# Human Rights Due Diligence in Business: Establishing meaningful human rights responsibility and action

# A Writing Wrongs Workshop – How can universities support school students to write about social justice issues?

## A brief by the Centre for Human Rights in Practice, University of Warwick

**Equality and human rights legislation and challenges to welfare benefit sanctions**

Report of an Expert Workshop

Centre for Human Rights in Practice, School of Law, University of Warwick

Monday 29 June 2017

# Introduction

* 1. This report summarises the key discussions and proposals made at the Writing Wrongs schools workshop (WWSP). The workshop brought together academics, writers and a range of other individuals with (1) experience of teaching in schools and/or (2) organising activities for school students from disadvantaged backgrounds. The aim of the workshop was to:
* Share experience of programmes for school students involving writing on social justice issues.
* Consider how universities might create more opportunities for school students, particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds, to become involved in writing about social justice issues.
* Discuss the attractiveness of a ‘regional hub’ model whereby universities across the country run workshops for school students in their own area, feeding into the national [Orwell Youth Prize](https://www.orwellfoundation.com/the-orwell-youth-prize/) (OYP).
* Consider what forms of co-ordination and support would make the regional hub model feasible for universities who wish to participate.
	1. The workshop was held under Chatham House rules meaning that individual comments are not attributed in the report that follows.

# Key Conclusions and Proposals for Future Action

2.1. Key conclusions and proposals for future action were as follows:

* That existing experience from WWSP and OYP points to the attractiveness and feasibility of universities running writing workshops for students from disadvantaged backgrounds feeding into the national Orwell Youth Prize (section 4)
* That there is significant added value in a national network of universities offering opportunities for school students from disadvantaged backgrounds to develop their skills in writing about social justice issues (section 5)
* That the University of Warwick can assist universities who wish to pilot some version of the WWSP model over the next year in various ways including by providing materials used in the planning and delivery of the Warwick writing workshops, sharing information about the costs of WWSP, sharing contacts with writers who could participate on new programmes, and other bespoke forms of assistance as required (section 6).
* That there were a variety of other ideas for how the WWSP programme could be built on and expanded including more direct engagement with secondary school teachers, engagement with other professional networks, use of music and theatre as inspiration for writing, and use of technology to help inspire and disseminate writing (section 7).

# Workshop attendees

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| Anil Awesti | Centre for Lifelong Learning, University of Warwick |
| Michael Bailey  | Department of Sociology, Essex University |
| Gonzalo Ceron Garcia | Department of English, University of Warwick |
| Francis Gilbert | Department of Educational Studies, Goldsmiths University of London |
| Gareth Griffith | Department of English, Bristol University |
| Alison Hall | Xaverian College and Political Studies Association  |
| James Harrison | School of Law, University of Warwick |
| Becca Kirk | University College, Birmingham |
| Stephanie Le Lievre  | Programmes Manager, Orwell Youth Prize |
| Carolina Matos | Department of Sociology, City University |
| Kate Mattocks | Department of History & Politics, Liverpool Hope University |
| Jack McGowan | Department of English, Warwick University |
| Rebecca Omonira-Oyekanmi | Freelance writer and journalist, Trustee of Orwell Youth Prize  |
| Grant Phillips | Deputy Chair, Orwell Youth Prize |
| Lewis Smith | Department of History, University of Warwick,  |
| Lucy Sweetman | Creative Writing, Bath Spa University |
| Andrew Williams | School of Law, Warwick, School of Law |
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1. **Lessons from the experience of Warwick and OWP**

**The Warwick and OWP experience**

4.1 Over the last two years, the Centre for Human Rights in Practice at the University of Warwick has been running the ‘Writing Wrongs schools project’ (WWSP). This brings together Year 12 students (first year sixth form) from disadvantaged backgrounds[[1]](#footnote-1) in the Coventry/Warwickshire area to learn writing skills at a series of three workshops held during the autumn and spring. The aim is for the students to produce a piece of their own writing on a chosen social justice theme by the end of the programme.

4.2 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 school students work on their own writing and receive extensive feedback from the Centre’s writing team. At the same time, school students experience a taste of university life and careers advice from a range of professional writers.

