices of NAWE.¹⁷ When Creative Writing is offered as a small part of a department's provision, students are sometimes asked to rely on criteria developed for degrees in English Language and Literature. However limited the provision of Creative Writing, this is clearly inappropriate. Creative Writing criteria should be written with a view to promoting genuine creative endeavour, diversity and originality and will differ from criteria which prioritise the development of critical, analytical skills.

Another means for lecturers to ensure parity in assessment, without having to restrict the methods of achieving those outcomes unduly, is for them to place

an emphasis on students' learning outcomes in the assessment process. Although learning outcomes tend not to be popular among academics, they do provide ways for lecturers to identify the requirements made of students while allowing students flexibility in terms of the volume or nature of the work they submit. They can also be used to encourage student writers to reflect on the extent to which they are developing their craft.

In a recent survey conducted on behalf of the English Subject Centre, all respondents noted that they already require students to submit work, alongside their creative writing, which demonstrates their capacity to reflect on the processes they have been involved in as they have produced their creative work.¹⁸ All Creative Writing programmes in HE stress the importance of asking students to reflect critically on their own work. While this work may draw on the kinds of literary theory deployed in English Language and Literature degrees, it need not do so. Literary theory will, in any case, be deployed in different relations to the creative work within the different disciplines of English Literature and Creative Writing: it is certainly not its function to 'bolster' or 'give credibility' to creative work which constitutes in itself a credible and substantial contribution to creative practice in the academy. The role of reflective practice in Creative Writing is to encourage students to engage critically with the practices, processes and craft of Creative Writing.

In many universities, anonymisation is compulsory to avoid discrimination against certain groups of students and 'unseen' exams are also used in attempts to combat plagiarism. Neither of these practices is workable for Creative Writing programmes which rely heavily on formative work and on processes of reworking and revision. Other steps will need to be taken to ensure that marking is conducted fairly and that plagiarism is, as far as possible, designed out of the assessment process. It is now possible to buy Creative Writing assignments and even 'reflective essays' on the internet. All lecturers in Creative Writing need to be mindful of plagiarism as a risk and to 'design it out' of the curriculum through techniques such as monitoring drafting processes, for example.¹⁹

7. Resourcing

Creative Writing modules and programmes draw on the expertise of a range of experienced writers, involve small group work and require the involvement of external experts such as agents, publishers and authors who work outside academia. For these reasons, among others, Creative Writing programmes can be expensive to resource and maintain.

Group sizes are a real issue in a discipline which relies so heavily on the formative processes of the workshop. Decisions about group sizes (which, it is widely agreed, should not exceed 15) and the allocation of staff time should also take into account the considerable burden on tutors in terms of marking. Tutors will need to review student work throughout the semester and this produces a marking load likely to exceed that of colleagues in English Studies programmes unless numbers are carefully monitored. As Maggie Butt notes in her article here on marking, ‘The marking load [for Creative Writing] has a significant bearing on class sizes and work programmes.’

Payments to part-time lecturers should reflect the burden of assessment generated by Creative Writing as a discipline, as well as the level of expertise of the professional writers and any administrative burdens generated by the courses they teach. It is likely that models for recruiting, training and supporting professional writers who become involved in Creative Writing programmes will benefit if they draw on practices established in other disciplines where professional practitioners are regularly brought in to teach on academic courses. Programme leaders in the performing arts, art and design and architecture are

experienced in developing appropriate support mechanisms for teacher-practitioners, for example.²⁰

Photocopying costs are generated by the workshop process when tutors provide students with copies of other students’ work. While some departments are pushing these costs onto students themselves, the introduction of these hidden expenses for students is unhelpful and is likely to militate against any policies that are designed to recruit and retain students from under-represented groups.²¹ Where courses draw on genres which involve performance and technologies, these developments also need to be effectively resourced.

