



We are now recruiting for our next Squad. The two year programme will run from April 2020.

To be eligible you must be aged between 16 and 21 and live, work or study in the North of England.

The Writing Squad is a group of motivated writers. We exist to help you develop your writing.

We welcome writers of any formats – from poetry and prose, through film, stage and radio scripts, to games and graphic novels.

Being part of the Squad is FREE and we work round your life so you can study, work or travel at the same time.

The Squad will provide you with

- one to one support on whatever you are writing
- workshops led by professional writers
- opportunities to work on projects
- a supportive community of writers and artists
- professional development advice and support

HOW DO YOU APPLY?

The closing date is midnight Sunday 29th March 2020.

To apply to join the Writing Squad please send us the following before then:

-a cover note of no more than 2 pages telling us about you, about your writing, who inspires you, what you'd like the Squad to do for you, what your plans are in terms of study/work/travel and where you'll be living over the next two years. Please also tell us how old you will be on April 1st 2020.

-up to ten pages of prose/script or ten poems/songs, or URLs where we can watch or listen to your work.

-please let us know which workshop you'd like to attend, Manchester, Leeds or Newcastle, and how you found out about the Squad (Twitter, a leaflet, a schoolteacher etc.).

Email everything for your application as one single Word or PDF attachment to join@writingsquad.com. We need your application to be saved with the correct name so that we can process it. Please pay close attention to the following guidelines:

- For the North East Squad meeting in Newcastle, save your file as yourfirstname_yoursurname_NE
- For the North West Squad meeting in Manchester, save your file as yourfirstname_yoursurname_NW
- For the Yorkshire Squad meeting in Leeds/Sheffield, save your file as yourfirstname_yoursurname_Y

For example: if your name was Margaret Atwood and you wanted to attend the Newcastle Squad, your filename would be Margaret_Atwood_NE.doc.

It is up to you to make sure that your file is named correctly so that we can process everybody's application as efficiently as possible. Remember, we only accept Microsoft Word or PDF files.

You must email us the document, we will not accept applications through Google Docs or any other file sharing service (though of course if you include links in your application to your work on YouTube, Vimeo, SoundCloud, Bandcamp, Tumblr or blogs you run, we will look at those.)

The closing date is midnight Sunday 29th March 2020.

If you have any questions have a look at the FAQs below and then if we have not answered everything you need to know, tweet us @thewritingsquad or post a question on our Facebook Page and we will answer it. All the quotations are from Squad writers.

"Look at the Ledbury Festival site & see my pic alongside Andrew Motion. Incredible to have gone from somebody embarrassed about where they came from & shy about who they were to be in this line up. You are a big part of this & it is life changing."

"The Squad transformed my life, setting me on the path towards being what my parents, friends, college and university careers adviser didn't know existed: a self-employed artist. The Squad promotes a pragmatic & entrepreneurial approach to writing that I rarely see elsewhere, and it's down to the organisation's openness and diversity."

FAQS

Will I receive an acknowledgement of my application?

Yes you will. If we haven't let you know we have had your application within five days of you sending it, then email us again to check.

What is the north of England?

The north of England is everywhere from Cheshire, South Yorkshire, North and North East Lincolnshire up to the Scottish border in Cumbria and Northumberland. In the past we have also accepted writers from Derbyshire and Staffordshire, people just over the border who feel more connected with the North than the Midlands.

I am nearly 16/just over 21, does that make me ineligible?

You have to be at least 16 on April 1st 2018. We do not work with writers under 16. If you are under 16 you'll be able to apply in 2022.

If you have just turned 22 on April 1st do tell us but don't worry about it too much, we are looking for the best writers, people we want to work with, rather than being absolute sticklers for the age-range.

Should I send examples of all my different work or stick to one thing?

Send your best work, for now we are interested in how well you write rather than your range. For example: if you think you are a good poet but your stories are only so-so, then send your poems. If you are experienced at writing scripts, but have only just started writing poems, send a script.

What commitment will I have to make?

