

A Writing Chance: adjusting the lens on social class and diversity in the UK publishing industry

Abstract

A Writing Chance was launched in June 2021 as a new talent development programme open to new and aspiring writers from under-represented backgrounds. The programme aimed to offer a positive intervention, designed to discover new talent, support new writers from under-represented backgrounds to break into the UK creative industries, and empower UK publishers and editors to represent a broader range of perspectives in commercial outputs. Levering resources, experiences and capacity, the programme mobilised a new model of partnership working to explore what happens when cross-sector organisations come together to tackle a shared challenge. This article explores the origin story of the programme, its activities and impacts from launch to publication, and offers recommendations on how we can take the legacies of this work forwards to offer others the writing chance that is needed now more than ever in a post-pandemic world.

A Writing Chance was launched in June 2021 as a new talent development programme open to new and aspiring writers from under-represented backgrounds. The programme aimed to offer a positive intervention, designed to discover new talent, support new writers from under-represented backgrounds to break into the creative industries, and empower publishers and editors to make space for a broader range of perspectives. Levering resources, experiences and capacity, it mobilised a new model of partnership working to find out what happens when different organisations come together to tackle a shared challenge. This article explores the origin story of the programme, its activities and impacts from launch

to publication, and offers recommendations on how we can take the legacies of this work forwards to offer others the writing chance that is needed now more than ever in a post-pandemic world.

The 'Value' of Diversity

There remains a dearth of diversity across protected characteristics including race, gender and disability in UK publishing. Social class, although not a protected characteristic by law, also presents a long-term challenge for representation in the sector. The issue of who gets to write in the UK press and which perspectives and voices are heard has been highlighted by numerous industry, government and charity commissions across the last two decades with specific reference to intersectional characteristics. A Women in Journalism (WiJ) report in 2020 highlighted a lack of diversity when it comes to both the journalists and experts featured in newspapers, radio and television prime-time news programmes in the UK, it has been reported: “The media becomes a distorting lens not a reflective mirror when the media teams who cover stories do not reflect the diverse make-up of our society. It is time for decisive change” (Mills 2020). Most of the UK’s national news media organisations are based in London. Most of the UK population is not. The ‘Regional Accents Report’ (2022) recently examined the impact that regional UK accents have on individuals within the UK publishing industry. Positioning ‘Accentism’ as the ‘unfair behaviour based on an individual's accent or language use’ it found that 88.1% of respondents felt that there needs to be better representation of different backgrounds and more open attitudes to accents in the industry.

As former Head of Media for Guardian News and Media, academic and journalist Jane Martinson argues, that “it is often said that the British media industry is pale, male and stale; but it’s probably fairer to call it pale, male and posh. the media industry needs to look outside the white male able-bodied elite to others who want to speak truth to power. Without that, it could so easily become an industry just speaking to itself” (Martinson 2018). Former social-

mobility tsar Alan Milburn's State of the Nation report found that only 11% of journalists were from working-class backgrounds, compared to 60% of the population. A report by The Sutton Trust in 2016 found that more than half of the country's top journalists had gone to private school, and 80% of editors in top jobs came from private or grammars schools (Kirby 2016).

In 2017, Sky News' Lewis Goddall published a blog post that caused a social media storm. In it he wrote from his own perspective as a working class entrant to journalism and reflected on why diversity is about more than just what you see. He argued that "the pay gap is bad – but its class gap is worse [...] it's in journalism where the problem is most egregious. The injustice is pretty overwhelming. Because class matters in journalism [...] We journalists are the ones who day after day, are supposed to reflect Britain unto itself. We're supposed to be the ones who find and tell the stories that matter to our audiences, and for the BBC, all of its licence fee payers. How are we supposed to do that if we are drawn from an increasingly narrow social caste?" (Goddall 2017).

