

“Lacuna Magazine: A Writing Wrongs Project”.

IATL staff funding strategic project granted July 2014

INTERIM REPORT

Introduction

Lacuna is an on-line multimedia magazine that curates and displays innovative content relating to the study and promotion of human rights (see www.lacuna.org.uk). It was established by the Centre for Human Rights in Practice in order to provide a forum for encouraging and developing creative methods of knowledge dissemination. It commissions and publishes the highest quality writing/expression on human rights related topics and includes fiction, non-fiction, reports, videos and other content.

The project engages students, staff and a range of communities beyond the university to participate in a completely new way of thinking, learning, and writing about human rights. It provides a platform for students to engage with staff, human rights practitioners, campaigners, civil society groups, artists and others in a completely different and radically more empowering way.

The successful construction and launch of Lacuna was funded in part by an IATL award in 2013. As a result of this achievement significant opportunities for developing the Writing Wrongs and Lacuna project materialised. New funding was then sought and granted from IATL in the sum of £19,560.13.

The Project aims to introduce a new strategy to complement Lacuna by:

- (a) enhancing the Warwick student engagement across disciplines
- (b) develop student skills of writing and multi-media production of the highest quality
- (c) expand student engagement at an international level
- (d) improve student employability through direct experience and learning

This interim report charts the achievements in each of these areas over the first 6 months of the project.

1. Enhancing the Warwick student engagement across disciplines

A ‘Lacuna Association’ has been established run by students for students. All levels of study are represented both postgraduate and undergraduate. Seven students from Politics, English, and Law have been appointed to develop the association with a view to developing content of the magazine and assisting in its promotion across the university and the wider community. Between them they have brought organisational, networking and creative skills to bear for the benefit of contributors and the magazine’s output. Particularly worthy of note is the enhancement of Lacuna’s video content directly through the Association’s work: we have now added two films to our archive which demonstrate the possibilities for contributors within the student body. See in particular:

<http://www.lacuna.org.uk/insider/girl-summit-campaign/> and
<http://www.lacuna.org.uk/feature/carpenter-state/> obtained by the Association on its own initiative.

In addition to content development, the Association has been instrumental in expanding our promotional strategy.

We aim to continue to support the association so as to increase student engagement with the magazine and develop an autonomous wing to the creative output of the magazine.

2. develop student skills of writing and multi-media production of the highest quality

We appointed Chris Davis as Lacuna's student editor to oversee the skills agenda of the project after we had already recruited the first of the student association members. Rebecca Omonira (our writer in residence) was also drawn in to provide support. In September 2014, Rebecca delivered a master-class on writing to 20 students. Chris has also provided advice on editing and the crafting of submissions.

We have also considered how we can develop a more systematic approach to training in the creative aspects of writing. In the autumn of 2014 we submitted and had approved a new UG module entitled 'Writing about Human Rights'. This is available to all Humanities and Social Sciences UGs as well as part of the Law degree programme and will run in 2015/2016 academic year. We are not yet sure of numbers but we are hoping this will provide a formal, assessed route for the development of writing skills.

In addition we have hosted a number of writing related events that have been well attended by the student body. Laila Sumpton, a professional performance poet and human rights activist presented a workshop on the use of poetry to communicate messages about wrongs. Andrew Williams also talked of the magazine and its developed to the student UNICEF society as part of its programme of events.

3. Expand student engagement at an international level

This has proven to be our most difficult task. Although we have many links with students and writers overseas, we have yet to formalise arrangements. However, we are endeavouring to develop this strand in the remaining period of the project as we believe it will enhance our profile internationally as well as provide the student association with a broader range of opportunities.

4. Improve student employability through direct experience and learning

We believe that this is happening through the full engagement between magazine professionals and the student members of the association. The spectrum of skills developed through involvement with the magazine will undoubtedly enable students to pursue employment opportunities on the back of their experiences with the magazine. In many cases, the publication of their work is there for every prospective employer to see, which could be the most important advantage gained during their involvement in the project both immediately and in the long term. The fact that the magazine is now achieving recognition nationally (through the long-listing of our writer in residence for the Orwell Prize for journalism in relation to her work on Lacuna) demonstrates the students involved can benefit directly as well as indirectly from their engagement with us.

Expenditure

To date we are well on track to spend the grant in its entirety. The on-going costs of production of the magazine are being supplemented by other funding sources (notably the Law School).

Details of expenditure are awaited from our accounts department.



15 April 2015