For the most part, national funding for the subject operates on the basis that Creative Writing is a ‘chalk and talk’ subject (though some courses with performance elements are funded differently as ‘Creative Arts’ programmes). At faculty and department level, new Creative Writing programmes are sometimes treated in the same way, as if Creative Writing is learnt and taught in broadly similar ways to English Literature. In fact, the discipline relies heavily on external expertise as well as small group teaching. Departments will need to budget for visits from expert practitioners from the creative and cultural industries. It is crucial that students of Creative Writing encounter a range of voices during their programme and are encouraged to come to terms with what other writers do. The involvement of professionals from outside academia provides students with opportunities to meet writers, editors and others who can help them to develop their skills and their employability.

8. Part-time teaching

Creative Writing programmes often make extensive use of tutors on part-time contracts in order to meet the demand for the provision of specialist modules in, for example, writing for children or script-writing. Many of the tutors who teach in this way will have experience of teaching in HE and will be familiar with the procedures which are now involved in the delivery of all HE programmes. They will be conversant with learning outcomes and assessment criteria, for example. For other writers invited to teach on these programmes the

labyrinthine procedures involved in delivering courses in HE will be less familiar.

Proper induction procedures and the careful delineation of rights and responsibilities will help to avoid difficulties during term-time and the examination process. If part-time tutors are required to attend meetings, a meetings rate should be paid in order to compensate them for their time.²²

9. Research and research training

Under the terms of the 2001 Research Assessment Exercise (RAE), research includes ‘the invention and generation of ideas, images, performances and artefacts including design, where these lead to new or substantially improved insights.’²³ Creative Writing clearly falls within the terms of this definition. Nevertheless, lecturers in Creative Writing did not necessarily have their work submitted for the 2001 Research Assessment Exercise. Departments which host Creative Writing programmes need to take on board the status of Creative Writing as research. At the same time, departments need to be reassured that Creative Writing submissions will be given equivalent weighting in terms of any research audit method that succeeds the current RAE. Colleagues in Creative Writing deserve to be treated as professionals who are engaged in a critical discipline and as people with a right to draw on funds to support their ongoing development as writers. Departments need to ensure that current and future students are going to be taught by practising, publishing writers. To this end, lecturers in Creative Writing should be included in sabbatical schemes and research programmes which should be sensitive to the different research methods of writing practitioners.

It is worth noting that lecturers in Creative Writing are eligible to apply for research grants from the Arts and Humanities Research Board’s (AHRB) ‘Small Grants in the Creative and Performing Arts Scheme.’ For the AHRB, Creative Writing falls under the aegis of ‘Creative and Performing Arts and Design’ (CPAD) rather than English.²⁴

As Creative Writing provision expands at postgraduate level, the question of research training for postgraduates is arising and the issues involved in developing this training are discussed in a report on Research Training in the Creative & Performing Arts & Design (CPAD) which was produced in 2001 by the UK Council for Graduate Education (UKCGE).²⁵ The report anticipates changes in requirements for the training of research students in all disciplines. These changes were considered by the AHRB which, in the process of its recent ‘Postgraduate Review’, focussed on how best to reconcile the ‘two principal desired outcomes of a doctoral programme: first, scholarly pieces of work that will make a significant contribution to knowledge and understanding; and secondly, well-trained researchers, who will contribute to society and the economy the very high levels of skills, as well as knowledge and understanding that they have gained through the course of their studies.’²⁶ The report

also reflects on how such changes might be accommodated in subjects which are practice-based (where practice is defined as ‘the exercise of appropriate skills in the creation of an original work in the field or fields of creative and performing arts and design (e.g. drama, dance music fine arts, graphics, fiction, poetry, design).’)²⁷

Some useful suggestions are made about the kinds of needs which training for postgraduates in Creative Writing and other CPAD subjects might tackle. The report argues, for example, that students need to have contact with practitioners in their discipline. UKCGE’s research showed that ‘Students appreciated the benefit of continual contact with practitioners, industry and a set of professional practices and saw this as a vitally important aspect of their research training.’²⁸ It also stresses the need for departments to ensure that Creative Writing students at postgraduate level are not isolated from postgraduate activity in cognate disciplines or from other students in their own area of study. It suggests that ‘it will be an important task for supervisors to ensure that students have an appropriate network of support in the period before a “critical mass” of students is in place, especially as the pioneers will be the key members of the support network in future years.’²⁹