The last two decades have witnessed major changes in the way society treats disabled people and the rights and expectations disabled people can have of employers. Yet there remains a poverty of opportunity and visibility for disabled entrants to UK journalism today. The 2010 Single Equality Act positioned disability as an equality issue. While there has been a significant increase in reporting on disability in UK journalism in recent years, there remains a recognised shortage of disabled journalists in the industry (Philo et al 2011). The NUJ suggests that "disabled members in the media industry are overwhelmingly concentrated in the lowest-paying, low-status or freelance jobs. This makes it particularly difficult for them to get time off to attend meetings or to afford the related costs that disability can bring" (Galpin 2016). This has broader implications for public perceptions, education and the visibility of disability across UK society.

The 2019-21 Lord Select Committee Report 'Breaking News? The Future of UK Journalism' (UK Parliament 2020) encourages pluralism and advocates for the broad benefits of focussing on enhanced diversity in UK journalism. The report argues that, "equality of opportunity to enter journalism is not only a question of fairness: it is also crucial for their output that newsrooms benefit from a diversity of views and perspectives. This should be a natural result of different backgrounds and life experiences being represented in the newsroom, so long as newsrooms create and maintain a pluralistic culture [...] Improving the job prospects of those from traditionally underrepresented backgrounds who aspire to go into journalism is important to building confidence in the media". Several of the report recommendations stipulate changes in journalism that are designed to enhance diversity and promote economic growth across the regions and nations.

The recommendations state that "news organisations which have launched 'engaged journalism' schemes to build relationships with the communities they serve should be commended, as should those which have increased transparency by explaining their journalistic processes in innovative ways. We believe that an important way to serve communities better is by ensuring that newsrooms are representative of their audiences." The report positions the spill-over benefits of greater diversity in UK journalism as part of the government's 'levelling up' agenda in profiling the UK regions and nations and targets more inclusive reporting as a potential means of addressing a perceived loss of faith in the mainstream media in the wider fight against 'fake news' and 'disinformation'. The report concludes with a series of advisories to the industry to take action and address diversity and access as a priority.

The publishing industry also responded to this context. initiatives that aim to address identified barriers to access and opportunity including the BBC 50:50 Equality Project, the Media Foundation Placement Scheme, ITV Enabling Talent, Channel 4 Diversity Training Scheme, the Journalism Diversity Fund and the Journalists Charity. In 2021 Bloomberg

launched its global Journalism Diversity Program in the UK “Journalism is about who is asking the questions,” said Matt Winkler, Editor-in-Chief Emeritus of Bloomberg News. “We also know that if everyone asking the questions looks alike and sounds alike, there is little chance of explaining the world as it really is”. Bloomberg is committed to diversity in the newsroom, at every level in its workforce, and in its content. In 2018, Bloomberg launched the New Voices initiative to increase the representation of women and minority executives as sources in both online and on-air content. The program initially began with the establishment of a definitive global list of female experts in finance and business, a system to track diverse sourcing, and the funding of media training for top women executives in global cities. In 2020, the program expanded to include a cohort of Black executives of all gender identities and in 2021, it will expand to include a cohort of Latinx executives of all gender identities. *The Sun* newspaper also partnered with News Associates, a UK journalism school, to launch a trainee scheme to increase the diversity of its newsroom. *The Sun* editor-in-chief Tony Gallagher said: “The Sun is Britain’s biggest news brand and it is vital we create opportunities for aspiring journalists from every part of society. Increasing diversity in our newsrooms is a challenge for the entire industry, and, as the people’s paper, *The Sun* should reflect the people. Good jobs in journalism should be available to all with talent, no matter what their background.”

