

The Reinvention Centre Student Small Grants Fund

Evaluation Report for: *Broadcast New Warwick Writing*.

Jane Commane

Experience

Gaining practical, hands-on experience of the publishing and literary industries through involvement in the project, as well as learning to work as a team and learning how to co-ordinate a project of this scale.

Confidence

Facilitating new writers with experiences that will increase their confidence and encourage a continuation of their skills. Providing a platform for their work, raising both their own profile and that of the University programme from which they originate

Research

Providing an extension of student learning by putting into practice what is learnt in Writing seminars about publishing and the literary marketplace and providing an opportunity to undertake active research within the literary environment.

Summary

Broadcast: New Warwick Writing was launched on October 19th 2006 following six months of work towards its creation. Six MA writing students worked alongside their tutors in the department, their publishers, Heaventree and their fund providers the Reinvention Centre. The result was a 70-page book, containing a selection of prose and poetry that aims to represent the quality and originality of work being produced by students on the Warwick Writing Programme.

This evaluation report will document the project at each step of its progress, and includes a short review, offering evaluations and recommendations, at the end of each section.

Initial Stages: the project begins.

The project got underway during the spring term when the six MA Writing students decided to publish an anthology of their work. We began with several meetings with Michael Hulse then proceeded to search for funding. We tried the Retired Staff Association Fund, the Lord Rootes fund and the WGA fund, but found that the deadline had passed for all these sources of funding. I got in touch with the students union, and their president, Brian Duggan kindly put us in touch with the Reinvention Centre. I had a meeting with Mike Neary of the Reinvention Centre, where I briefly sketched out the plan for the anthology. Mike Neary told me how we could apply for funding and how much we may be eligible for. He emphasised that the money would be given with the intention of being a catalyst, that would create a project with a longer-term impact for future students, and I agreed to continue working to make sure new students could become involved.

Meanwhile, the plan for the anthology took shape. We approached Jon Morley at Heaventree to explain the project with a view to Heaventree publishing the completed anthology. Jon offered assistance and asked to see examples of work from all of us.

We decided to limit the anthology to MA students only, after deliberating over running a competition for undergraduate work. Michael Hulse suggested we approach Jeremy Treglown to be editor of the anthology.

Evaluation:

The project should really have begun earlier in order to allow us to have more time in which to find funding and plan the project. Time constraints meant undergraduates were not included – but this should definitely be part of any future project.

The Next stage: project underway.

Further meetings were held between Jon Morley, Michael Hulse, Mike Neary and ourselves. A proposal for funding was drawn up, which the Reinvention Centre accepted, for a total of £1,500. In the proposal, costs were detailed for each aspect of the project, including publication, promotion and the launch night costs. On Mike Neary's suggestion, it was decided to abandon the idea of a launch in London, partly because of the costs but also because it was felt that a Coventry launch would help to raise the profile of the city and the local area, as well as the university itself.

Jon Morley approved the work and came to meet all the MA students. We discussed, with Michael Hulse also, the future trajectory of the project, the present funding situation and how the sales of the anthology could fund another project. We also discussed Jeremy's role as editor, and how work would be selected. It was decided that all work should be submitted anonymously to him so he was enabled to make decisions without any knowledge of who had written what. Mike Neary had already suggested ideas about collaboration, and mentioned that we should consider the appearance and presentation of the work. I contacted Coventry Art student, Claire King, after seeing her work at the degree show, and commissioned her to produce our cover artwork and presentational concept.

We continued to work on the project, and over Easter, we all submitted our work to Jeremy Treglown. Everybody submitted a minimum of two alternative pieces of work so that he would have a good range of work to choose from. I met with Claire King, presenting her with the titles we had so far (First Transmission and Broadcast) and we discussed the type and style of artwork we wanted, so that she was able to produce some prototypes. I also met with Jon to discuss the timescale and to confirm dates for the work experience for the project.

After the return of the manuscripts in the summer term, the students made the necessary corrections to the work. Clare King returned with a finalised idea for the cover, which we approved. Further meetings followed, between Mike Neary, Jon Morley, Michael Hulse and the students. A date, in early October, was set for the launch after we decided that there would not be enough time to launch before the end of summer term, which provided some breathing space. Unfortunately, time constraints for Heaventree and the fact they were in the process of moving offices, meant that we were not able to complete our work experience there until early August.

During work experience, Heaventree encountered some IT problems (namely faults with their Internet, meaning it took some time to set up the necessary desktop publishing programmes). However, work experience was completed and the work was proof read by several people, we all learned how the work would be typeset using Quark, and were involved in making decisions about the layout.