The report on research training for CPAD students might be of use to departments drafting learning outcomes for research programmes in Creative Writing, as well as those developing training programmes. It identifies a number of skills which distinguish degrees in the Creative Arts and they include:

- *the capacity for creativity.*
- *a high degree of skills in developing new ideas and in being innovative.*
- *highly-developed skills in performance, exhibition, demonstration, [and/or] communication.*
- *experience in dealing with complexity, for example, understanding and discourse on the interactions between mind, body and emotions.*
- *ability to reach an accommodation in the tension between theory and practice.*
- *through engagement with professional practice, well-developed entrepreneurial and business skills.*
- *a general capacity for breadth of vision.*
- *willingness to be bold and to take risks in appropriate*

10. Recommendations

Creative Writing is firmly established as a discipline within the academy and it is characterised by active debates about learning and teaching, literature and creativity. In the future, these debates are likely to focus on issues such as the differentiation of undergraduate and postgraduate programmes, the needs of those Creative Writing professionals on part-time contracts who contribute to curriculum development and delivery, and strategies for sophisticating a vocabulary which will allow for the articulation, defence and support of flexible and robust programmes that foster creativity within the increasingly ‘professionalised’ structures of the academy.

The recommendations offered here contribute both to wider knowledge of Creative Writing practices in HE and to future debates on learning and teaching in the discipline. The articles which follow introduce colleagues to some current discussions within the Creative Writing subject community.

- Creative Writing operates alongside and in partnership with the disciplinary frameworks of English Language and Literature but should be acknowledged as an independent discipline which is distinguished by its own theory and practices.
- Creative Writing should be taught by practising creative writers. While many of these writers will already be practising academics, working in the disciplines of Creative Writing or English Literature, for example, due care should be paid to the training and support of professional writers who are seeking to establish full- or part-time careers within the academy.
- Creative Writing in the academy represents scholarly research as both the AHRB and the RAE recognise. It must be acknowledged and supported as such at departmental, faculty and institutional levels.
- Innovation in the learning and teaching of Creative Writing should be fostered and funded through staff development programmes which acknowledge the importance of lecturers’ contact with Creative Writing practitioners in the UK and within the wider international subject community.
- Creative Writing programmes should be resourced—financially and administratively—with due regard for the quality of the learning environment, including the need for individual/small group tuition, the demands of Creative Writing assessment practices, the needs and expertise of visiting lecturers, and the requirement for student to develop contacts with expert practitioners and others in the arts and cultural industries.
- Part-time lecturers in Creative Writing should receive training tailored to the demands made on them in terms of administrative roles and pastoral responsibilities as well as learning and teaching.
- Creative Writing should be assessed in relation to Creative Writing assessment criteria.
- Differences between the practices involved in workshop and the seminar need to be acknowledged and respected. Workshop group sizes should not exceed 15.
- The English Subject Centre should continue to support Creative Writing in HE and foster ongoing dialogue about learning and teaching in the discipline by continuing the development of its Creative Writing events programme. It should also support Creative Writing through the development of resources, project funding when available, and collaboration with other organisations and centres such as the National Association for Writers in Education and the UK Centre for Creative Writing Research Through Practice.

Appendix A: Marking: a health warning

Dr Maggie Butt, Programme Leader, Creative & Media Writing, Middlesex University

Once, when I was complaining about my marking load, my daughter said, ‘What’s the problem, you’re only reading stories?’ In one way she was right. Marking creative writing in Higher Education isn’t like marking essays. At its best it can be stimulating, inspiring, astonishing—it can even make you laugh or cry. At its cliché-clogged, ungrammatical worst, it can make you despair.

It’s also unlike marking essays because criticism of creative work can be so painful to the author. Critical comments can be like saying, ‘Your baby is ugly,’ to a new mother. Feedback has to be given with care and diplomacy. And all that takes time.

There are, of course, two distinct types of ‘marking.’ The first is the ongoing formative feedback on weekly writing, coursework exercises and drafts of work for assessment. Students will probably ‘workshop’ this material and exchange it amongst themselves for written comments, but they all crave the praise and, failing that, the advice of the tutor. And in our increasingly consumerist culture, they believe they have paid for that. Here lies a central dilemma of the Creative Writing course—in order to improve, students need feedback but your painstaking reading and commentary, which gives them real insight into their strengths and weaknesses, takes hours and hours of tutor time. You want them to write every day—they want you to read all of it, and not only to read, but to comment in detail on which phrases and sentences ‘work’ and which don’t, and why.