The number of working journalists in the UK has gradually increased over the last three years to nearly 100,000, according to analysis of the Office of National Statistics Labour Force Survey. But while the UK journalism workforce is growing, the pervasive problem of a lack of diversity in UK journalists is not going away. In 2020, MP Marsha de Cordova MP closed her speech on media diversity to the House of Commons with the claim that “Without a diverse workforce made up of every part of our society – without reporters with an understanding of, say, Bristol and Birmingham, and without executives from Oxtun as well as Oxbridge – the media will always fail to speak for us all. It is time for real action and time for real change so that our media is by us, for us and about us.” Dorothy Byrne, Head of

News and Current Affairs of Channel Four, told a seminar in the same year at the Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism that ‘if you yourselves are not representative of your audience or your readers, then you cannot understand and represent their interests. As society changes, if you don’t change with it, you will lose viewers, listeners and readers... If you change you who defines the news agenda, you change the agenda.’ Josie Dobrin, cofounder of Creative Access, also revealed to a BBC inquiry that "the obstacles faced by aspiring journalists from minority and working class backgrounds - such as unpaid internships, unfamiliar cultural codes, and a lack of senior role models. Of all the creative industries [...] the press is one of the slowest when it comes to diversifying the workforce" (Muir 2017).

A Writing Chance

A Writing Chance opened in February 2021 to new and aspiring storytellers from under-represented backgrounds. We sought fresh perspectives and great stories from people whose voices have historically not been heard in publishing and the media. The programme was inspired by the *Common People* (2018) project that sought to launch a new anthology of writing with the aim of amplifying new working class voices in the UK literary industry. One of the recommendations of the project was for further work to be undertaken to tackle the identified disparity of representation for working class writers in the UK. The challenge united a diverse range of organisations who seek to promote inclusion in the UK creative industries and who share an interest in shaping new policy to tackle the pervasive problem in the future. The programme offered participants bursaries of £1,500, one-to-one mentoring with industry leaders, publication or broadcast of their work and training opportunities.

This UK-wide project was co-funded by Michael Sheen and the Joseph Rowntree Foundation and supported by media partners New Statesman and Daily Mirror. The project was delivered by New Writing North and literature organisations nationally, with research funding provided from [blind redacted at journal request] University.

A Writing Chance was devised and governed by a cross-sector steering committee of representatives from the partner funders and supporters including academics from [blind redacted at journal request] University UK, literature development organisation New Writing North, third sector social think tank Joseph Rowntree Foundation, media partners The New Statesman and Mirror group and social activist, philanthropist and actor Michael Sheen. This cross-sector model of working offered a rare opportunity to explore what new ways of working might prove effective in tackling the identified challenge of diversity. The programme steering committee developed the concept of A Writing Chance, generated agreements and project plans, and led on the governance and evaluation of the programme from March 2020 to October 2021.

A Writing Chance launched its search for new under-represented writing talent in June 2021. The initial launch was explicitly conducted without mention of major project sponsor and partner Michael Sheen to ensure that applicants submitted expressions of interest based on the aims of the programme rather than the celebrity supporters involved in its inception. The launch was shared via the online networks of the steering organisations and associated industries and amplified through two pieces of journalism published in the Daily Mirror and on the New Writing North website that offered personal reflections from industry experts on why writers should consider taking part.

The 30 shortlisted writers were asked to respond to three additional questions about their aspirations for the programme and their writing. They were also asked to produce another piece of writing - for which they were each paid a set fee. The shortlisting panel read the 30 new pieces of writing and comprised a range of representatives from the programme steering committee organisations, the UK regional writing development agencies, and invited freelance writers and journalists. Together, they read 30 pieces of new writing and generated a shortlist of 11 participants who would be offered a place on A Writing Chance.

All entrants to A Writing Chance were asked to respond to ten questions that captured key demographic data relating to identity, identified barriers to access and intersectional issues. This data was evaluated to generate new understanding about who applied to the programme, why and what they wanted to achieve from taking part. In total the programme call generated 744 entries from which a shortlist of 30 was chosen.