Evaluation: In future, the project should set a firm timetable for production and try to stick to it. This timeline should also be discussed widely with all parties involved, so

that any problems, such as those caused by Heaventree's move, can be ironed out before they can cause disruption. Equally, a deadline should be set in advance that is both realistic and suitable for all parties, as it would give the project a better sense of trajectory for the participants to aim for.

The Final Stage: Printing and the Launch Night

After discussions with our printers, Anthony Rowe, we finalised the price and style of the book and came to an agreement with them about the paper and length of the book. Meanwhile, the launch date had been finalised as the 19th October, in order to allow us to promote the launch to new Warwick students and secure their involvement.

Finding a launch venue did prove problematic. We did attempt to secure the Herbert Art Gallery in Coventry as a launch venue, but found both the price and their slow response an issue. After speaking to Mike Neary at the Reinvention Centre we were kindly offered the brand-new Reinvention Centre room at Westwood as a venue. Using Claire King's designs, promotional materials were printed at Heaventree, including posters and invites. Using the Writers Yearbook, a database of targeted parties (including media, literary agents, literary magazines, small presses etc) was drawn up. A mass mail-out of invites followed – over 150 invites were sent out six weeks before the launch. The response was slow to start with – many of those who replied simply could not make the Coventry launch. However, many literary agents did voice an interest, and one in particular, from Caroline Sheldon Literary Agents, showed a great deal of support.

In the mean time, preparations for the launch fell into place as the date drew closer. We decided that music, wine and food would create a relaxing and enjoyable atmosphere for the night. From personal recommendations, I approached Manos Puestas to provide music and found a reputable supplier for our buffet. We purchased the wine and drinks ourselves to minimise costs. We decided to hold readings from the book on the night, from each of the writers involved. Unfortunately, two of the MA Writing group were not able to attend the launch. Michael Hulse and Maureen Freely kindly volunteered to step in and read from their work. A press release was also drawn up and sent to various media outlets to promote the launch.

During the week of the launch, the final flyers were handed out in order to encourage Warwick students to attend. The finished books arrived from the printers in time at Heaventree's offices. I called BBC Coventry and Warwickshire and was able to secure a live radio interview for their evening show on the night of the launch. We also arranged an interview and photo shoot with the Coventry Evening Telegraph, but they were unable to make the agreed time and were not able to run the feature. On the night itself, the group met on campus and attended a reading in the Chaplaincy to promote the event. We then went around the campus to put up signposts for the venue. Then, we went to the room, got it set up for the readings and managed the arrival of wine, food and musicians.

At 7.30pm, the evening kicked off with music, followed by the six readings and then the buffet and wine, finally rounding off at 9pm. Though it was a very hectic and demanding evening, it was a reasonably well attended by various writers, tutors, students and a literary agent. We all had some excellent feedback, made good contacts with people on the literary scene, and met new students who were interested in being part of the project next time.

Evaluation: In hindsight, I would recommend that we should have taken more time to signpost the event and provide guidance to visitors, as some guests were unable to find the building or had difficulties in accessing it. It think we also should have allowed ourselves more time, and divided up duties more effectively between members of the group before the night of the launch, so there would be no confusion over who was responsible for what.

Outcomes:

Broadcast sold around 100 copies since its launch and around 50 complimentary copies were also sent out to the media, other University-based Writing courses, literary magazines and various literary agents. I had great feedback from many who attended the launch and some great comments of support and appreciation from those who purchased the book.

Since the launch, one member of the group has received interest from a literary agent who wanted to know more about the novel she was writing. Since then, the writer has now sent off the first three chapters, which were approved by the agent, and is working closely with them to develop a deal.

Other members are still writing and working on pieces of long fiction or collections of poetry. I have received enquiries from several agents about the project and I am now working on the second volume of Broadcast with this year's editor, David Dabydeen, to ensure that this precedent for publishing is continued at Warwick. This time, we will be including the work of a wider selection of student writers, regardless of their course of study. I am currently working with a team of twelve undergraduate and postgraduate students who are interested in being part of the project and helping to co-ordinate its production. The money raised from sales of the first Broadcast will be ploughed back in to the project to help make publication possible again. We also be working with Coventry's Heaventree Press again and seeking to capitalise upon the success of the first anthology. We aim to build a reputation for new Writing at Warwick, and to create a University anthology with a difference – a project that is entirely student-motivated that aims to provide a platform for grass roots literature.