**University of Warwick Writing Wrongs Schools Project – Materials to explain key aspects of the programme and support other Universities interested in adopting similar models.**

**Centre for Human Rights in Practice, University of Warwick**

1. **Introduction**

The Centre for Human Rights in Practice (CHIP) at the University of Warwick is home to the ‘[Writing Wrongs’](http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/soc/law/research/centres/chrp/writingwrongs) programme which brings together academics, journalists, writers, artists, film-makers, university and school students to develop, publish, exchange and share creative and engaging writing about issues of human rights and injustice.

Over the last two years CHIP has been running the ‘Writing Wrongs Schools Project’, in collaboration with the [Orwell Youth Prize](https://www.orwellfoundation.com/the-orwell-youth-prize/) and various professional writers. These materials provide an overview of the Writing Wrongs Programme (section 2), its key aims (section 3), how we advertise the programme (section 4) how the overall programme has been operationalised at Warwick (section 5), a more detailed description of the workshops which are at the heart of the programme (section 6) and the associated costs (section 7). They aim to assist others who may be interested in embarking on similar programmes in their own universities. For any further information, please contact James Harrison (J.Harrison.3@warwick.ac.uk).

1. **Overview of the Writing Wrongs Programme**

CHIP is now commencing the third year of its Writing Wrongs Schools project with schools in the West Midlands area. Year 12 students from disadvantaged backgrounds[[1]](#footnote-1) attend intensive workshops held at Warwick where academics from a variety of disciplines (law, politics, English, history) and professional journalists and writers provide students with advice and guidance on essential research and writing skills. The students work on their own writing and receive extensive feedback from our writing team. At the same time, those students experience a taste of university life and are exposed to careers advice from a range of professional writers.

The student who produces the best piece of writing sees their work published in the University of Warwick’s [Lacuna Magazine](http://www.lacuna.org.uk/) (which is also part of Warwick’s Writing Wrongs Project). The winner also benefits from a paid internship with the magazine. All students are given written feedback on the final pieces of writing and encouraged to submit their work to the national Orwell Youth Prize. Representatives of OYP attend the final workshop and they organise for an additional cohort of students from the region to join our students. The project has met with excellent feedback from participants and teachers in the local area.

1. **Aims of the Writing Wrong Programme**

The writing wrongs programme aims to:

* Raising Attainment: offering students research and writing support to enable them to develop vital writing and research skills.
* Raising Aspiration: providing students with experience of a university environment with the aim of overcoming barriers to progression to Higher Education, and engaging them with a variety of professional writers to better understand the pathways to those professions.
* Encouraging social awareness and engagement with social justice issues.
* Bridging the Gap between A Level and University: learning essential university study skills and meeting university students from similar backgrounds to their own, thus facilitating students’ transition from school/college to possible undergraduate study.
* CV Enhancement: presenting students with access to extra-curricular activities and work experience as a means of supporting the development of their CVs and university application forms.
* Giving a voice to young people: by encouraging them to write about issues of importance to them, enhancing their ability to express themselves and giving them the confidence to submit their work to a prestigious national writing prize.

From a writing perspective, there is no other comparable programme in the UK. There are essay and creative writing competitions some of which encourage young people to write about human rights and social justice issues (e.g. Amnesty International Youth Awards). But they do not provide significant support to aspiring young writers in the way that this programme does.

1. **Selecting School Students for the Programme**

In the first two years of the programme 25-30 students were selected for the writing wrongs programme. In the third year, it is envisaged this will rise to 40-50 students. (An additional cohort of around 30 students attend the final workshop each year through the efforts of OYP, as described in section 5 below).

The programme is advertised to schools who meet specified WP criteria (performance at GCSE and A level and number of students receiving free school meals) in the local area. This is done primarily through emails to existing school teacher networks, follow up telephone calls, a teachers’ event at Warwick where teachers learn about a range of WP activities the university provides, and various other networking and communication processes. There are also efforts to engage directly with students through social media. Students apply through an online form (the form as well as an advertisement for the programme can be found at <https://www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/soc/law/research/centres/chrp/writingwrongs/schools>).