The demographics of nationwide applicants were very different to those usually seen in diversity schemes. 57% of submissions were from people aged 34 and under and 18% of applicants claimed that their identity is different to the sex they were assumed to be at birth. 56% of applicants identified as White British or White English and 31% as Non-British or Other.¹ Significantly, 51% self-described themselves as having a disability and 21% of applicants reported more than one disability and/or health condition[s].² In terms of their lived experiences of barriers to diversity in writing and publishing, 95% of applicants believed there are barriers to them entering the UK media and publishing sectors today as a result of their personal demographics, the geography of opportunity and the perceived insecurity and closed networks of writing as a career choice. As one applicant stated, “Working-class kids get hobbled by expectations: Learn plumbing; writing is not for my kind. You have to think practically/financially when trying to choose a career path when coming from a low/unstable income household. This excludes things like writing.” Others pointed to infrastructural disadvantage in the nations and regions as a major barrier to access: “I live in a northern town in the UK that is underfunded and where very few people seek education, so there is little scope for writing spaces. Half of our library has been converted into council offices and our newspaper headquarters have been shut down - I feel this says a lot about how much

¹ Including: Black Guyanese and Serbian, unknown as a result of adoption and care leaver, Iranian, Mexican, Maltese, Indo Caribbean, Central American, Belgian, Kurdish, Romanian, Portuguese, Scandinavian, German, Mauritian, Ashkenazi Ethnic Jewish, Latvian, Native American, East European, Polish, Persian, Vietnamese, Pacific Islander, Australian, South African, Bulgarian, Hungarian, Korean, Turkish, Swedish, Armenian.

² Cited conditions included: Dysxia, ADHD, Autism, Cancer, Epilepsy, Asperger's, PTSD, Tourette's, chronic pain, Parkinson's, Chronic Fatigue Syndrome, Anxiety, Neurodiversity, Stroke, OCD, Ehlers Danlos Syndrome, IBS, Carpal Tunnel Syndrome.

writing is valued. As a working class writer earning a living has to come first, that leaves little time to develop my craft.”

New Writing North notified the successful 11 writers of their place on the programme in May 2021. Working with Professor Shaw, New Writing North staff held meetings with all the participants via Zoom and telephone prior to the launch to induct them into the project, the research and evaluation aims, and to find out more about their individual needs and their ambitions. Part of this activity was readying the writers for the media launch and the attention and engagement with the press that could follow. A Writing Chance launched its shortlist of 11 writers with a co-ordinated media campaign supported by CLD Communications Ltd, Sofia Lewis and the PR teams across the steering committee organisations. This functioned to amplify the reach of launch activities and with Michael Sheen as the advocate for the programme, the media attention was significant and the programme was profiled with interviews on Channel 4 News, ITV, The Bookseller, the Daily Mail and the Mirror.³

Channel 4 News anchor Jon Snow sparked a subsequent debate that ran into the newspapers the next day with his observation that the programme was needed because ‘the diversity of writing has actually shrunk [...] there are people who have all the talent to write but haven’t had the chance’. ITV presenter Lorraine Kelly also offered a platform for promoting the programme saying ‘I can’t tell you how fantastic this is. AWC will give people

³ Channel 4: <https://www.channel4.com/news/michael-sheen-backs-working-class-writers-in-creative-industries>

The Bookseller: <https://www.thebookseller.com/news/michael-sheen-calls-greater-inclusivity-media-support-11-new-writers-announced-1266470>

Mirror: <https://www.mirror.co.uk/3am/celebrity-news/michael-sheen-fronts-inspiring-project-24415735>

Daily Mail: <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/tvshowbiz/article-9736461/Michael-Sheen-reflects-rough-experience-Covid-19.html>

New Statesman: <https://www.newstatesman.com/culture/music-theatre/2021/06/michael-sheen-why-creative-industries-need-do-more-offer-others>

ITV: <https://www.itv.com/news/wales/2021-07-04/michael-sheen-starts-new-creative-arts-scheme-to-help-people-from-working-class-backgrounds-break-into-the-industry>

who wouldn't normally get a chance to be the best they can be. It's a great idea. I feel very strongly about this. I'm from a working class background and I don't think that somebody like me, right now, would have the opportunities that I had. I had mentors, I had a chance, I really did, so that's why now what AWC is doing is so important'.

