Programme specification
MA in Creative Writing

Faculty: Faculty of Arts
Entry in: September 2016
Awarding Institution: York St John University
Teaching Institution: York St John University
Delivery Location: York St John University
Programme/s Accredited by: Not applicable
Exit Awards: Postgraduate Diploma in Creative Writing
               Postgraduate Certificate in Creative Writing
UCAS Code / GTTR / Other: Not applicable
Joint Honours Combinations: Not applicable
QAA Benchmark Group(s): Not applicable
Mode/s of Study: Full-time over 1 year
                  Part-time over 2 years
Language of Study: English

Introduction and Special Features

The MA in Creative Writing aims to develop a relationship between critical and creative practice, in which students situate their creative writing as a mode of engagement, as well as a craft which results in a product for an audience or readership. Both process and product are valued, and there is an emphasis on creative practice and reflection. Modules allow students to reflect on such issues as ‘voice’, their place as contemporary writers, high-level understanding of audience and genre, the possibilities of experimentation and subversion, the effects of forms of cultural production on their art, etc. Students can choose to write in a variety of genres, and can be encouraged to interrogate genre-distinctions. The level of expertise on the teaching team means that students can be supported in a variety of genres.

The programme aims to develop high-level skills associated with the development of a portfolio of creative writing. It allows students to develop original projects in a supportive environment, whilst encouraging them to engage with contemporary literature. It provides the following skills which are both transferable and specific to the study of the subject:

- To generate original written work through a variety of creative techniques.
- To critically evaluate and analyse the writing of others, especially contemporary writing, and apply that understanding to their own work.
- To demonstrate an understanding of a variety of genres, including fiction, non-fiction, poetry and scripts.
- To work effectively in a team in supporting and collaborating with others.
- To develop editing and drafting skills.
- To situate their writing both culturally and within a commercial context in relation to notions of audience and readership.
- To manage time effectively in relation to successfully completing an extended piece of writing or collection.
- To critically reflect on creative processes.
To successfully research relevant materials.

**Special features of the programme:**

- **Professional, published writers** teach on the team, but the programme also draws upon the expertise of regional, national and international writers as guest lecturers.

- **The Literature Series** is a considerable strength of the programme. Its primary aim is to enhance student experience and events are designed to complement their courses. The events contribute to the creation of a ‘literary’ and creative community. At the same time, they are open to the public and are an effective way of marketing the BA and MA programmes and signposting YSJ’s place in the community. Recent visiting speakers include novelist Fiona Shaw; graphic novelist Graham Rawle; poet Daljit Nagra; short story writer and editor Nicholas Royle and a visit from a literary agent from Peters, Fraser and Dunlop. The Programme also involves the current Royal Literary Fund fellow who has given talks and readings. These opportunities constitute part of the learning and teaching strategy, in that they contextualise the production and creation of contemporary writing and lead to vibrant debate; inspiration; greater awareness of contemporary literature and the opportunity to engage with possible routes outside of academia in wider regional and international contexts.

- **Regional provider** for returning learners and life-long learners as well as those wishing to take an MA as a route to further postgraduate study

- **Flexibility and modular progression.** The MA can be taken part-time or full-time which allows for flexibility. At the same time, modules build upon a reinforce key skills, and apart from the foundational, introductory module, can be taken in any order.

- **Evening teaching.** Offers flexibility to those in employment or with other commitments.

- **Termly teaching** provides clarity of provision and space for student reflection on learning and assessment. It also provides a sense of continuity.

- **Focus on the Contemporary.** This is supported by the Literature Series which invites practising writers to share their expertise (above).

**Admissions Criteria**

In addition to the University’s general entry criteria for postgraduate study, you must have:

- A first degree or above in a related subject at 2:2 Honours level (or international equivalent)

In addition, applicants to the Creative Writing MA will be required to submit a portfolio of 1000-2000 words of creative writing in one or more of the following genres:

- Poetry
- Fiction
- Non-fiction
- Script

If your first language is not English, you need to take an IELTS test or an equivalent qualification accepted by the University (see [https://www.yorksj.ac.uk/international/how-to-apply/english-language-requirements/](https://www.yorksj.ac.uk/international/how-to-apply/english-language-requirements/)).