Strict guidelines have to be set, and adhered to, about what you will read, and how often. Students sometimes find this disappointing, but imagine you have 80 students taking a module, as in my first year. You clearly can’t read and give meaningful feedback on (for example) 80 short stories a week, every week, in addition to working with other students, preparing classes, completing administrative tasks and carrying out research. You wouldn’t have time to sleep. You have to decide which exercises are most significant, or run a rota system, or concentrate only on drafts of assessed work, and then be clear exactly how many drafts you are prepared to read. If a piece of work goes through eight drafts, will you read them all? And how then will you maintain any kind of objectivity when the work comes to you for final assessment?

The marking load has a significant bearing on class sizes and work programmes. A large class (even broken down into small groups) can mean impossible amounts of formative feedback. And this isn’t the kind of marking which can be done with a few ticks and crosses. I sometimes end up writing more on a short piece than the student has written!

Marking can also bring you up against the problem of deeply personal material, and students who need counselling and support of a kind which you aren’t trained to provide. Of course you refer them to the appropriate support services, but this too is time consuming.

In addition to the formative feedback on work set in class, students often ask you to read their novel or screenplay-in-progress, which is being written outside the confines of the course. Again, you have to set rules and stick to them. You can’t read one person’s novel and not another’s.

Secondly comes the summative assessment marking. Again this is different from marking essays. Students may be working with disturbing autobiographical material, which makes them feel very exposed. You might have read drafts of the work, and feel very sympathetic to the student. But then you have to sit in judgement on the piece and award it a mark which could affect the student’s self-esteem and even job prospects. It’s not easy. The only way to do it fairly is to have absolutely clear marking criteria. Many examples of good practice in this area have been published, particularly Dr John Singleton’s ‘Assessing Creative Writing in HE’ and ‘Analysing the Aesthetic’ by Atkinson et al.³¹

Think carefully about degree class criteria and specific module criteria, as well as manageable word limits for the creative and the critical work. A short piece often requires greater language control and understanding of structure than a long piece. As a safeguard against plagiarism, ensure that drafts are required with the final work, and that the drafting process and influences are fully examined in an accompanying critique. Decide what penalties you will impose for students who fail to include drafts.

Practising writers, who may be used to running workshops in less formal situations, often find the procedures and rules of assessing creative writing in HE very difficult to comprehend and comply with. This can lead to problems at assessment boards, and even to student appeals. It's crucial to make sure students and part-time lecturers understand the criteria as clearly as you do. Most HE writing courses require a critical preface alongside the creative work. On the Middlesex programme each module is marked 50% on creative work and 50% on a critical preface discussing the process and context of the critical work. Remember it is very hard for students to perform well in both the creative and critical arenas and this can lead to apparent marking anomalies.

Departments who are thinking of running Creative Writing courses need to understand that the marking is a real and substantial extra burden on Creative Writing tutors which needs to be taken into account in the work programme and class sizes. The only way to keep formative marking to a sensible level is to have small groups which have adequate time to workshop writing effectively. Creative Writing courses are not cheap to run, and this is why workshop and lab-based courses attract higher fee banding.

Finally, although marking is the bane of every Creative Writing tutor's life, it can also be immensely worthwhile when a student grapples with the comments you made on an uninspiring first draft and turns it into a revised piece which takes your breath away.

Appendix B: A Creative Writing manifesto

Michlene Wandor, Senior Lecturer in Creative Writing, London Metropolitan University

I have always earned my living from writing, mainly drama (theatre and radio), but also from poetry, short stories, books and journalism. For the past two decades, writing has been augmented by teaching Creative Writing (poetry, playwriting and prose fiction), to drama students at the Guildhall School of Music and Drama, adult education students at the City Literary Institute, American students, and a range of residential courses and workshops in this country and abroad. For the past four years I have also evolved and run an undergraduate half-degree in Creative Writing at the University of North London.