A landing page for the project was launched on the day of the PR announcements. The page carried introductory information about the programme, articles by some of the steering committee, free resources for new writers and a special ten-week course for underrepresented writers, *The Writer's Plan*. The website also featured an 'invitation to industry' portal as a gateway for capturing the contact details of professionals who identify that they would like to be involved by sharing industry knowledge, meeting or working with participants, receiving this report, becoming involved with future projects of this kind or discussing new ways of collaborating.

A free online access event was provided for all 744 entrants to A Writing Chance in recognition of the efforts involved in participating in the recruitment and selection process. Hosted by Michael Sheen, the event was broadcast live and was also recorded to ensure asynchronous delivery to participants who could not attend on the day. Hosted by Michael Sheen, the event included talks and a question and answer session with a panel of industry experts. The panel spoke about their experiences of entering the writing profession from non-traditional backgrounds and answered audience questions about how to access and achieve success in the industry. A chat window operated throughout the workshop and enabled audience members to ask questions of the panel, to share resources and opportunities with others and to forge new connections with other writers up and down the country. Audience responses praised the access event for offering 'a huge amount of information and encouragement'. Following the access event, over 500 people signed up to the free online writing course on the A Writing Chance website.

An important element of A Writing Chance was the provision of a mentor to each participant writer. The mentor worked with their writer to develop their work for publication at the end of the programme, but also functioned as a source of advice, guidance and contacts. The mentors were all volunteers who self-selected from project partners but also from across the industry. They were matched with writers based on the initial application data and engaged in mentoring online for six months. All mentors took part in a mentor training session led by New Writing North and were allocated a mentor handbook to provide a background to models of mentoring in the creative industries. The mentor training session outlined the basic requirements of the role and asked the mentors to consider programme timelines, how to structure meetings and how to provide effective feedback. Special focus was given to facilitating digital online mentoring and how to replicate the personal benefits of mentoring remotely.

Evaluating Change-Making

Evaluation is important as a tool to understand why and how programmes are having an impact, the pathways to that impact, and to understand which aspects of a programme are more or less effective. Building evaluation into the programme from the initial applicant stage meant that it was never too early to start learning lessons in A Writing Chance. The evaluation aimed to capture observed outcomes, to assess how much of any observed change in outcomes could be attributed to the programme and to measure how changes varied across the cohort of participants. Evaluation was especially important in assessing the efficiency and efficacy of A Writing Chance as an experimental pilot project. There was an identified need to understand of how the programme functioned – both in terms of effectiveness in delivering intervention, the eventual impacts of those interventions – in order to inform strategic decision-making, resource allocation and policy making for the future.

A Writing Chance aims to emphasise the importance of lived experience and how this shapes the subject and practice of writing. The aims of the evaluation and impact strategy were to measure changes to the participating writers' identification of, perspectives on and experiences of barriers for accessing careers in media writing and their knowledge, understanding of how the industry works and professional skills and awareness. It also sought to learn more about the power of peer relationships and writing practice in developing confidence, ambition and profile and to measure the writers' understanding of the marketplace for media writing in the UK today.

The programme adopted a hybrid evaluation strategy and timeline for participant engagement. This model is aligned with the iterative and responsive nature of the project activities and enabled the research to deep-dive, rather than anticipate, emergent issues based on the evidence returned at each stage of the development programme. This research model also provided capacity to explore fully a theory of change. By capturing baseline, intermediate and final positional knowledge in relation to the writers and to the industry professional who took part, the programme could identify key areas for policy formation and recommendations. The evaluation aimed to identify future needs and potential solutions, to share models of good practice that could be replicable elsewhere and to raise a debate on class and media writing. The developmental design and complementary mixed methodology of the evaluation strategy offered balance between the strengths and weakness of various approaches to ensure research rigour. The mixed method of questionnaires and interviews, supplemented with reflective practice diaries and observation at Insight Days generated a large quantitative data set that informed a series of qualitative interviews.

100% of writer participants stated their confidence had increased significantly from the programme. From being chosen to take part and publicly announced as a new talent in writing, to being able to call themselves a writer and working with professionals in other

industries, writers report that their increased confidence directly resulting from has enabled them to pitch their work and to apply for other writing development opportunities and/or awards schemes. As one writers reflects, “I think AWC has had the biggest impact on my confidence in myself as a writer. I think that at times this is a somewhat tender confidence but I now see myself as a writer, something I would not have said out loud before.”