1. **The Overall Programme**

Each year, the Writing Wrongs programme involves the following key components:

* Three workshops for all students enrolled on the programme. In these, we teach a variety of writing skills and explain how to research and write about issues of human rights and injustice.
* The development of online skills-based materials to assist students with writing and better understanding issues of (in) justice and human rights and email communication through which students can raise issues throughout the programme
* The submission and marking of the essays by the project team.
* A Prize giving event where all students are given feedback and certificates, winners and runners-up receive prizes and all students are encouraged to enter the national OYP.
* A paid internship for the winner and publication of their essay in Lacuna

We aim to have sufficient tutors on the programme so that each tutor is responsible for between 6-8 students. Ideally tutors will see the same groups of students throughout the programme, thereby building up trust and confidence. So it is a good idea to get tutors to commit to dates early in the academic year. We run workshops on Saturdays so we are not taking students away from their studies. In our model, tutors each have a student ambassador with them during group work so as to help them work really closely with individual students. Later in the programme, there are 1 to 1 sessions between each student and the tutor, and student ambassadors sit down separately to talk to school students about university life and give campus tours (see workshop agendas at appendices 1-3 for more details on this).

1. **The Workshops**

The writing workshops are the most important component of the programme. They are where students develop their writing skills, become inspired about the writing process, learn about a range of social justice issues and meet and interact with academics, professional writers and students from similar backgrounds to themselves.

Our model which includes 3 workshops is set out below. But it is certainly not the only possible model. For instance, other universities may decide to make a lesser commitment, particularly in the early days of developing a programme. They could decide for instance to run a single workshop. We can see how this would work and are happy to discuss different models at any time with interested parties.

In the Warwick model, before the first workshop, all students on the programme are sent a link to a piece of writing to read in advance (a piece is chosen on a social justice issue that is accessible, but not something that they are likely to write about themselves – to avoid the temptation that they copy the piece we have given them in their own writing! - For instance in the first year, it was a piece from the New Yorker magazine about racial discrimination and capital punishment in the US).

Students are also asked a question which they need to think about before the first workshop and will form the basis of their own writing. This question is related to an annual theme chosen for the OYP national writing competition, so that their writing fits within the scope of that competition. But we turn it into a simpler question which focuses them on their own experience. We find that this is the best starting place to encourage confidence in their own writing. So for instance, in the first year, the question was phrased as follows:

“Rachel [the author of the New Yorker piece] is clearly angry about the issues she is writing about in Louisiana, USA. When you think about your own environment, experience and background, what social justice issue is it that makes you particularly angry? Please write down one issue on a piece of paper, together with three justifications for why you have chosen that issue. You should try to make these reasons as convincing as possible, as you will be discussing them in groups at the workshop on 21st November.”

The first workshop (which takes place in November) includes the following key components:

* An introduction to the programme and its aims, the tutors, the student ambassadors and each other
* Small group discussions of the piece they have read in advance of the workshop to get them thinking about the writing process
* An inspirational talk from a professional writer with a similar background to their own talking about his/her career and how he/she writes.
* Small group discussions of their own ideas related to the question they have been given in advance (e.g. ‘what makes you angry?’)

In appendix 1, there is an annotated timetable for the day with notes about what each session entails. As you will see from the timetable, in the afternoon session of the 1st workshop, students work in small groups and discuss the question they have been asked in advance of the day (e.g. ‘What makes you angry?’). These discussions are intended to help them to narrow down the theme they want to write about. They are also intended to provoke the idea that they need to do more research to understand their topic properly. At the end of the day we give each student a (relatively expensive and therefore nice-looking!) notebook to write down the research they have done (their notes, articles, books etc. they have found, notes of interviews they have undertaken etc.) and bring to workshop 2.

Workshop 2 (which takes place about a month after workshop 1 in December) is intended to get them to start thinking about the process of writing itself. Again we invite a professional writer, who talks about her background, and then does a workshop session on ‘writing craft’ to talk about different kinds of writing styles and approaches. While half the students are with the professional writer, the other half of the students are having one to one feedback on the research they have done with their tutors, who also help them plan the kind of writing they now want to go away and produce for workshop 3. See appendix 2 for a timetable of the day for workshop 2.

