



# **Subject Benchmark Statement**

## **Creative Writing: Draft for consultation**

October 2015

# Contents

How can I use this document? .....	1
About Subject Benchmark Statements .....	2
About this Subject Benchmark Statement .....	4
1 Defining principles .....	5
2 The nature and scope of creative writing .....	6
3 Subject knowledge and skills .....	8
4 Learning, teaching and assessment .....	11
5 Benchmark standards .....	18
Appendix 1: Postgraduate and doctoral course design .....	19
Appendix 2: Membership of the benchmarking groups for the Subject Benchmark Statement for Creative Writing .....	20

## How can I use this document?

This document is a Subject Benchmark Statement for Creative Writing that defines what can be expected of a graduate in the subject, in terms of what they might know, do and understand at the end of their studies.

You may want to read this document if you are:

- involved in the design, delivery and review of programmes of study in Creative Writing or related subjects
- a prospective student thinking about studying Creative Writing, or a current student of the subject, to find out what may be involved
- an employer, to find out about the knowledge and skills generally expected of a graduate in Creative Writing.

Explanations of unfamiliar terms used in this Subject Benchmark Statement can be found in the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education's (QAA's) glossary<sup>1</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> The QAA glossary is available at: [www.qaa.ac.uk/about-us/glossary](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/about-us/glossary).

## About Subject Benchmark Statements

Subject Benchmark Statements form part of the UK Quality Code for Higher Education (Quality Code) which sets out the Expectations that all providers of UK higher education reviewed by QAA are required to meet.<sup>2</sup> They are a component of Part A: Setting and Maintaining Academic Standards, which includes the Expectation that higher education providers 'consider and take account of relevant Subject Benchmark Statements' in order to secure threshold academic standards.<sup>3</sup>

Subject Benchmark Statements describe the nature of study and the academic standards expected of graduates in specific subject areas, and in respect of particular qualifications. They provide a picture of what graduates in a particular subject might reasonably be expected to know, do and understand at the end of their programme of study.

Subject Benchmark Statements are used as reference points in the design, delivery and review of academic programmes. They provide general guidance for articulating the learning outcomes associated with the programme but are not intended to represent a national curriculum in a subject or to prescribe set approaches to teaching, learning or assessment. Instead, they allow for flexibility and innovation in programme design within a framework agreed by the subject community. Further guidance about programme design, development and approval, learning and teaching, assessment of students, and programme monitoring and review is available in Part B: Assuring and Enhancing Academic Quality of the Quality Code in the following Chapters:<sup>4</sup>

- *Chapter B1: Programme Design, Development and Approval*
- *Chapter B3: Learning and Teaching*
- *Chapter B6: Assessment of Students and the Recognition of Prior Learning*
- *Chapter B8: Programme Monitoring and Review.*

For some subject areas, higher education providers may need to consider other reference points in addition to the Subject Benchmark Statement in designing, delivering and reviewing programmes. These may include requirements set out by professional, statutory and regulatory bodies, national occupational standards and industry or employer expectations. In such cases, the Subject Benchmark Statement may provide additional guidance around academic standards not covered by these requirements.<sup>5</sup> The relationship between academic and professional or regulatory requirements is made clear within individual Statements, but it is the responsibility of individual higher education providers to decide how they use this information. The responsibility for academic standards remains with the higher education provider who awards the degree.

Subject Benchmark Statements are written and maintained by subject specialists drawn from and acting on behalf of the subject community. The process is facilitated by QAA. In order to ensure the continuing currency of Subject Benchmark Statements, QAA initiates regular reviews of their content, five years after first publication, and every seven years subsequently.

---

<sup>2</sup> The Quality Code, available at [www.qaa.ac.uk/assuring-standards-and-quality/the-quality-code](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/assuring-standards-and-quality/the-quality-code), aligns with the *Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area*, available at: [www.enqa.eu/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/ESG\\_endorsed-with-changed-foreword.pdf](http://www.enqa.eu/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/ESG_endorsed-with-changed-foreword.pdf).

<sup>3</sup> Part A: Setting and Maintaining Academic Standards, available at: [www.enqa.eu/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/ESG\\_endorsed-with-changed-foreword.pdf](http://www.enqa.eu/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/ESG_endorsed-with-changed-foreword.pdf).

<sup>4</sup> Individual Chapters are available at: [www.qaa.ac.uk/assuring-standards-and-quality/the-quality-code/quality-code-part-b](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/assuring-standards-and-quality/the-quality-code/quality-code-part-b).

<sup>5</sup> See further Part A: Setting and Maintaining Academic Standards, available at: [www.qaa.ac.uk/assuring-standards-and-quality/the-quality-code/quality-code-part-a](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/assuring-standards-and-quality/the-quality-code/quality-code-part-a).