I have probably encountered a fairly representative cross-section of people who take Creative Writing courses: a wide range of ages, cultures, experiences and skills in both non-accredited courses and in students for whom Creative Writing is an assessed, substantive part of their degree.

For a long time I believed strongly that only professional (i.e. regularly published and performed) writers should teach Creative Writing; that academics who also 'write', but for whom writing is not the way they earn the major part of their living, do not necessarily have the right vocational skills in Creative Writing to be able to encode it within their professional expertise as teachers. In the light of the last four years teaching at degree level myself, I have modified this opinion, and developed what I hope will be useful guidelines for people in similar situations.

If Creative Writing is to 'work' within a traditional academic context, its foundational skills need to be clearly pinpointed. Its approaches, methods, assessments and aims need to be defined as clearly as possible and distinguished from other kinds of Creative Writing courses. In the academic context, there is a fundamental difference between Creative Writing elements within an English degree, and free-standing Creative Writing degrees. (I am not in favour of full Creative Writing degrees, for reasons which I hope will be clear later.)

Creative Writing shares features with both traditional English teaching, and also with the performance and vocational arts subjects (drama, film, fine art, music) which are already relatively well established at university level. It doesn't need special

pleading or accommodation due to its special needs, but it does need structured and carefully thought through syllabi, if it is to fulfil its exciting potential, as a 'young' discipline within the academy, and as an enhanced aesthetic presence in the cultural world. Creative Writing is the last performance-based art to enter the academy, and it is important to get it right.

Very few Creative Writing undergraduates will have previously done a formal Creative Writing course. There are no GCSEs or A levels in Creative Writing (should that be the next stage?). A small number of students may have had English teachers who encouraged them to write, as part of developing literacy skills, observation or exercising their imaginations.

In any Creative Writing class, therefore, there is likely to be little experience, and a wide range of aptitudes, skills, motivations, commitments and outcomes.

The following is something of a manifesto of requirements and approaches which I believe can establish a sound framework for any substantial Creative Writing course.

First of all, academically-based Creative Writing teaching cannot have as its determining force the conviction that fiction writing is merely, or even mostly, a) therapy, b) self-expression, c) a training ground for the next batch of great writers, d) a form of play, or e) a glorified form of literacy or study skills training.

All of the above may be by-products of the process: writing fiction can feel/be therapeutic, it can involve degrees of self-expression, it can give people the valuable space and time to explore and develop writing skills which speed up the (vocational) professionalising process. It can improve critical and technical understanding of language, and thus develop literacy skills.

However, the primary purpose of an undergraduate Creative Writing course is a) to develop a combined critical and writerly understanding of fictional genres and the imaginative possibilities of language, in order to be able to make informed choices; b) to enhance all literacy skills; c) to develop a critical literary intelligence leading to an informed critical vocabulary d) to create more hungry readers.

Appendix B

In practical terms, the following are essential:

1. An admissions procedure in which students are asked to submit two pieces of writing, from two of the following: poetry, prose fiction, drama. Non-fiction, discursive work, however literate and fluent, gives little indication of how students can handle imaginative uses of language. The submissions should show reasonable levels of literacy and understanding of sentence entities, punctuation and grammar. They should also show some sense of literary form—i.e., in poetry a sense of rhythm, some use of figurative language; in prose, a sense of narrative movement, varying description with dialogue, a reasonable level of manipulation of narrative voice; in playwriting, some ability to convey an imaginative world through dialogue alone.
2. A sound basis of literacy. It is impossible to work with literary form and non-discursive uses of language, unless students—at the very least—know the names of basic parts of speech, grammatical function, punctuation, and expand their vocabularies. Discussions about meaning and literary expression make no sense otherwise.
3. A secure grounding in a selection of literary/critical theory, so that students writing can develop genuine critical vocabularies, enabling them to discuss a text in terms of what it does/says, and how it does so through its language.
4. Compulsory modules/courses in the three basic genres: poetry, prose fiction and playwriting.
5. All assignments should contain BOTH ‘creative’ work, and critical essays which show some analytical understanding of genre. Ensure there is a compulsory reading requirement.
6. Jettison the term ‘workshop’ and use ‘seminar’ instead. It carries more serious weight.
7. Always do some writing in class.
8. Everyone reads their work out in class automatically.
9. Work to develop a critical vocabulary which outlaws all subjectivist responses: ‘I like’, ‘I dislike’, ‘I prefer’: all distract from the analytical process. Value judgements, if used at all, should be left to the END of the analytical process. I