81% expressing A Writing Chance as a positive mentoring experience and 63% of writer participants said mentorship was the most beneficial aspect of the programme. The majority of writers expressed a desire for sustained relationships with their mentors and/or ‘remaining part of the NWN family’ so they could stay close to networks and professional opportunities, as well as more informal support and advice. Many also articulated the desire for an annual ‘reunion’ so the writers could maintain peer support and also ‘check in’ with NWN and the steering group partners to evaluate progress and reflect on the results of the intervention on a more long-term basis.

54% of writer participants said forming peer and professional contacts and networks was the most beneficial aspect of the programme and that this in many cases led to further writing work or opportunities. Peer networks and support facilitated by the programme created ‘cohort camaraderie’ in spite of the covid-context of delivery. Through a writers’ Whatsapp group and informal zoom meetings, the community created for the writers proved ‘invaluable’. As one writer states, “We are each other’s cheerleaders, commiserators and soundboards. We also share writing advice, resources and opportunities”. While the programme brought them together, the writers themselves co-created new virtual and blended spaces in which peer support and advice networks could thrive. Due to health contexts not all writers were safe to travel to in person events, but the majority of participants finally met for the first in Cardiff and then again at the House of Lords. The value of in-person encounters was also cited as being ‘extra special’ in the covid-delivery context.

Professional networks arising from the programme were also highly valued by writers. The profile of the programme coupled with opportunities for the publication and performance of their work created a 'sense of achievement' and 'access' as well as enhancing 'industry knowledge' so that writers could benefit from spill-over benefits including additional professional opportunities for representation, commission and pitching. The range of opportunities for publication on the programme also meant that many writers 'learned how to write content for diverse audiences across a range of forms' or 'take practical steps to move into a more creative space' and 'expand in the writing that I can do.'

100% of writers believe that the programme has created some degree of change of awareness and/or perception of working class writers in the industry. Although many acknowledge it is still 'early days', the writers acknowledge 'tangible progress' and credit the 'platform and credibility' provided by the programme for enabling them to gain 'respect from people in the industry which is so hard to come by usually'. Writers credited the involvement of 'respectable organizations (NWN, JRF) and publications (NS, Mirror) and advocates (like Michael) backing us" for opening doors and opportunities, as well as giving the writers confidence and permission to change perceptions and who writes and what working class writers can write about. The range of perspectives and subjects in the writers' published and performed work means that 'AWC has shown the diversity of voices of those who consider themselves to be working class. We are not a monolith and we do not all necessarily have the same perspectives or opinions on things'.

Despite their very different professional backgrounds, the mentors shared similar motivations in wanting to get involved and volunteer their time to the programme. Many reflected on how much pathways into the industry had changed since their own entry and their fears that they would struggle to gain access under contemporary conditions. A belief that 'giving back is the right thing to do' and the desire to 'share the opportunities afforded by our own back stories' were cited as motivating factors for taking part. Significantly, the

mentors also reported the importance and value of volunteering their time, rather than being 'told to take part' by their employer, or assigned to a mentee 'who I could not bring value to'. Despite 90% of those taking part having had some previous experience of mentoring, many mentors reported feeling 'apprehensive' or 'under-qualified' at the start of the programme. The appeal of a 'longer term relationship' with a mentee across the programme period along with the 'tailored training and support' provided to all mentors was identified as a 'key appeal' and a valued source of professional development.

Three quarters of mentors said mentorship was the most beneficial aspect of the programme. The mentoring process was of significant professional and personal value to both the writers and mentors taking part in AWC. For the mentors, the process gave them pause for reflection and enabled a critical distancing from their profession and practice. By giving the mentors space to question norms and become more aware of barriers within their own industry, the programme created a 'new awareness' of the lived reality of constraints that 'would otherwise just be overlooked'. For some, the mentoring process also 'helped with personal practice' and re-engaged them as writers and as editors through the feedback process.