## Relationship to legislation

Higher education providers are responsible for meeting the requirements of legislation and any other regulatory requirements placed upon them, for example by funding bodies. The Quality Code does not interpret legislation nor does it incorporate statutory or regulatory requirements. Sources of information about other requirements and examples of guidance and good practice are signposted within the Subject Benchmark Statement where appropriate. Higher education providers are responsible for how they use these resources.<sup>6</sup>

## Equality and diversity

The Quality Code embeds consideration of equality and diversity matters throughout. Promoting equality involves treating everyone with equal dignity and worth, while also raising aspirations and supporting achievement for people with diverse requirements, entitlements and backgrounds. An inclusive environment for learning anticipates the varied requirements of learners, and aims to ensure that all students have equal access to educational opportunities. Higher education providers, staff and students all have a role in and responsibility for, promoting equality.

Equality of opportunity involves enabling access for people who have differing individual requirements as well as eliminating arbitrary and unnecessary barriers to learning. In addition, disabled students and non-disabled students are offered learning opportunities that are equally accessible to them, by means of inclusive design wherever possible and by means of reasonable individual adjustments wherever necessary.

---

<sup>6</sup> See further the *UK Quality Code for Higher Education: General Introduction*, available at: [www.qaa.ac.uk/publications/information-and-guidance/publication?PubID=181](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/publications/information-and-guidance/publication?PubID=181).

## About this Subject Benchmark Statement

This Subject Benchmark Statement refers to bachelor's degrees with honours in Creative Writing.<sup>7</sup>

This is a new Subject Benchmark Statement, first published in 2015. Creative Writing is a diverse and still developing subject. It is underpinned by a growing body of research and pedagogical thinking, but it is also necessarily responsive to the changing world of print publication and other media. This Statement aims not only to define current practice but also to register possibilities for its future development.

### Note on alignment with higher education sector coding systems

Programmes of study which use this Subject Benchmark Statement as a reference point are generally classified under the following codes in the Joint Academic Coding System (JACS):

W800	Imaginative writing
W810	Scriptwriting
W820	Poetry writing
W830	Prose writing
W890	Imaginative writing not elsewhere classified. <sup>8</sup>

---

<sup>7</sup> Bachelor's degrees are at level 6 in *The Framework for Higher Education Qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* and level 10 in *The Framework for Qualifications of Higher Education Institutions in Scotland*, as published in *The Frameworks for Higher Education Qualifications of UK Degree-Awarding Bodies*, available at: [www.qaa.ac.uk/assuring-standards-and-quality/the-quality-code/qualifications](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/assuring-standards-and-quality/the-quality-code/qualifications).

<sup>8</sup> Further information about JACS is available at: [www.hesa.ac.uk/content/view/1776/649/](http://www.hesa.ac.uk/content/view/1776/649/).

# 1 Defining principles

## 1.1 Creative Writing:

- involves both the practice of writing and critical reflection on that practice
- requires engagement with the expressive potential and persuasive power of language
- recognises formal constraints and conventions, but also questions them in order to produce innovative solutions to artistic problems
- operates on the principle that process is as important as product, since both generate knowledge
- requires students to acquire knowledge of the contexts of their writing: literary, cultural and personal
- requires students to read analytically across a culturally and historically broad range of writing
- involves the exploration of the relationships between writer and creative industries, text and audience.

## 1.2 The broad aims of a Creative Writing degree are to:

- provide an intellectually stimulating experience of learning and studying
- enable students to adopt a wide range of reading strategies, applied to their own work and the work of others
- recognise the contribution that readers and audiences make to the realisation of text or performance
- develop students' ability to contextualise their own work within the writing traditions that precede and surround them
- introduce students to speculative and reflective approaches to writing and reading
- encourage students to expand their thinking about the possibilities and challenges of writing (for example, aesthetic, cultural, or political)
- support students in the development of their own writing, and develop their confidence through a critical, technical and creative understanding of the subject/craft/art and of their own creative process
- support students in developing strategies for creative expression
- foster students' creative/artistic ambitions and support them in achieving their aspirations, offering direction and advice where necessary
- inspire enthusiasm for the subject and an appreciation of its continuing social, cultural, political and economic importance
- encourage students to recognise the skills and insights they develop through the course, and help them identify career opportunities to use them.

## 2 The nature and scope of Creative Writing

2.1 In the UK, the formal methods of teaching that first began to develop in relation to Creative Writing in the 1970s have now established it as an academic subject in its own right, methodologically independent of English or other 'parent' subjects. Whether dealing with traditional or emerging forms of imaginative writing, Creative Writing is founded on an understanding of the imagination as a vital mode of perception and enquiry, and on an awareness of the power of language and literature to transform individual lives and cultures.

