

Friday 15 November 2019

Talent development scheme seeks under-represented voices from the East of England

The National Centre for Writing (NCW) based in Norwich UNESCO City of Literature is seeking under-represented voices in fiction from the East of England to take part in its coveted Escalator Talent Development Scheme.

Now entering its fifteenth year, the writing programme has supported over 100 early career novelists and short story writers, and helped to launch the careers of Michael Donkor (Fourth Estate), Megan Bradbury (Picador), Miranda Doyle (Faber), Guinevere Glasfurd-Brown (Hodder) and Kate Worsley (Bloomsbury)

The 2020 scheme is keen to receive applications from early career writers who self-identify as from a working class background, or whom wouldn't ordinarily have the opportunity to benefit from this kind of support. Working class voices remain critically under-represented in contemporary fiction and NCW seeks to address this through Escalator and its talent development programme more broadly.

Six successful applicants will receive a ten-month package of support including five sessions of one-to-one mentoring with an experienced writer; a retreat based at the National Centre for Writing, Dragon Hall; workshops and development sessions; and a showcase event with an audience of invited guests and industry professionals.

This year's mentors are Megan Bradbury, Michael Donkor and Kate Worsley – all former alumni of the Escalator programme who have gone on to publish prize-winning and critically acclaimed novels.

Michael Donkor, author of the Desmond Elliott-shortlisted debut *Hold*, was mentored by Daniel Hahn in 2015. He returns to the Escalator scheme this year as a mentor. He said:

'I'm delighted to return to Escalator as a mentor and to have this chance to collaborate, share, learn with and learn from writers at this important stage in their careers. The Escalator scheme challenged and encouraged me to think about storytelling in radically new ways, and I hope I can offer similarly energising and exciting ideas to my mentees!'

Peggy Hughes, Programme Director at NCW said:

'Escalator offers talented new writers a series of opportunities to work with professional writers, meet people in the industry and spend time focusing on their work in a supported and creative way. It's a very special programme that has seen huge success over the last fifteen years, bringing writers and stories from the East of England to national and international readerships.

'This year we're focusing on writers from working class backgrounds or backgrounds where access to the world of books and writers might otherwise be limited. We're really excited to discover who will emerge from our region in the coming months.'

The deadline for applications is Friday 10 January 2020. For full details visit the National Centre for Writing website nationalcentreforwriting.org.uk/escalator.

'It is a privilege to be so deeply involved in another person's work'

Last night (14 November) NCW showcased its 2019 cohort of talented emerging writers to an audience of agents and publishers, including reps from Am Heath, Blake Friedmann and Hodder & Stoughton.

The prestigious event which took part at the Free Word Centre in London is the culmination of ten months' work on the Escalator Talent Development Scheme. The showcased writers were Mike Allen, Anni Domingo, Sam Hacking, Daniel Hickey, Rob Perry, Jon Ransom, Hannah Redding, Kellee Rich, Emily Slade and Tony Warner.

Ross Raisin, author of *God's Own Country* and mentor to Rob Perry and Emily Slade, said:

'Mentoring, when it works well, is never a unilateral occupation; it is a relationship, between writers. It is also, for the mentor, a privilege to be so deeply involved in another person's work, helping the writer to understand their project and process

more fully, as well as tuning the eye that will before long return to the mentor's own writing.

'The Escalator scheme has been a very enjoyable experience for me. Observing my two writers, Rob and Emily, commit to and progress with their novels, energises my own practice and has given me the opportunity to get to know two lovely people, two ambitious writers, who should be proud of their achievements so far.'

Ross was joined at the event by fellow Escalator mentors Yvonne Edwards, Daniel Hahn, Anjali Joseph and Hayley Webster.

Emily Slade read an extract from her young adult novel *Don't Tell* at the event. She said:

'One of the many valuable things about this Escalator year with Ross as a mentor has been the realisation that all the little blocks and problems I thought I had in my writing seem to be a normal part of a healthy creative process. Ross's belief, encouragement and genuine curiosity about my book has been an enormous boost to my confidence.'

Laura Stimson, NCW Programme Manager and lead on the Escalator 2019 programme, said:

'Each year, through Escalator, we share stories that we hope will go on to be published and loved by readers. Books such as Michael Donkor's *Hold*, Guinevere Glasfurd's *The Words in My Hand* and Nicola Upson's series of Josephine Tey novels are testament to this ambition. It's a pleasure and a privilege watching writers develop, and ideas made real, and this year is no exception. Our writers' stories delight in language, rattle with energy and explore the private lives of the characters of tomorrow. '

The Escalator Talent Development Scheme is supported by Arts Council England.

Further information can be found at nationalcentreforwriting.org.uk/escalator or by calling 01603 877177.

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Notes to Editors:

1. For further information or images contact Steph McKenna, Communications Manager at steph@nationalcentreforwriting.org.uk or 01603 877177
2. The **National Centre for Writing** (NCW) is a place of discovery, exchange, ideas and learning for writers, literary translators and readers. Based in the restored and extended 15th century Dragon Hall in the heart of Norwich England's first UNESCO City of Literature, it explores how writing can inspire and change the world we live in. Its year round programme of events, festivals and courses reaches over 14,000 people a year with an additional 110,000 engaged online. Through its learning and participation programme it supports 4,440 young people a year and has a commitment to working with those in the most disadvantaged areas. NCW's patrons include Margaret Atwood, JM Coetzee, Kei Miller and Elif Shafak. www.nationalcentreforwriting.org.uk
3. Escalator is the National Centre for Writing's annual talent development scheme open to all fiction writers (novel or short story) living in the Eastern Region (Bedfordshire, Cambridgeshire, Hertfordshire, Essex, Norfolk and Suffolk). It has been running for over a decade and has supported over 110 writers in their creative projects, with many going on to sign with agents, publish and receive awards for their writing.

Ten successful applicants are selected for this free scheme, all of whom commit to a period of mentoring, a series of development opportunities, talks and workshops as part of a residential retreat, and take part in a final showcase. nationalcentreforwriting.org.uk/escalator/