4.3 The students submit their final pieces of writing in March/April, all receive certificates and prizes and the student who is judged to have produced the best piece of writing has their work published in [Lacuna Magazine](http://www.lacuna.org.uk/) (part of Warwick’s Writing Wrongs Project). They also benefit from a paid internship with the magazine during the summer. All students are given written feedback on the final pieces of writing and encouraged to submit their work to the national OYP.

4.4 WWSP has a close relationship with the OYP. OYP aims to inspire and support the next generation of politically engaged young writers. OYP runs its own writing workshops in schools and regional workshops bringing together established writers/journalists with aspiring young writers, combined with a writing prize for 13-18 year olds to write in any form (poems, stories, plays and essays etc.). At the end of the year they hold a Celebration Day for entrants to the prize to come together for a day of writing, seminars and debate.

4.5 In 2017 Warwick and OYP ran a joint workshop as part of the WWSP programme. The Warwick cohort were joined by other school students from the Midlands for a workshop in which all school students received 1 to 1 feedback on their writing, participated in writing workshops with professional writers and spent the day with university students, academics and a wide variety of different professional writers.

**Reflections and Questions about the Warwick and OYP experience**

4.6 Tutors from the Warwick and OYP programmes reflected on the fact that 1 to 1 time between writers/academics and school students was a particularly important part of the programme. They felt that this created particular value for students who generally had never had this type of interaction before. They felt that skills workshops and the independent work school students were encouraged to undertake between workshops combined to help students develop important research and writing skills.

4.7 Also important to the programme was the presence of Warwick University students (from similar backgrounds to the school students) who acted as student ambassadors, facilitated discussions, talked about their experience of university etc.

4.8 Workshop participants were keen to know about the costs of the Warwick programme. The main fixed costs are publicity materials for the programme, the costs of employing student ambassadors, transport and catering for the workshops. There was also the cost of the paid internship at Lacuna Magazine for the winner. University rooms are used free of charge. Some of the workshop facilitators and tutors are full time academic members of staff and were not paid, 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.

4.9 School students are recruited by a widening participation officer who is already employed by the university, and used the university’s existing network of contacts. He also administered all logistical elements of the programme. Overall, the fixed costs of the programme 3 workshops for 25 students was approximately £3,500 (transport, catering, publicity, Lacuna internships, payments to student ambassadors). But there are significant additional costs if staff need to be paid to administer and teach the programme.

4.10 Challenges identified for the future included:

* Encouraging more boys to participate in the programme and engaging with students from younger age groups
* encouraging a range of different types of writing (e.g. reportage, creative etc.) while at the same time ensuring that students were given detailed advice and guidance on the writing process
1. **Rationale for other universities becoming involved**

5.1. There are no national writing programmes focusing on social justice issues for young people 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.

5.2 Support for young people to equip themselves to write about social justice issues has never been identified as an important aim in schools. Changes to the national curriculum has also reduced writing opportunities, and professional early career development in local and national journalism is increasingly difficult to access.

5.3. In this context, participants agreed that there was real value in bringing together universities, schools, writers, publishers, editors and the Orwell Youth Prize (OWP) to think about the potential of future co-operation/collaboration. By sharing expertise and networks and drawing on experience gained in relevant initiatives already undertaken, clear benefits could be seen in developing a cooperative, national creative writing programme that can feed into a national prize focused on social justice issues.

5.4 Some of the rationales for individual university departments becoming engaged in such a programme were identified as:

* Universities already do significant outreach work and have developed contacts with local schools, particularly in disadvantaged areas on which writing programmes could be built.
* Writing programmes like WWSP have the potential to engage a wide range of academic departments across the social sciences, arts and humanities enhancing inter-disciplinarity.
* Universities are making significant funds available for widening participation work. Programmes like WWSP provide something above and beyond many WP activities by developing writing and research skills of disadvantaged school students, and encouraging long term engagement with schools/students over the course of the programme.
* Programmes of activities that focus on developing the writing and research skills of disadvantaged school students, particularly on social justice issues are relatively rare.
* Exposure to universities will also allow school students from disadvantaged backgrounds to make a more informed choice about whether university is the right choice for them and engagement with various kinds of professional writers can also lead to opportunities to think about future careers.
* Individual academics/administrators/writers may struggle to run programmes that engage meaningfully with a wide range of school students from deprived backgrounds in their local area, so co-ordination/collaboration between multiple individuals and institutions may enhance the chances of success.
* The creation of a national network of universities feeding into the OYP would give a level of prestige that would be impossible for universities acting alone, and could potentially allow the range of opportunities for school students to be increased (e.g. through paid internships to media organisations, scholarships for study etc.).