2.2 Characterised by a focus on the study and production of imaginative writing in the core genres of poetry, prose fiction, script writing and creative non-fiction, Creative Writing is also receptive to other modes of writing and emerging forms and media. Programmes might, therefore, include modules or strands of study in performance-based texts, interactive digital literature and vocational forms of writing such as journalism. 'Script writing' includes writing for stage, TV, radio, film and digital games, and 'creative non-fiction' includes autobiography, biography, nature and travel writing, lyric essays, as well as evolving hybrid forms. Creative Writing furthermore explores the relationship between such discrete generic fields of writing, and the cross-fertilisation such relationships encourage.

2.3 Creative Writing as an academic pursuit develops a range of cognitive abilities related to the aesthetic, ethical and social contexts of human experience. Its processes foster the ability to see the world from different perspectives, both as a life skill and as an essential part of artistic practice. In the making of new work, it recognises the role both of deliberate, conscious decisions and of the unconscious impulses and recognitions that underlie and energise composition.

2.4 The student writer, regardless of subject or style, needs to understand the difficulties and power of concrete expression and thought in relation to the insights offered by more abstract discourse. The challenge for the student writer is to adapt, 'translate' or transform ideas, perceptions and knowledge into the concrete or sense-based language of creative writing.

2.5 Creative Writing appears in a variety of types of degree, which reflects the autonomy, specialisms and traditions within individual degree-awarding bodies. Named degrees may be single honours in Creative Writing; they may also be joint honours - for instance, combined with English Literature or Language, as well as other arts and humanities subjects or other disciplines. The range of possible combinations is extensive, and can reflect the interdisciplinary bent of an awarding body. It should also be noted that the term traditionally used by UCAS to refer to Creative Writing study is 'Imaginative Writing'.

2.6 Writing programmes in the UK tend to be eclectic in their creative output rather than prescriptive of particular schools of writing or dominant house-styles. Students have responsibility for their own work, from conception through to development, editing and final redrafting, though they will inevitably be working within the creative constraints of their given form. Within a broad community of interest, however, there is scope for different higher education providers to develop distinctive orientations: for example towards new media, experimental forms of writing, or engagement with the publishing industry.

2.7 The awareness that student writers develop of the processes of their own writing entails close consideration not only of formal but also historical and cultural contexts. Student writers are encouraged to recognise and move beyond received ideas, familiar representations, and stale or clichéd expression. This 'cultural literacy' includes an understanding of the negotiations of meaning that arise between writer, medium, text, audience and publisher or broadcaster.



2.8 Creative Writing engages the student writer in a range of roles - as thinker, artist, 'maker' and apprentice. In addition to their own and their peers' writing, reading encompasses traditional and contemporary models of imaginative writing, with greater emphasis normally given to the conception, production and reception of modern and contemporary texts. Individual perspectives are broadened by exposure to texts that are culturally and stylistically diverse, as well as to texts that might deepen the student writer's awareness of their own local, regional or national identity, experience and idiom. Reading, thought and practice may also embrace experimental or liminal terrain, exploring concepts such as ambiguity, paradox, the ludic, the aleatory or the surreal.

2.9 Reading also includes the analysis, guidance and reflections of writers alongside texts of literary criticism and critical theory. The core practice of 'reading as a writer' involves cultivating an alertness to the choices faced and the decisions taken by the writer of a text, in order to inform and enrich one's own writing practice. The analysis of craft, aesthetics and poetics and the literary-critical or theoretical approaches with which students may be familiar from their study of English Language and Literature complement one another in the study of Creative Writing. Appropriate theoretical frameworks may be used to help position the student writer's practice and to further their understanding of a text's relevance to wider cultural thought and debate.

2.10 Creative Writing has contributed significantly to related subjects such as English literature and language, drama, media, journalism, film studies and theatre studies. Creative Writing research increasingly contributes to the study of creativity both in the individual and in groups. As a subject, it is naturally interdisciplinary. Creative projects are often implicitly 'hybrid' in conception, and sometimes explicitly so in form, seeking to express a sense of heterogeneous experience. Writers have always investigated questions of consciousness, history, politics, ecology, psychology, identity, metaphysics, art, scientific discovery, and other fields of knowledge. A writer's working method frequently engages with very disparate research activities. This may involve fieldwork as well as archival or scientific study.

2.11 Although many established contemporary writers are graduates from Creative Writing programmes, those programmes are not primarily vocational. Graduates gain broad and transferable skills finding application for their learning through teaching, editing, community arts work, arts management and administration, journalism and feature-writing, or within other areas of the creative industries such as advertising, film, video production and computer game production.