We will expect you to attend Squad Days four times a year in either Manchester, Newcastle, and Leeds or Sheffield. There will be other workshops on offer involving previous Squad members which you will be welcome to join. You will also have four 1-1 sessions a year with a member of our Core Team.

How much will it cost me?

The programme is free, all you will have to pay for is travel, though we do have a fund to help with train fares if you need it.

I have special needs, can you help me with these?

Of course. We have an enabling fund not only to help people get to workshops but also support any needs they might have, whether that is expenses for carers, equipment or support.

"The Squad changed my life. I joined whilst recovering from an illness that sapped my self-confidence and left me knowing only that I wanted to write, but having no idea how to go about it. The Squad paid for my carer to travel so that I could attend workshops with professional writers and engage with other young people passionate about writing. I have written a poetry book, a novel and several plays which have been published or performed as a direct result of the workshops and one-to-one mentoring"

What will we be doing on Squad Days?

Squad Days are workshops lasting 11.00-17.00 on Saturdays.

In the first year these are led by the writers on the Core Team and will take place in the region in which you are based.

In the second year, once we get an idea of what you are interested in, the days are led by guest writers. In the second year the workshops could take place in any northern region. From time to time we throw in extra workshops when you will work with members from previous Squads.

We hold at least one two-day workshop a year, open to current and past Squad members. Their focus comes from the particular needs of the Squad and have included weekends spent making short films, making flash online projects, exploring self portraiture with a poet and a photographer, and writing on strange objects at John Rylands Library; as well as open and 'unblocking' weekends without agendas.

"It's brilliant to have the opportunity to spend time with other committed writers and really dedicate a day or a weekend to writing purely creatively. The Squad tutors are always really imaginative about how you work, taking you to exciting new places and getting you to look at the world around you in new ways – you're never just sitting in a room doing exercises. By the end of the day I always feel really energised and have a load of new ideas to follow up."

"It's always laid-back, always welcoming to new and different ideas, the workshops were a means of communicating those ideas in a creative space where you can't be judged. You get new techniques to apply to your own writing and round you out as a writer."

What are One to Ones?

One to Ones give you the opportunity to work with a member of the Core Team and focus in detail on whatever it is you are writing in your own time – you will be entitled to up to eight one-to-one sessions over the two years. We create individual plans for developing your work, and how you manage and promote yourself as writer. The one-to-ones take place either by phone, Skype or in person across the north.

"The mentoring helped my writing become much stronger in a short period of time and also allowed me to work closely with poets such as Peter Sansom, Helen Mort and Stevie Ronnie. I have since been published in magazines I never thought I'd get into, thanks to their guidance and encouragement. In 2016 I was a winner of the New Poet's Prize and I received a huge amount of support from Stevie in pulling my submission together. As a result of that prize I've given several poetry readings and the Poetry Business published my debut pamphlet. I don't feel that any of this would have been possible without the support network the squad set up for me."

"To have a professional writer spending one-to-one time on your work is a fantastic opportunity. I think I would have been far less confident and flexible in workshops at university if I hadn't had that experience of receiving constructive criticism. Tutors always treated me like a professional, took a real interest in my work and made me feel there was somewhere to progress without overwhelming me."

Where will we meet?

Squad Days will be held in city centre venues, like the Anthony Burgess Centre in Manchester, or Yorkshire Dance in Leeds, sometimes we meet in hotel meeting rooms or university seminar rooms.

Face to face one to ones will be held somewhere you feel comfortable, we always use public spaces like coffee shops and libraries.

What do you mean, professional development?

During and after the two-year programme, we provide support not only with your writing, but also advice on promoting yourself, making contacts, setting up projects and companies and making applications. Through our private Facebook group we provide a constant flow of opportunities such as calls for submissions, job opportunities, free competitions etc. We promote our writers through our website and social media activity. We also develop projects which offer Squad writers experience and employment, you can find out more about them here.

"I have now been self-employed, earning my income solely as an artist, for 18 months. Without the the Squad enabling me to travel to attend interviews and other opportunities, supporting me, and challenging my development as an artist, I would not have been able to stop working in pubs and devote myself to creative work. Becoming a member of the Writing Squad has had a profound effect on my life; they have made me the person and artist I am today."