The biggest challenge identified by mentors was that of 'time and capacity': all wanted to invest more time but found themselves at a particular point of being 'time poor and time pressured'. Mentors identified key challenges related to the specific covid context of delivery, including a lack of face to face contact with their mentee, the juggling work commitments, home schooling, illness and a mentee, and managing writers' expectations about availability and access. Some also worried about 'giving professional criticism without discouraging the mentee'. 90% of the mentors expressed a desire to mentor a future phase of the programme, with only 'time and job changes' preventing those who could not take part again.

100% of steering group members report that the greatest success of the programme was the partnership approach. By combining resources, networks, experience and ideas, the steering group brought together a diverse range of cross-sector leaders to create an intervention that was more than the sum of its parts, and far more than any of the member organisations could have achieved individually. By stepping up together to tackle a shared challenge, the steering group report that partnership working is '100% a model of success we would pursue in future'. Key successes of the programme identified by the steering group include the recruitment process that produced a more diverse demographic of entries, the mentors' personal relationships with writers that enabled responsiveness and appropriate support, and networking among mentors and writers that created sustainable peer connections and knowledge exchange relationships. Bringing every writer on the programme to a point of publication success and in some cases exceeding expectations of professional development in confidence and future trajectories was also cited by many steering group members as their 'recognised indicator of the success of the programme'.

Much like the mentors, the steering group felt that the greatest challenge of the programme was 'time and timelines' and 'capacity and communication'. The limitation of digital engagement meant that a planned 'residential at the start of the programme' to network writers and mentors and for them to meet the steering group could not take place, and remote working and limitations on travel conspired to produce a sense that the steering group was 'more remote than we originally intended to be, even though we made sure we were at every meeting and attended every possible physical event'. The high profile of the programme was also cited by many members of the steering group as both a curse and a blessing, with increased pressure, expectation and scrutiny but also additional opportunity to shine a spotlight on the issues being addressed.

100% expressed a desire to be part of the steering group for a future phase of the programme that could include 'partner organisations and mentors from different sectors' and

a 'variety of outputs' for the writers' work. The steering group felt that in order for the programme to expand in this way, 'a project manager' would be required to enhance communication with writers, mentors and partners and that this new role would offer another vital opportunity to grow talent from under-represented backgrounds in the Creative Industries and also grow capacity in leadership within this area. The group also felt that an expanded programme would enable 'more freelancers' to get involved in the mentoring process and also potentially as members of a future steering group.

Such a scale-up would require 'more investment in partnerships' that is 'long term' to enable strategy formation and in-cycle evaluation, and a recognition that the value of partnership working does not begin and end at the purely economic. The mutually beneficial and whole system value of engaging in the programme articulated by mentors and steering group members evidences a variety of unanticipated social, political, professional and financial impacts for participants that needs capturing and articulating to encourage others to come on board. As one steering board member argues, "there needs to be more investment in partnerships. This project has shown that there is a shared agenda amongst most creative industries organisations, third sector and private – to find the best writing by people from a rich diversity of backgrounds – but to do that systems need to change, that needs patience, iterative learning, relationship building often on an individual basis and all this needs coordinated investment."

As a result of taking part in the programme, the writers have achieved a range of professional successes including getting an agent and contracts for work, commissions and awards. The writers' work was also performed and published across the UK and distributed across the world as a result of a BBC Sounds global podcast series on BBC Sounds. From Margins to Mainstream aired in 2022 across 6 episodes with global distribution. The evaluation outcomes orientated towards policy recommendations aimed at actioning the research findings and changing the story about who gets to write in the UK today. These

recommendations used the new knowledge and understanding generated by A Writing Chance as a new evidence base to inform a new evidence base of decision making as well as a series of asks to key stakeholders and influencers.