### 3 Subject knowledge and skills

#### Subject knowledge

3.1 Creative Writing graduates have subject knowledge in and understanding of some or all of the following:

- i the technical requirements of the form in which they are writing
- ii tone, register, structure, genre and audience in their own writing
- iii editorial approaches and processes
- iv the creative process and the body of written works that surrounds it
- v 'reading as a writer' - the relationship of reading to their own practice
- vi publishing and performance contexts, opportunities and audiences in the wider world, and the historical and cultural development of such contexts
- vii the range of relevant contemporary writing, together with a comprehensive grasp of literary history; this includes awareness of major writers and critical approaches
- viii the principal literary genres of prose, poetry, and drama; this includes writing for various media such as film, radio and stage, but also evolving media such as writing for digital and new media
- ix the relationships and interactions between different genres and media
- x the variety of styles of English language usage: regional, global, stylistic and media-specific
- xi potential language usage in terms of voice, idiom, idiolect, simile, metaphor, analogy, and other expressive and rhetorical devices as appropriate to form
- xii the role of readers and audiences in realising texts and performance as imaginative experience
- xiii theoretical, stylistic and practice-based concepts and terminology
- xiv critical awareness of the context in which writing is produced and how individual practice relates to that of predecessors and contemporaries, peers and established practitioners
- xv the nuanced critical awareness gained from contextualising their own writing within a given framework, historical, cultural or stylistic
- xvi the development of new writing strategies drawn from critical reflection upon their writing practice
- xvii the interplay between practice, criticism and theory within their chosen form(s).

#### Skills specific to Creative Writing

3.2 Graduates of Creative Writing make a valuable contribution to society: they are sought by employers because they have high level skills in, and positive engagement with, communication, linguistic expression, creativity, artistic representation, research processes and active learning. Creative Writing graduates are effective communicators, problem solvers and researchers. The following skills are considered to be fundamental to the study and practice of Creative Writing; many are also potentially transferable to other contexts. Graduates of Creative Writing are typically able to:

- i produce clear, accurate, artistically coherent and technically sophisticated written work, which articulates a combination of research and creative ideas
- ii communicate orally and through the written word concrete ideas and abstract concepts, displaying an ability to articulate a critical understanding of complex texts and ideas, negotiating critical, contextual, historical, conceptual and ethical dimensions of their work and the work of others

- iii read as a writer - with an ability to analyse texts, performances and broadcasts, and respond to the affective power of language, using appropriate approaches, terminology and creative strategies
- iv use language in a sophisticated and nuanced fashion, with a heightened awareness of concision, voice, idiom, idiolect, simile, metaphor, analogy, rhythm and media-specific restraints
- v use reflective strategies to help capture and synthesize personal experiences and other research in an imaginative form
- vi apply a well developed aesthetic sensibility and sense of intellectual inquiry
- vii employ an imaginative and divergent mode of thinking which is integral to identifying and solving problems, to the making of critical and reflective judgements, to the generation of alternatives and new ideas, and to engaging with broader issues of value
- viii edit with a high level of rigour and scrutiny, at the various levels of clause, line, sentence, stanza, paragraph but also at the structural level of overall scene, chapter, collection, book
- ix apply scholarly bibliographic skills when and where necessary
- x use the views of others in the development and enhancement of practice; formulate considered practical responses to the critical judgements of others, while developing a generous yet rigorous critical scrutiny in peer review and workshop activities;
- xi view themselves as practitioners and reflect critically on their own creative writing practice;
- xii engage creatively and critically in appropriate independent research
- xiii conduct independent conventional, theoretical and practice-based research.

## Generic and graduate skills

3.3 Graduates who have studied Creative Writing will have developed their curiosity, intellect and imagination, alongside an interrogative approach to the manipulation of ideas, form, media and language. Their critical faculties will be enhanced by a confident imaginative practice. Graduates are typically able to:

- i initiate and take responsibility for their own work
- ii present information to a professional standard in different specific contexts
- iii self-manage and show a distinct ability to work independently, set goals, manage workloads and meet deadlines
- iv anticipate and accommodate change, and negotiate contexts of ambiguity, uncertainty and unfamiliarity
- v identify strengths and needs, in reflecting on personal development
- vi select and employ communication and information technologies: source, navigate, select, retrieve, evaluate, manipulate and manage information from a variety of sources
- vii show considerable personal qualities, including an enthusiasm for enquiry and the motivation to sustain it, often displaying high levels of determination and adaptability
- viii work flexibly, both independently and collaboratively
- ix communicate their own ideas and the ideas of others concisely, accurately and persuasively in order to influence opinion, developing, constructing and presenting arguments in appropriate ways
- x communicate in a variety of media, with a strong awareness of the uses of language
- xi interact effectively with others, in team or group-work, for example through collaboration or in workshop situations
- xii be sensitive to cultural contexts when working with others

- xiii adapt to different demands and tasks, and be able to look beyond the immediate task to the wider context, including the social and commercial effects of their work
- xiv appreciate the benefit of giving and receiving feedback
- xv evaluate and reflect on their own practices and assumptions
- xvi work with and appraise new media
- xvii experiment with and challenge conventions of form and approach in full critical knowledge of these conventions
- xviii use high level information retrieval and analytical skills, including the ability to interpret, evaluate, synthesise and organise material, to formulate independent and critical judgements, creative solutions and articulate reasoned arguments
- xix edit the work of peers, and writing in different genres and for different media.