"Without the support of the writing squad (emotional and financial) I would definitely not have had the confidence and motivation to continue trying to be a professional writer. The generosity of their support—in terms of the breadth of ideas they support, and way in which they support them—is unlike anything else I've experienced. Their continued belief in me certainly helped me on my way to achieving an actual production, and was instrumental in building my confidence to form relationships within the industry."

I am just about to go abroad for a year, will that count against me?

No. In the last Squad we had people in the Canada, China and Austria, we have grads from Vancouver to Beijing. We are a virtual organisation and having people all over the world makes us a stronger more intelligent organisation.

"The squad has made a massive difference to me in helping me to keep writing and keep valuing the importance of my own writing and the creative process throughout all the general life-upheavals of my late teens and twenties, including 2 spells of living abroad, 1 degree, countless house moves and about 5 career changes. That is invaluable. It has helped me make informed decisions about what I wanted out of life and out of a career – I would not have got this anywhere else. It has improved the quality of my writing and encouraged me to try new genres and styles. Today I am happy with the literary decisions and the life decisions I have made."

OK, so am I the kind of writer you are looking for?

It is likely that you will have been writing for some time and have developed your practice.

We use sport as an analogy quite a lot, so it is like you are looking for a good team to join, with an experienced, well-regarded coach and players who are as skilful as you, who will test you and help you get even better. It is not like looking for an occasional game in the park where ability doesn't really matter, it is not like you have just seen someone playing and quite fancy a go yourself.

Having said all that, occasionally we do take a punt on people who may not be brilliant yet but show promise and, more importantly, have a story to tell which is not being told elsewhere.

You will like reading, watching or listening to the work of other writers – you will not be writing in a vacuum, but want to be inspired and influenced by great poems, books, films, TV etc.

Writing is something you want to do.

We mean this in two ways, you might be considering it as a career, whether as a creative writer, journalist, performer or blogger, you may want to write for the theatre, TV or film.

Or it may be something you want to make an important part of your life while you pursue a career in another field.

Either way, writing will be something you do reflexively, you don't just think about it, wish you could do it or hope one day you'll find some time to do it.

OK we all have blocks, but the Squad is here for people who write, not people who want to write or only write when they are set an assignment.

You might be studying creative writing, we don't regard this as an advantage or disadvantage, but we are here to support you as an individual artist writing what it is you want to write. We will not help you with, or offer advice on, coursework!

Basically, if you love writing, feel you have to write, love talking about writing and reading/watching/listening to what writers make, and want to get better at your own writing, then make sure you apply before midnight on Sunday March 29th 2020.

"The Writing Squad showed me that there was a space for my voice and opened my horizons up to new worlds of writing and like minded people. I have carried my passion for writing into a career in teaching, and I still use the fundamental skills and experiences that the Squad helped me develop to inspire and guide young writers to realise their potential."

"I have been fortunate to benefit from a great number of development schemes/projects specifically designed to support young and emerging writers. This includes initiatives run by (or in partnership with) FOYLE, Tower Poetry, New Writing North, The Poetry School, ARVON, and The Poetry Business, amongst others. Whilst each of these programmes was uniquely valuable to me, not one of them came even close to offering the depth, scope, flexibility, accessibility, longevity, or sheer quality of support that The Writing Squad offers. Nor would I have been likely to have known about or successfully applied for any of those schemes, without the support of the Squad. I truly believe that what the Squad provides is unique in the arts sector. Whilst most development schemes are geared towards developing particular capabilities, and leave participants with 'something to take away' from the experience, the Squad provides a level of individually tailored support that frankly I would not have believed possible if I hadn't experienced it."

"The best way I can describe the Squad's role in my life is something like a fairy godmother. It came at exactly the right time, and made the world accessible to me. Almost everything I value about my life now – the friends I've made, my healthy relationship with writing, confidence in travelling, and a readiness to take risks (both personally and professionally) – I credit at least on some level to the The Writing Squad."

"I surprised myself and am so grateful what I did was received with enthusiasm and encouragement. I jumped, and you all caught me. It was great to be a part of it."