If you do not have traditional qualifications, you may be eligible for entry on the basis of Accredited Prior (Experiential) Learning (APL/APEL). For example, applicants may have a professional background in creative writing or a related area. The portfolio of creative writing required by all applicants also meets the University’s APEL policy. An interview may also be appropriate. We also consider applications for entry with advanced standing.
Programme Aims

1. To provide opportunities for the production of original, creative writing.
2. To enhance and develop creative writing skills in the context of the literary marketplace.
3. To develop confidence and critical thinking through reflective practice.
4. To provide a supportive learning environment which meets the needs of a diverse set of learners.
5. To promote and develop a vibrant postgraduate and creative community in the university through events, workshops and visiting speakers, including partnerships with local arts events such as the York Literature Festival.
6. To encourage critical as well as creative thinking and practice.
7. To equip students with the skills necessary to develop into professional writers and/or pursue further postgraduate study.
8. To enhance student development as independent learners and practitioners.
9. To develop appropriate skills in communication, collaboration and self-management.

Programme Learning Outcomes

Level M / FHEQ L7

Upon successful completion of a Master of Arts in Creative Writing students will be able to:

1. Apply in-depth knowledge and advanced critical understanding of the practice of writing to a range of texts in different genres and from different historic/socio-economic contexts (including the contemporary).
2. Critically explore issues and insights pertaining to current theory and practice in contemporary writing.
3. Apply an in-depth and informed understanding of the theory and practice of genre (fiction, poetry and scriptwriting) to a range of texts and contexts.
4. Critically evaluate the role of orality, language varieties, and the role of the voice in a range of texts in different genres and/or from other cultures.
5. Demonstrate in-depth critical awareness of the relationship between literary production and the literary/creative marketplace.
6. Employ reflective skills in the evaluation of their own writing and that of others (included published and performed texts).
7. Demonstrate a comprehensive understanding of techniques of collating, organising and applying relevant insights from a broad range of both primary and secondary sources.
8. Proactively formulate ideas and develop, implement and execute plans by which to evaluate these when researching, planning and writing assignments.
9. Communicate clearly and effectively in writing, using advanced concepts and terminology appropriate to the Master’s Level study of Creative Writing.
10. Take a proactive and self-reflective role in organising and managing own learning in order to achieve successful outcomes.
11. Demonstrate professional standards of referencing and excellent presentation of written material. In addition, Master of Arts Creative Writing graduates only will:
12. Demonstrate comprehensive reflective skills, understanding of generic techniques, and originality in creative practice, in the successful execution of an extended portfolio of writing.

[Outcomes are informed by the QAA Quality Code for Higher Education at level 7: Master’s Degree http://www.qaa.ac.uk/Publications/InformationAndGuidance/Documents/Quality-Code-Chapter-A1.pdf And by York St John’s ‘Qualifications Descriptors’ document for M-Level (Registry 2011)]
Programme Structure

Modules for the Programme

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Credits</th>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Status of Module</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>MCW001</td>
<td>Critical Approaches To Creative Writing</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MCW002</td>
<td>Writing The Voice</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>1, 2 or 3</td>
<td>C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MCW003</td>
<td>The Contemporary Writer</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>1, 2 or 3</td>
<td>C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MCW004</td>
<td>Writers, Readers And Audiences</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>1, 2 or 3</td>
<td>C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MCW005</td>
<td>Portfolio</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>2 &amp; 3</td>
<td>C</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

*C*: Compulsory, CP: Compulsory for progression to the next level, CA: Compulsory for award, O: option or E: elective.

Teaching, Learning and Assessment

The teaching methodology for creative writing is informed by the evolution of creative writing pedagogy in the UK and the US, and incorporates several elements of good practice. The subject-area in Higher Education is helpfully defined by NAWE (National Association for Writers in Education) in their Benchmark Statement (2008). Whilst it does not refer specifically to M-Level Creative Writing, it does offer some helpful definitions that relate to this as a discipline which ‘develops a range of cognitive abilities’. Creative Writing is a practice-based discipline which also reflects upon itself. The following NAWE definition informs our understanding of this as an academic subject:

“[It is] an endeavour that speculates upon and challenges its own nature and purpose, frequently demands high levels of self-motivation, intellectual curiosity, imagination, and divergent thinking skills. Students learn to recognize the interactive relationship between media and processes, between ideas and issues, and between producer, mediator and audience. A Creative Writing student should be able to position the individual’s practice and output with an appropriate critical discourse and contextual framework.” (NAWE, 2008)

The MA programme aims to develop students’ abilities in generation of material; reflection on creative practice; professional understanding of the subject area; relevant critical skills; social and cultural context for their work; and a range of transferable skills.