## **4 Learning, teaching and assessment**

### **Programme design and curricula**

4.1 A Creative Writing degree has the broad aims of encouraging creative innovation, curiosity, independent enquiry, contextual study, technical mastery, artistic maturity and professional preparation. Its curriculum may extend to include many different practices with the aim of inviting students to explore their creative potential, find inspiration in contemporary and canonical writing, and develop both specific and transferable technical skills.

### **Undergraduate programme design**

4.2 At undergraduate level, Creative Writing may be offered as a single honours subject, as an element in a joint or combined degree course, or as an individual module in another programme. As a single honours subject, Creative Writing may share modules with related subjects such as English, publishing, drama, film or creative studies.

4.3 A Creative Writing programme designed for undergraduates offers clear academic progression over three or four years of full-time study. Part-time study can be undertaken over a longer timespan, but has clear, progressive stages, equivalent to completed years of full time study. Programmes can be provided through face-to-face or distance learning methods or may be delivered by a combination of online and face-to-face teaching.

4.4 In the year in which this document was written (2014-15) Creative Writing was added to the A Level syllabus as an independent subject, although not all schools and colleges will offer it and some teachers will have little or no formal training in the subject. The first year of degree study may function as an introduction to the subject, including core writing skills, key learning strategies, observational methods, experimentation with language, encouragement to experiment with unfamiliar forms and approaches to the discipline, and encouragement to use their own direct experience as a source of writing. Since first year undergraduates may or may not have studied Creative Writing in school, this introductory year also aims to bring the whole cohort to a comparable level of subject knowledge and competence.

4.5 In subsequent years students are encouraged to extend their writing range and develop individual specialisms as both their practice and critical responses become increasingly sophisticated. The final undergraduate year is characterised by independent or self-directed work, providing a strong foundation for employment, for postgraduate study, and for continuing creative work in adult life: it normally includes a creative writing project of dissertation length accompanied by a critical/reflective commentary.

### **Creative Writing & research**

4.6 While original creative work is the essence of research in this practice-led subject, many students choose to contextualise their practice-based research by drawing on the discourses of related academic fields. It follows that the scope of programme design and curricula in Creative Writing may enable students to consider critical questions concerning artistic practice and the results of this practice; for example, structural or stylistic questions, questions of form and function or questions of authorship and reader-reception. Equally, Creative Writing research might be driven by thematic or subject-based ideas, concerns with cultural conditions, the psychology or emotive context of Creative Writing, or explorations of Creative Writing aesthetics. Some students might be interested in the types of knowledge that Creative Writing entails and offers; others may have an interest in the audiences for creative writing, its distribution, or public reception.

## Professional preparation in Creative Writing

4.7 Given that writing incorporates a range of highly transferable skills, the award of a Creative Writing degree indicates a high degree of professional competence in its graduates. This may be extended in higher education by the teaching and learning developed in relation to or in collaboration with creative industries. The use of industry professionals as guest speakers, visiting lecturers or knowledge transfer associates ensures the contemporary relevance of such teaching. Such contact with the creative industries may be intensified by prizes, awards, bursaries or scholarships sponsored by employers.

A Creative Writing programme may include:

- study of the creative industries
- case studies of working writers and their writing practice
- work placements, internships, volunteering or shadowing exercises
- 'master classes' by industry professionals
- the production of marketing or employability materials such as portfolios (online or physical) writing anthologies, social media presentations or submission packages
- career planning
- outreach or community activities
- support and preparation for public competitions
- field trips to industry events.

## Learning

4.8 Creative Writing is a practice-based discipline in which the student is an active participant in their own learning. The developmental nature of Creative Writing requires teachers and teaching strategies that are informed and authoritative, grounded both in the practice of writing and the pedagogy of creative process.

4.9 Collaborative learning in writing workshops has come to play a central role in the discipline. Tutorials, lectures, seminars, master classes, project work and other teaching methods may also play a strong role.

## The Creative Writing Workshop

4.10 The writers' workshop has been widely adopted as a collaborative exercise that accelerates and consolidates student learning. In a writers' workshop the participants read and critically respond to each other's work, operating in a small group in which the role of the tutor is mainly to steer, inform and moderate discussion. The learning outcomes of a workshop broadly include technically improved writing, an expanded critical vocabulary and preparation for the drafting and editing work required of a professional writer.