Workshop 3 takes place in February. A week before the workshop students are asked to submit a draft of their piece of writing so tutors can read it in advance of the session (the students don’t all do this – some bring writing along on the day – the tutors have always managed to work with this). OYP advertise this workshop and they also bring a cohort of students who are thinking of entering the youth prize, and have a draft piece of writing/ideas about what they want to write. The two cohorts mingle during the day. At the workshop, students all get extensive 1 to 1 feedback sessions with tutors as well as various writers’ workshops, a tour of the university campus and the opportunity to attend other meetings (e.g. on financing university education).

We set a deadline for writing to be submitted in March, and then our tutors produce written feedback on each of the submissions. Collectively we decide on a winner and a couple of runners up. At our final prize-giving event, the focus is on making sure that all students receive praise for their efforts and we make it clear that all students have the potential to go on and submit their work for the national Orwell Youth Prize. We tell them the written feedback they have received is to encourage them to do this, and we offer them the opportunity of a further chat with a tutor if that will help them.

1. **The Costs of the Programme**

Costs will vary depending on how much you can draw upon in-house resources and how much you need to buy-in external resources. The main fixed costs are publicity materials for the programme, stationary costs, the costs of employing student ambassadors, transport (most of our students make their own way) and catering for the workshops. For us, there was also the cost of the paid internship at Lacuna Magazine for the winner. We use university rooms free of charge.

Some of the workshop facilitators and tutors we use are full time academic members of staff and work with us on a voluntary basis. Others are external to the university (e.g. professional writers) or are not on full time contracts (e.g. PhD students) and so are paid for their time in preparing for and running workshop sessions and providing feedback on school students’ work.

School students are recruited by a widening participation officer who is already employed by the university, and she uses the university’s and department’s existing network of contacts. She also administers all logistical elements of the programme. Overall, the fixed costs of the programme for 3 workshops for 25 students was approximately £\*\*\*\* (limited transport costs, catering, publicity, payments to student ambassadors). But there are significant additional costs if staff need to be paid to administer and teach the programme. External speakers also need to be paid if you use them. There are also the costs of whatever prizes you give (our internship costs approximately £800 per year). OYP can bring in school students from the local area and arrange for writers to speak at events. They charge for the administration of this. We can provide details of costs if this is of interest.

**Writing Wrongs Workshop 1**

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| **Time** | **Group Size, Subject and Presenter** | **What is covered and issues to consider** |
| 10.00am-10.30am | Plenary - Introduction to the Programme - James Harrison,  | Introducing the students to how the programme will operate over the year, providing them with some inspiring thoughts about writing and its potential, and showcasing the online resources we will be creating.  |
| 10.30am-11.30am | Seminar Groups of 6-8 students – Discussion of “Revenge Killing”[[2]](#footnote-2) – everyone involved | A facilitated discussion of the piece we have asked them to read in advance of the first workshop. Get them into small groups to begin with to help them start talking. For those students who have not read the piece, we put them all together in one seminar group and give them some extracts from the article to read there and then. |
| 11.30am-11.45 am | Break |  |
| 11.45am-12.15pm | Plenary – An audience with Lacuna Writer in Residence, Rebecca Omonira-Oyekanmi | Rebecca reflects on her background, how she ecame a writer, and some of her journalism, particularly in relation to telling the stories of migrants entering Europe from Africa.  |
| 12.15pm -1pm | Lunch | A more relaxed opportunity for us to mingle with the students and get to know them a bit.  |
| 1pm – 2.45pm  | Seminar groups – The research behind your writing – everyone involved | In advance the students have been told the following: “Rachel [the author of Revenge Killing] is clearly angry about the issues she is writing about in Louisiana, USA. When you think about your own environment, experience and background, what social justice issue is it that makes you particularly angry? Please write down one issue on a piece of paper, together with three justifications for why you have chosen that issue. You should try to make these reasons as convincing as possible, as you will be discussing them in groups at the workshop on 21st November.” We ask them all to hand in their themes at the end of the first session. Then, we put people together in appropriate groups so they are discussing their ideas with people who have similar interests. We then get them presenting their issues to each other and attempting to justify those ideas. This should lead on to a discussion of what needs to be done to make their issues really compelling; The idea is to encourage them to think about the need to say more to really convince people of their arguments. But before they can say more, they need to research the issues in more depth. This is to reinforce the idea that good writing starts with good research – knowing your subject well. We allow them around 30 minutes to present and talk about the issues they have brought along, before we shift the focus to the research they need to do to prepare for the next workshop.  |
| **2.45pm-3pm** | Final plenary | Bring them back together for some final rousing words and to explain what they will be doing in the next workshop – i.e. talking about the research they have done and developing their writing skills. We also want to know what online resources they would value. |