5.5 It was also recognised that there are limits to what can be achieved by following the WWSP approach including:

* that there are many other school students, beyond those defined by universities as from ‘widening participation’ backgrounds’ who would benefit from this kind of programme. Many school students from other state schools lack writing skills and professional networks in the media industry. So there is also a need to think about how a programme could be extended to include this cohort.
* the Warwick model, as set out above, is designed for year 12 (sixth form) students; this excludes younger age groups, who may be considered desirable groups to reach out to but who would require the application of different methods of learning. If such groups were to be targeted then there would be a need to learn from other programmes and experiences (for instance Paper Nations – see <http://papernations.org/>) and think about alternative models (see section 7 below)
1. **What forms of collaboration would be beneficial**

6.1 There was general consensus that universities who were looking to set up their own writing programme in their own local area would benefit from various forms of support and collaboration. For those ‘pioneers’ looking to set activities up over the next year, the University of Warwick representatives (James Harrison and Andrew Williams) indicated they would be happy to share:

* Full details of the plans for its writing workshops.
* Publicity materials used to publicise the programme
* Online resources produced to support its programme
* More detailed cost estimates for the WWSP
* Contacts with writers who could teach on programmes developed by other universities.

6.2 Warwick representatives would also be happy to offer bespoke guidance and support to universities developing their own programmes. OYP could also potentially co-deliver workshops with individual universities. They could help with design and bringing in writers and school students who had shown an interest in entering the OYP. There would however be a cost to OYP involvement.

6.3 It was agreed that there was no reason why all programmes needed to be identical, and that different universities could adopt different programmes. Variations might include:

* More or less workshops being run by universities in any given year.
* A focus on particular kinds of writing
* Universities in the same region collaborating together to run programmes together.

6.4 There was also general consensus that, in the longer term, if universities were to be brought into the programme from across the country, there was great value in having resources for a national co-ordination function which would:

* Work with universities who wanted to join the network to help them in the development of programmes.
* Facilitate engagement between various actors (OYP, universities, writers etc.) and co-ordinate a national network of writers who could then be allocated to particular university programmes where they were needed.
* Share evolving best practice from across the network.
* Develop on-line resources to support programmes.
1. **Ideas to enhance and expand future action on this issue**

Beyond the ideas set out above, there was a range of other ideas that participants identified as potentially important mechanisms for engaging school students in writing about social justice issues:

* Particularly in relation to younger school students, there was perceived to be a value in engaging school teachers directly and empowering them to teach about social justice issues. Participants identified a number of opportunities, for instance within the GCSE curriculum where this could be done (e.g. in relation to Citizenship). It was recognised that there was a need to think carefully about how this could be done effectively, as simply producing a pack of materials might not be sufficient to create the kind of programme envisaged by workshop participants. It was recognised that other programmes had suffered when simply producing such packs and not engaging sufficiently with the teaching this led on to.
* There could be organisations beyond those so far identified through WWSP who could play an important role in future efforts to create a national programme of writing about social justice for school students. For instance, Teach First and other similar networks were identified as organisations through whom the word could be spread about the initiative.
* There may be inspirations for writing which go beyond what have been considered so far. So for instance, music, art, film and theatre may be good sources of inspiration for future writing, and this could be encouraged within the programme.
* Technology could be harnessed to create added value both in terms of expanding the forms of writing that school students engage with (e.g. would blogs or interactive computer programmes attract more boys to the programme?) and in connecting the programme to communities where writing was produced (e.g. Through Apps that could create trails about pieces of writing in local communities)
1. 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 encourage teachers from those schools to select students on the basis of disadvantage (e.g. students with parents who have not been to university). [↑](#footnote-ref-1)