4.11 The students' skill in judging work-in-progress is both a means and an end in itself. This may be assessed implicitly through participation in workshops and explicitly through the workshop's impact on critical judgement and emergent creative work. This may be displayed through the keeping of a learning journal, learning log, workshop diary and records of successive drafts (which may be submitted with the assignment).

## Workshop techniques

4.12 The workshop has developed in divergent ways and the term may include a range of educative methods. Within the basic framework of a small-group discussion, tutors may take different approaches. These include, but are not confined to:

- submissions that may be written or read aloud
- response to named or anonymous pieces
- written and/or spoken feedback
- annotation of submissions by participants
- writing tasks set by tutor in class then shared for comment
- writing tasks set by tutor in advance so that work is distributed and read beforehand for fuller comment in class
- the use of email, online forums or social media as modes of sharing work
- writing tasks set by students in class or in advance
- collaborative writing exercises in class or set in advance
- online/virtual workshopping
- role-play of specific industry-based situations: for example editorial or scripting meeting; pitching for publication
- site-specific tasks and exercises
- the acting or performance of pieces for comment
- analysis and discussion of set texts.

## Workshop size

4.13 The group size for effective workshops is critical. It must be large enough for a variety of viewpoints, perspectives and responses, but small enough for individuals to feel their work is properly addressed. The recommended size for undergraduate workshops is 15.

4.14 At undergraduate level there are strong arguments for the division of classes into smaller groups, which the tutor facilitates by visiting each in turn. Such a method encourages and facilitates a greater degree of autonomy and is more student-centred, both of which are essential building blocks to good workshop practice.

4.15 The atmosphere of a workshop should be nurturing and constructive, and it is the tutor's role to promote this. While it may be appropriate for either tutor or students to challenge a student or to express a strong view about their writing, it is important that this is done in a mature and professional way so that, when a student's work is critiqued by the group, they feel that the responses are to their work, not them personally.

4.16 To achieve good workshop practice tutors invite students to question and respect submissions as work in progress. Above all, criticism must be substantiated by close reference to the text. It may be useful to provide a formal structure for workshop sessions, particularly when group members do not already know each other. It may also be useful to compose guidelines or 'ground rules', so that there is clarity about acceptable and unacceptable modes of response. Where students require, it may be appropriate to seek professional guidance in moderating the sessions, to employ support staff or to use technological support systems.

## The role of the tutor

4.17 The role of the tutor ranges from impartial facilitator of peer response to engaged writing practitioner who can intervene in the production of the emergent text as well as model and coach productive styles of feedback. In all cases this demands a highly developed awareness of writing techniques and of group dynamics.

4.18 The principle at the heart of the workshop method is that of close attention to work-in-progress, calling on the participants' responses as readers and fellow writers. This not only awakens the writer to other possible readings of their work, but educates all participants in awareness of technical and aesthetic possibilities. Through this reflexive experience students learn the ability to offer practical insights to their fellow students.

4.19 The workshop is where the subject can be understood as the natural home for the nascent and unresolved, the hybrid and protean, the unpacking and repacking of formal complexities, dissents and subversions. The workshop process keeps the creative text in a ductile or provisional state and leaves its authors open to the possibilities of developmental change.

## Other teaching strategies

4.20 Creative writing is an outward facing discipline, which embraces a range of professional skills, and fosters many transferable skills. It therefore includes a spectrum of teaching methods and styles including:

- formal lectures, covering contextual/historical/cultural material, and technical aspects of writing
- seminar discussions
- individual or small-group tutorials
- intervention in students' work through annotation or online editing methods
- small group work, for close reading and editorial/peer feedback, planning discussions, and project work
- focus on technical skills, which may include use of screenwriting, editing, publishing or multimedia software, or the design and use of apps
- self-directed learning
- experiential learning such as fieldwork on location
- mentoring of projects and other work by industry specialists
- off campus visits - theatre, performance poetry, readings, talks, galleries or festivals
- online work, including forums, blogs and wikis.

In addition, talks or readings by guest speakers are often considered to be part of the teaching programme and students may be assessed by writing reviews or journal entries about the event(s).

## Drafting and revision

4.21 While the overall emphasis in composition is on originality and invention, this is supported by the process of drafting, redrafting and revision. Creative Writing courses are by definition writing-intensive, and they emphasise the development of successive drafts in response to feedback from peers and tutors.

4.22 Writing is rewriting: students are expected to develop the confidence to experiment, to take risks, and to learn from mistakes. They should be able to assess their own progress



in learning through a reflexive and reflective process. Creative Writing courses nurture the generation of diverse formal and imaginative possibilities and an understanding of how and why creative decisions are made.