The work of Michelene Wandor informs an approach which does not merely use the traditional feedback ‘workshop’, but also hones a range of other skills, including:

- ‘to develop a practical understanding of...[genre] conventions’;
- ‘to think about writing, and to think about how to think about writing, through analysing the stylistic features of student writing in the classroom’;
- ‘for each student to develop a greater understanding of how their mind/imagination works; to gain understanding of their own linguistic and cultural resources, and of the necessity of expanding these’;
- ‘to pursue class-based studies which focus on imaginative writing, not rewriting.’

(Source: Wandor, M. The Author is not Dead, Merely Somewhere Else: Creative Writing Reconceived, Palgrave: 2008)
The importance of professionalization in terms of the M-Level quality of the course is also key. Teaching practice incorporates elements of best-practice as described above, and aims to follow what Stephanie Vanderslice suggests in her recent study on Creative Writing courses in the US and the UK. In a chapter devoted to graduate level teaching, she suggests that writing ‘communities’, ‘advice from practising writers’ and ‘time to write’ must be supplemented and supported by teaching an understanding of how the publishing industry operates; the wider context for creative writing; and transferable skills that can apply to related professions. (Source: Vanderslice, S. *Rethinking Creative Writing*, Professional and Higher Partnership: 2011)

Creative writing assessment strategies include manifestos (MCW001); portfolios accompanied by Critical Self Commentaries; and optional ‘critical’ essays (MCW002). The manifesto assessment is 20% of the introductory module *Critical Approaches to Creative Writing* and encourages students to situate their writing in a creative way. For most modules, the Portfolio is the main form of assessment, allowing for a flexible approach (students may write in any genre and produce completed pieces, extracts or ‘collections’) but also requiring a Critical Self-Commentary. This element of the assessment asks the student to explore the development of their creative work through references to influences, research and the drafting process. It is also a pedagogical tool in itself - detailed reflection helps to develop writing through raising awareness of the decisions the writer makes. It provides an opportunity to explore ‘process’ as well as ‘product’.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>STRATEGY</th>
<th>MODULE</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Manifesto</td>
<td>MCW001</td>
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<tr>
<td>Portfolio &amp; Critical Commentary</td>
<td>MCW002, MCW003, MCW004</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Critical essay</td>
<td>MCW002</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extended portfolio &amp; Critical Commentary</td>
<td>MCW005</td>
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**Progression and Graduation Requirements**

The University’s [general regulations for postgraduate awards](#) apply to this programme.

Any modules that must be passed for progression or award are indicated in the Programme Structure section.

In addition, the following programme-specific regulations apply in respect of progression and graduation:

- MCW005 cannot contribute towards exit awards;
- To exit with a *Postgraduate Certificate* or *Postgraduate Diploma* students must attempt: MCW001;
- The award of *Master of Arts* will be dependent on the successful accumulation of 180 credits.

**Internal and External Reference Points**

This programme specification was formulated with reference to:

- [University Mission Statement](#) [see page two]
- [Strategic Plan 2015-20](#) [see page four]
- York St John University Key Objectives 2012-2015
- York St John M-Level descriptors, Registry 2012
- Faculty of Arts Assessment Handbook 2011
- NAWE Creative Writing Subject Benchmarks and Research Benchmarks, 2008.
- The HEA
- Knights, B. Teaching and Learning in English Literature, Sage: 2006
- Morley, D. The Cambridge Companion to Creative Writing, CUP:2012
- Holland, S. Creative Writing: A Good Practice Guide, HEA English Subject Centre Reports, 6 (February 2003), 4.
- Vanderslice, S. Rethinking Creative Writing, Professional and Higher Partnership: 2011.

**Further Information**

Further information on the programme of study may be obtained from:
- Admissions entry profile (Admissions)
- Programme validation document (Registry – Academic Quality Support)
- Regulations (Registry – Academic Quality Support)
- Student programme handbook (faculty)
- Module handbooks (faculty)

*Date written / revised:*
First entry to this version of the programme is 2013 (revalidated March 2013). Reviewed: October 2014 (no change)