have found that if illuminating and exciting textual analysis takes place, value judgements effectively become unnecessary. This doesn’t mean that anything goes; rather, it constantly recreates a use of the notion of ‘criticism’, as a meaningful analytical process, which leads to understanding why certain approaches to writing work better than others, and thus encourages good practice. Notions such as ‘positive’ or ‘negative’ criticism, which accrue as correlatives to premature value judgement, thus also become irrelevant.

10. Avoid/argue with terms such as talent, genius, inspiration. ‘Aptitude’ is more useful, since it indicates something which is to be developed.

I hope it is clear from the above, that the skills needed from Creative Writing teachers are in fact a combination of a) professional writing skills, b) pedagogically oriented language skills, and c) traditional English literature/theory skills. These skills are not necessarily transferable; novelists, poets and playwrights have their specialisations, and will be best at teaching those. Similarly, the more ‘teacherly’ skills of literacy and theory are (mostly) likely to be better taught by traditional academics.

A final caveat: as Creative Writing becomes a component in more and more HE courses, one should be aware that motivations will be varied. There are, of course, students who genuinely want to ‘write’; but Creative Writing is also attractive to departments desperate to recruit more students. Some students see it as a soft option, easier than English, because you don’t have to read lots of books, or write long essays. Some students will avoid reading anything, if they can. Others will devour the horizons which open up before them.

Whatever the circumstances of each HE institution, a Creative Writing course based on a sound and realistic foundation is likely to be rigorous, intellectually stimulating, and enjoyable.

Appendix C: What is a postgraduate degree in Creative Writing?

Dr Graeme Harper, UK Centre for Creative Writing Research Through Practice³²,
University of Wales, Bangor

Education in the writing arts has not changed that much since the birth of the university, though the formalisation of this process within Higher Education has asked us increasingly to reflect on the nature of the ‘subject’ of Creative Writing, and on how such a subject might be taught.

Likewise, the formalising of the relationship between creative writer and the academic literary critic did not come about until relatively recently in the history of the university. As Andrew Delbanco points out in ‘The Decline and Fall of Literature’, the ‘scholar of Scottish and English ballads Francis James Child was appointed to the first chair of English literature at Harvard only in 1876; the English honours degree was not established in Oxford until 1894.’³³ These two things, occurring in tandem, have impacted directly on the construction of postgraduate Creative Writing programmes.

Today, a postgraduate degree in Creative Writing can be a variety of things. It can focus on any genre and be nominally a ‘research degree’ (i.e. an individual project with supervision) or nominally ‘taught’ (i.e. based on units of study or modules of assessment, some of which relate to critical or theoretical issues rather than involving ‘creative practice’ – though this split is not maintained in all programmes). Indeed, if nominally ‘taught’, modules of study might be based either on genre, critical or theoretical, cultural or literary, industrial or historical premises.

At their core, postgraduate degrees in Creative Writing, which can be anything from diplomas to doctorates, most often consist of a longer piece of Creative Writing with some ‘response’ to it by the writer, indicating their critical awareness of their own practice and/or the practice of others, not necessarily only the practice of writers. The ‘response component’ of a postgraduate Creative Writing degree can come in a vast number of modes and with a variety of labels (e.g. ‘critical essay’, ‘dissertation’, ‘reflective essay’, ‘analysis’ and so on).

The difference between one ‘level’ of achievement and another in Creative Writing degrees is most often flagged up by reference to the length of Creative Writing submissions, with Diplomas and Masters level work not

usually involving completed longer works (i.e. novels, collections of stories or poetry, full length screenplays and so on). There are variations, however, and there is a fundamental difference between the UK and USA experience.