## **Media**

4.23 Students may be encouraged to engage in creative work using online forums, social and interactive media and in virtual collaboration in multi-platform or cross-functional projects. In a rapidly changing technological environment in which employment opportunities exist, it is important that students have the opportunity to work and experiment in writing for new and still emerging media, including non-scripted forms.

## **The importance of reading**

4.24 The writing process is simultaneously one of creating and reading a text. Creative Writing students are required to read a wide range of texts: canonical works, the work of their peers, and, crucially, their own work. It is important that Creative Writing students are exposed to wide exemplary reading, as well as encouraged to develop as inquisitive, exploratory readers. They cultivate an awareness of different traditions and approaches to poetics, and are able to identify their own positions and preferences.

4.25 Reading lists consider students as global citizens and therefore are representative of diversity in culture and experience. Students read in many different media, from the newest to the most traditional, and teaching in Creative Writing provides the intellectual foundation which enables them to do so with insight and discrimination. Such broadening and deepening of perspectives is reflected in teaching and encouraged in the students' work.

## **Teaching in Creative Writing**

4.26 Creative Writing teaching is characterised and enriched by the inclusion of creative practitioners, scholars and industry professionals. Alongside the direct artistic and professional requirements of the subject, some lecturers may also specialise in cognate areas such as the pedagogy of creative writing, the relationship between writing and other creative arts, theories of literary production, writing and society, writing and culture or writing and well-being, while others may be seconded from the creative industries in knowledge transfer initiatives.

## **Assessment**

4.27 Learning in Creative Writing is supported by both ongoing and final forms of assessment.

### **Ongoing assessment**

4.28 Ongoing assessment is a central function of the iterative nature of the workshop process, which embraces both tutor feedback and peer assessment, as well as a growing ability to self-critique.

4.29 Ongoing assessment may also be delivered in formal feedback tutorials or indicative grading procedures. Creative Writing is characterised by its high level of feedback through workshops and individual attention, in written and in oral forms. There is a recognition that assessment is part of the learning process and that feedback is given regularly in order to further the student's development.

## Final assessment

4.30 Final assessment in a Creative Writing course is geared to the intended outcomes of each particular element or module. The learning outcomes and assessment criteria for each aspect of a Creative Writing degree are clearly articulated in programme documents available to students.

In some contexts students may devise their own assignments and assessment criteria in consultation with their tutor. Forms of submission may include:

- a novel extract, novella, or portfolio of stories or flash fiction
- a memoir or portfolio of life writing
- a portfolio of poetry on page, performance or digital media
- a film script or portfolio of short film scripts
- a play, libretto or portfolio of dramatic writing
- a portfolio of journalism or an individual journalistic assignment
- a blog, podcast, SMS drama or YouTube video, with or without related printed publications
- an industry-focused project such as a publishing, production, advertising or marketing exercise with evidence of audience engagement or client satisfaction
- a critical commentary, critical reflection or preface to the creative work discussing creative context, influences, and process. The critical, analytical element in a Creative Writing submission may take the form of a critical response, commentary, journal, account of poetics, self-reflective essay, literary criticism or critical preface, the use of self-reflective writing ensures that students engage in understanding the assessment process, which is designed to foster a 'deep learning' approach
- a multi-media project, produced alone or in collaboration with others
- a research portfolio including items such as location notes or interviews
- a step outline or planning document
- a professional submission package as defined by a literary agent, producer, publisher or scout
- a pitch for creative work or exercise in professional preparation such as a mock interview or funding application
- a journal of creative work, including sources, influences, revision and editing choices
- individual and group presentations, either formal or informal
- a collaborative project requiring the recognition and deployment of abilities such as effective team management, time management, team working, technical skill, project management and planning. Such projects might include making a film, publishing a magazine, setting up a website, organising an event, carrying out a substantial research project, or interaction with other cultural industries.

## Assessment criteria

4.31 Assessment criteria are clear, as itemised and transparent as possible, visible to students at all times, and addressed directly in feedback. Creative Writing students are often concerned that assessment criteria are flexible or subjective, and care is taken to demonstrate that a tutor's evaluation is based on agreed principles and reference points. In peer-reviews and in self-evaluations students use the same criteria, becoming familiar with and gaining confidence in the process. Briefs and rubrics are clear about what is required and what is to be learned from each assignment.

4.32 Assessment criteria may be formalised for brevity. Typically they are designed to evaluate some or all of the following:

- originality
- imagination
- ambition
- maturity of style
- use of language
- technical mastery
- awareness of context and genre
- audience engagement
- research
- presentation
- response to brief.

Specific criteria may be appropriate, such as news value in journalism, pedagogical theory in teaching, and the observance of genre conventions or criteria specified in external briefs. Care is taken to specify these with as much precision as possible.