Adjusting The Lens

Diversity is a powerful tool in creating social and civic cohesion. In a democratic country like the UK, people will only feel invested and recognised if they see their own story and hear their own voice in the representations offered to them. Unless our national story is told by a range of voices and perspectives from across the regions and nations, genders and races, classes and abilities, it can not be accurate, or fair. When people rarely get to see representations of themselves and their world in the media they consume they grow distrustful of the mainstream media. This research calls for UK Government to investigate the impact of digital change on diversity and not just the industry's finances and explore opportunities created by enhanced connectivity and barriers to access as part of future workforce planning.

Diversity in who writes and who get published can function to effectively bridge social and cultural divisions and representation highlights the influence, responsibility, and power of journalism in reporting diversity issues. Enhanced diversity in UK journalism has the potentially wide ranging benefits to multiple stakeholders - from addressing media stereotypes to achieving inclusive reporting and enabling representation of the social and cultural diversity of all UK audiences - enhanced diversity in UK writing and publishing is a good thing for everyone. A lack of diversity in these key UK creative industries matters because it has the potential to create a fundamental disconnect between expressed commitments to diversification by organisations and the lived experiences of those individuals consuming their journalistic output.

Communication scholarship broadly agrees that a “multiperspectival” press – a press that guarantees access to diverse sectors of society, allowing the presentation of diverse perspectives on a certain issue (Gans 1979, 2011) – is possible only if journalism fosters diversity in its content creators (Baker 2002; Napoli 1999). Content diversity is ultimately an indicator of quality in journalism (Choi 2009) and for this reason assessing diversity levels and identifying barriers and solutions to access are crucial. Unless the journalism industry takes decisive action to enhance the diversity of journalists today, it runs the real risk of losing touch with the increasingly diverse society of the UK today.

Diversity is an investment, not a gesture. There is a clear economic argument for full representation. On a deeper level, the value of diversity to industry is to deepen coverage and, in capturing range of perspectives, including those across the broad spectrum of social classes operative in the UK today, show how organisations can remain relevant and grow audiences. The value in gaining access to stories that would otherwise be missed means that diversity is not just about social justice and ethical obligation but also fundamentally about talent management. Organisations should avoid approaching inclusion from a market-driven rather than an ethical position. Diversifying content and staff can sometimes be perceived as a strategic method of growing audiences rather than a targeted attempt to engage in meaningful EDI. Equally, segregating a special characteristic as a recruitment target can lead to those individuals feeling ‘tokenised’ and the value of diversity as primarily attached to serving a specific challenge, rather than deemed integral to the functioning of an organisation. Hyper-visibility - when an organisation focuses intense profile on the few diverse members of staff as exemplified - can amplify the burden of representation for these individuals.

Cross-Sector Partnerships create culture change. A Writing Chance was the product of a new knowledge exchange collaboration that would not have been possible under existing funding schemes. The partners came together to address a shared challenges for mutual

benefit, leveraging their resource to create wider impacts. In doing so, the partners were able to benefit from the sharing of best practice and to build new relationships and awareness across sectors. This new model of partnership working demonstrated how it is possible to build the capacity of local and international actors by facilitating the development of a better understanding of industry dynamics and by building the resilience of actors for future crisis and shocks. By promoting a collaborative approach between and among aid actors, local to national governance stakeholders, the private sector and marginalised group, *A Writing Chance* shows how cross-sector partnership working can improve the inclusiveness, effectiveness and quality of intervention delivery.

Talent is everywhere, but opportunity is not. Where opportunities do appear, they are often hard to find and come and go quickly. The challenge of diversifying the workforce and gatekeepers of the UK creative industries proliferates across government departments and interventions run the risk of short-termism and double-doing as a result. Representation matters. The media frames how we think and feel about ourselves and the world around us. The best writing shows us who we are by shining a torch on untold stories and experiences, illuminating truths and bringing injustices and structural inequalities into the light. This research suggests that the people writing and setting the agenda do so through a relatively narrow prism of experience and that many alternative narratives and perspectives are out there waiting to be told, if only they can find a way in and their social and economic value to publishing is recognised and rewarded.

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