In the USA, the Master of Fine Arts (MFA) degree is often considered the ‘exit degree’ (i.e. endorsed as the ‘final’ qualification in the subject) for a creative writer. Thus, although labelled as a ‘Masters’ course, these programmes can involve work of some length. This brings about debate, particularly as PhD programmes in Creative Writing do exist in the USA and have done so now for some time. In light of the wide endorsement of the MFA qualification as an exit route, some have asked: ‘Given the strength and exit profile of MFA courses what is the additional purpose of PhDs in Creative Writing?’ Suffice it to say, the PhD stands alone as the highest qualification in the subject of Creative Writing attainable in the UK, and is certainly available as an exit degree in the USA.

A typical example of what would be required for a research based Creative Writing doctorate in the UK would be: a) the writing of a novel, a collection of short stories or a collection of poetry with b) a critical response of between 20,000 and 50,000 words. For an MA: a) a piece of Creative Writing of 15,000–20,000 words with b) a selection of essays or ‘responses’ or a ‘critical piece’ totalling 15,000–20,000 words.

These postgraduate submissions can be contrasted with work in an undergraduate module in Creative Writing, perhaps single genre or perhaps thematically, market-orientation or critical-definition based, where the student would either be expected to a) produce a portfolio of work containing pieces of Creative Writing or b) produce an individual creative work accompanied by a discursive piece or c) produce either of these, but also accompany this with earlier draft work or a diary or record of the writing process.

Thus, length of work submitted can only be taken as a guideline and many Creative Writing programmes make the point that there is a need for flexibility in order to cater for a wide variety of possible Creative Writing forms. Similarly, the creative-critical response

'cross-over' in Creative Writing programmes reflects the requirement that a creative writer be aware of their practice, the process of writing, and the practice and processes of writers, the industry or critics of finished Creative Writing. This does not negate creative practice as the core of these programmes, but it does reflect the opportunity Creative Writing learning on campus offers for the development of a writer's craft and of a personal understanding of that craft.

The variety of methods of relating the creative component in a Creative Writing course to the critical response by the writer makes plain that, while the critical response can certainly be much like the critical work of a student undertaking a degree in English, it serves a different purpose, and should not be considered in exactly the same way as critical analysis in the study of English. For one thing, it can often be quite different in pitch, tone and focus, being generated by the student's own Creative Writing and relating back to it.

Whereas at undergraduate level the workshop is the primary mode of delivery of Creative Writing teaching, at postgraduate level there is a relatively even split between one-to-one supervision of Creative Writing students by staff writers and workshopping within a larger Creative Writing course group. In addition, Creative Writing students, across the whole range of degree levels, are often involved in peer generated readings and/or workshops, in reading events involving visiting writers, in meetings with literary agents or other industry people, or in discussions with critics working on contemporary literature, film or theatre. These activities, more or less informal, can be seen as integral parts of the learning process in Creative Writing programmes.

The position of the campus as a place where creative writers can meet those interested in the writing arts actively continues to feed Creative Writing learning, as it has done since the birth of the university. The formalisation of Creative Writing on campus into degree programmes has not adversely affected this positive, informal, activity. What formal degree structures now exist endeavour to maintain a sense of the campus as creative space, drawing on the opportunities for reflection on individual writing practice, providing workshop or one-to-one discussion, and adding to this the opportunity to write, both in direct relation to the market for creative writing of all kinds, and in relation to the pursuit of 'great writing' in and for itself.