## 5 Benchmark standards

5.1 Typical honours graduates who have studied Creative Writing as a significant component of their degree will demonstrate:

- i a command of written and spoken language, including rules, conventions and the possibilities of experiment
- ii the ability to generate original creative work
- iii a grasp in practice and theory of techniques for writing, editing and rewriting in a range of forms, genres and media
- iv a creative and discriminating engagement with the expressive and imaginative powers of language
- v an independent and disciplined commitment to their own writing, and to its development
- vi an ability to read and respond critically and clearly to published work
- vii an ability to read and respond critically and practically to work in progress
- viii a reflective approach to the art and process of composition that understands it as capable of being explored, investigated and articulated
- ix an awareness of the historical and cultural dimensions of language use and literature, including developing media technologies
- x an understanding of writing as communication, with a variety of audiences, possible destinations and purposes, involving different priorities and skills
- xi an informed sense of the different routes to dissemination of creative work, both professional and informal
- xii the practice of engaging skillfully in groups and one-to-one in order to further the development of their own and others' work
- xiii an understanding of the transferability of the above to other contexts including employment.

### Excellent standard

5.2 Creative Writing graduates who attain an excellent standard will demonstrate to a higher standard the qualities listed above, creatively integrated and combined with independent enterprise and flair to produce work that is ambitious, markedly original in effect and searching in its enquiry.

### Threshold standard

5.3 Creative Writing graduates who attain a threshold standard will demonstrate an awareness and adequate grasp in practice of the qualities and skills defined above as typical, though their execution may be uneven or flawed.

## Appendix 1: Master's and Doctoral programme design

At master's level Creative Writing degrees share the aims of undergraduate programmes with the added expectation that graduates are prepared for a professional career as arts professionals or for progression to doctoral level study. Master's level programmes are typically taught over one year of full time study or two or more part-time. Successful distance-learning programmes engaging with new information technologies, online resources and dedicated blocks of study have been established at postgraduate and doctoral level. These developments have also led to 'hybrid' or flexible learning environments where students can modulate between different forms of study and support.

Master's level programmes may be modular, offering study in more than one writing form or genre, or focused on a single project such as a script or novel. They may also include modules with an academic focus and industry-oriented elements.

Some higher education providers extend their master's offer to include a Master's of Fine Arts programme, which specifically includes the study of Creative Writing pedagogy.

From the beginning of the 1990s British universities have awarded research degrees in Creative Writing, as either PhD or MPhil awards.

A doctoral thesis in Creative Writing typically consists of a complete creative work of 'publishable quality' and written to its natural length, accompanied by a critical thesis or exegesis relating to the genesis and execution of the creative work or to a related field of knowledge that is contiguous with or illuminates their creative work. Doctoral supervision may be by individual tutorials with or without the addition of a workshop programme or immersive residential experience. Research training programmes form an integral part of doctoral study. Full-time doctoral students are expected to complete within three to four years while six years is the norm for part-time students.

In postgraduate work as at undergraduate level, the responsive peer workshop continues to be a central experience, typically with smaller groups. Eight is an effective number for taught postgraduate courses, while at doctoral level workshops may comprise as few as two to four students, plus members of their supervisory team and visiting professionals.

## **Appendix 2: Membership of the benchmarking group for the Subject Benchmark Statement for Creative Writing (2015)**

Helena Blakemore	University of East London
Celia Brayfield	Brunel University
Patricia Debney	University of Kent
Professor David Duff	University of Aberdeen
Dr Bernardine Evaristo	Brunel University
Dr Nicole King	University of Reading
Professor Philip Gross (co-Chair)	University of South Wales
Professor Robert Hampson	Royal Holloway University
Andrea Holland	University of East Anglia
Dr Kym Martindale	Falmouth University
Professor Alison MacLeod	University of Chichester
Professor Steve May (co-Chair)	Bath Spa University
John McAuliffe	University of Manchester
Professor Graham Mort	Lancaster University
Paul Munden	National Association of Writers in Education
Dr Derek Neale	The Open University
Jackie Pieterick	University of Wolverhampton
Richard Stockwell	Northumbria University
Shelagh Weeks	Cardiff University
Dr Catherine Kerfoot	Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education
Dan Murch	Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education

### **Employer representative**

Chris Gribble	Writers' Centre Norwich
---------------	-------------------------

QAA1321 - Sept 2015

© The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education 2015  
Southgate House, Southgate Street, Gloucester GL1 1UB

Tel: 01452 557 000  
Email: [enquiries@qaa.ac.uk](mailto:enquiries@qaa.ac.uk)  
Website: [www.qaa.ac.uk](http://www.qaa.ac.uk)

Registered charity numbers 1062746 and SC037786