**Writing Wrongs Workshop 2**

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| **Time** | **Group Size, Subject and Presenter** | **What is covered and issues to consider** |
| **10.00am-10.15am** | Plenary - Introduction (James Harrison) | Welcome and introduction to the day. |
| **10.15am-10.45am** | Plenary – An audience with Clare Sambrook, co-editor of ‘OurKingdom’, the UK section of openDemocracy | Clare introduces her work and talks about her experience in becoming a writer. |
| **10.45am-11.00pm** |  | Break |
| **11.00pm-12.30pm** | Writing workshop (Clare Sambrook); 1-1 discussion (Tutors) and Q&A panel (Student Ambassadors) | Students split into two groups. One group provided with advice about writing craft from Clare Sambrook. The other group provided with individual feedback on their work so far from Tutors and take part in a Q&A session with Student Ambassadors on university life.  |
| **12.30pm-1.15pm** | Lunch | An opportunity to mingle with staff and student ambassadors and ask questions about university.  |
| **1.15pm-2.45pm** | Writing workshop (Clare Sambrook); 1-1 discussion (Tutors) and Q&A panel (Student Ambassadors) | Students split into two groups. One group provided with advice about writing craft from Clare Sambrook. The other group provided with individual feedback on their work so far from Tutors and take part in a Q&A session with Student Ambassadors on university life. |
| **2.45pm-3pm** | Final Plenary | Wrap-up, evaluation and an explanation of the work students need to do before the next workshop and what will be done in the next workshop. |

**Writing Wrongs Workshop 3**

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| **Time** | **Group Size, Subject and Presenter** | **What is covered and issues to consider** |
| **10.00am-10.15am** | Plenary (S0.11) - Introduction (James Harrison and representative of OYP) | Welcome and introduction to the day. |
| **10.15am-12.30pm** | Group work, individual feedback on draft essays, campus tours, and ‘meet the Warwick University students’ sessions | The cohort are split in half. One half do workshops with writers about very aspects of writing craft e.g. use of narrative voice, how to tell a story etc. The other half see their tutors in turn in half hour sessions to receive feedback on their draft essays. When they are not seeing the tutors, they go on campus tours and have sessions where there is the opportunity to ask our Warwick student ambassadors questions about life at university.  |
| **12.30pm-1.15pm** | Lunch (Student Hub) | An opportunity to mingle with staff and student ambassadors and ask questions about university.  |
| **1.15pm-3.30pm** | Plenary (S0.11) – Essay writing discussion | The cohort are split in half again. But they do it the other way round. Those who were with the writer workshops in the morning get one to one feedback etc. in the afternoon and visa versa.  |
| **3.30pm-4pm** | Final Plenary (S0.11) | Wrap-up, evaluation, an explanation of the final essay submission process and further explanation about OYP. |

1. We select students on the basis of the school which they attend. So we work with schools who have below national average GCSE and A level results and above national average take up of free school meals. We then prioritise candidates whose parents have not been to university. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Rachel Aviv, ‘Revenge Killing’, *New Yorker Magazine* , July 6, 2015 <http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2015/07/06/revenge-killing> [↑](#footnote-ref-2)