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2. For details see the British Council's guide to Postgraduate Study in British Literature <http://pgstudy.britishcouncil.org/>. It is likely that some postgraduate programmes have not been registered here and so numbers cannot be verified absolutely.
3. One of the aims of the English Subject Centre is to make expertise available across the subject communities of Creative Writing, English Literature and English Language. If you have developed successful strategies for learning, teaching and assessment in Creative Writing and you would be happy to discuss them with colleagues, please consider registering in our Directory of Experience and Expertise. For details, see http://www.english.ltsn.ac.uk/resources/general/expertise/Experience_Search.asp
4. The website of the National Association of Writers in Education (NAWE) is at <http://www.nawe.co.uk> and members of the association have access to a very useful archive of articles on Creative Writing in HE. Other resources available to Creative Writing lecturers include the English Subject Centre's resources on Creative Writing collected at <http://www.english.ltsn.ac.uk/Resources/topic/creative.htm> and are regularly updated.
5. English Benchmarking Statement <http://www.english.ltsn.ac.uk/resources/topic/benchmark/index.asp>
6. Steve May of Bath Spa University College will publish the findings of his project on the structure and nature of Creative Writing programmes in UK HE in Spring 2003. His work draws substantially on interviews with lecturers and students as well as course documentation and his findings will be distributed by the English Subject Centre. For further details, see <http://www.english.ltsn.ac.uk/projects/deptprojects/creativeunder.htm>
7. Colleagues can find out about activities in this area directly by visiting the website for PALATINE, the Performing Arts Learning and Teaching Innovation Network, at <http://www.lancs.ac.uk/palatine>. The English Subject Centre will also be working to develop links in this area and we welcome suggestions for events or resources which would be desirable outcomes of this kind of collaboration.
8. The English Subject Centre welcomes information about the ways in which courses in both disciplines are being reconceptualised in response to the growth of Creative Writing.
9. Professor Rob Pope and Ben Knights have both been National Teaching Fellows and are working on separate projects which invited students to engage with literary criticism through creative exercises. Details of Professor Knight's project are available at <http://ntfs.ilt.ac.uk/index.asp?docid=1790&pid=320#r> while Professor Pope's project is outlined at <http://www.English.ltsn.ac.uk/resources/general/publications/newsletters/newsissue1/acronyms.htm>
10. For a paper on student attitudes to reading by Dr Jo Gill of the University of the West of England and Dr Alan Brown of the University of Gloucestershire, see <http://www.english.ltsn.ac.uk/resources/general/publications/newsletters/newsissue4/gill.htm>
11. The LTSN Subject Centre for Philosophical and Religious Studies has already begun work on issues involved in students' reading 'difficult' texts.
12. For a discussion of the issues involved in the workshop's primacy as a learning environment, see Don Bogen's 'Beyond the Workshop: Suggestions for a Process-Orientated Creative Writing Course', *JAC* 5.0 (1998). This article can be downloaded at <http://jac.gsu.edu/jac/5.1/Articles/13.htm>
13. In Fine Art programmes, whole group discussion of individual student work has a long history and information on research into these practises is available through the LTSN Subject Centre for Art, Design and Communication (ADC – LTSN) and PALATINE, the LTSN Subject Centre for Performing Arts. Links to all Subject centres are available at <http://www.ltsn.ac.uk>
14. The English Subject Centre is planning to develop a training course for Creative Writing tutors in collaboration with the National Association of Writers in Education and we would welcome suggestions as to its form. We will also be including provision for Creative Writers in any training materials we develop for tutors in English Literature, Language and Creative Writing.

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16. For up-to-date advice on issues related to student support and referral, please consult the 'Access Issues' Section of the English Subject Centre's website. <http://www.english.ltsn.ac.uk>
17. 'Aesthetic: A New Approach to Developing Criteria for the Assessment of Creative Writing in Higher Education', *Writing in Education 21* (Winter 2000/01), 26-8. Available to members of NAWE through the HE archive at <http://www.nawe.co.uk>
18. The survey referred to here is that of Robert Sheppard and Scott Thurston at Edge Hill University College. They are investigating the range of ways in which Creative Writing programmes invite students to reflect critically on their own work through theory, poetics or other means. Their work on 'Supplementary Discourses in Creative Writing', to be completed in Summer 2003, will provide an invaluable resource for those reviewing or instituting new assessment practices in Creative Writing. For further details, see <http://www.english.ltsn.ac.uk/Projects/deptprojects/creativedis.asp>
19. See Moy McCrory's discussion of plagiarism and creative writing at <http://www.english.ltsn.ac.uk/events/archive/cwriting/index.htm#event2>
20. The English Subject Centre will make examples of such mechanisms available through its website at <http://www.english.ltsn.ac.uk>. It will also be publicising developments in the newly funded FDTL project on 'Professional Developments for Fractional and Part-Time Lecturers in Art and Design' which is to be based at the University of Hertfordshire.
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