

## SEN14D023

**Title:** Approval of a New University Award: Master of Fine Arts (MFA)  
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### Issue

1. At its meeting on 25 June 2014, LTC was asked to approve the introduction of a new award, the Master of Fine Arts (MFA) in Creative Writing. At the LTC meeting it was agreed that further scrutiny was required on the proposal. A small working group, chaired by the PVC (Academic) with the Director of University Services (LTS), the Associates Deans (L&T) for HUM and SSF, Professor Andrew Cowan (LDC) and Mr Henry Sutton (LDC), was set up to give further consideration to the proposed award, course content and the resourcing of the course.
2. Following the deliberations of the working group, on 21 August 2014 the PVC (Academic) took chair's action on behalf of LTC to approve the proposal, subject to Senate approving the introduction of the new award of Master of Fine Arts.
3. The background to LTC's scrutiny of the proposal was outlined in Section 12 of the LTC report to Senate on 5 November 2014.
4. Once the proposal is approved, revisions will be required to the Common Masters Framework Regulations. It will also be necessary to identify a colour for the hood for the academic gown of an MFA graduate.

### Recommendation

Senate is asked to approve the introduction of Master of Fine Arts as a new University award.

### Resource Implications

The resources required to run the MFA in Creative Writing have been fully costed by the Faculty of Arts and Humanities Faculty Manage and the resource requirements have been signed off by the HUM Faculty Executive.

### Risk Implications

The introduction of the award poses a low risk to the University. The course will run subject to agreed minimum student numbers.

### Equality and Diversity

Admission procedures will follow the well-established and successful practice of the existing Creative Writing MA courses in encouraging a good first degree as an entry criterion but

privileging the applicant's writing portfolio, personal statement and interview performance. This means that talented writers are admitted to the MA regardless of educational background: consequently LDC have welcomed nurses, carpenters, hairdressers, shopkeepers and air force pilots as well as students arriving straight from impressive first degrees in English Literature and older students with established careers in such fields as journalism, teaching, advertising and arts administration. The proposed MFA is designed in particular to appeal to three constituencies: American students; students who are already enrolled on our MA and would like to extend their association with UEA; home students who would welcome the opportunities offered by a two-year course. Nevertheless LDC would expect a similar diversity of students as enjoyed by the Prose Fiction MA, where the average age of student is 29 (ranging from 22 to 60) and the cohort conspicuously diverse in terms of nationality and ethnicity. 50% of the 2013-14 intake for the Prose MA are paying international fees. The admissions process would be identical to that for the MA, with the same assumptions regarding language proficiency, a minimum IELTS of 7.0.

### **Timing of decisions**

The course will recruit its first applicants in September 2015/6 subject to Senate approval of the introduction of the award of Master of Fine Arts.

### **Further Information**

Professor Andrew Cowan (Director of Creative Writing, LDC ) [A.cowan@uea.ac.uk](mailto:A.cowan@uea.ac.uk)

### **Discussion**

Below is a rationale for the introduction of the award of MFA from Professor Andrew Cowan (Director of Creative Writing, LDC) and Ms Jean McNeil (Senior Lecturer, LDC).

## **MFA Creative Writing**

### *Overview*

The Creative Writing programme at UEA was the first of its kind in the UK, and is distinguished by the unrivalled success of its alumni. We introduced the first MA in 1970, the first PhD in 1987, and students now join us from all over the world.

In 2011 we were awarded the Queen's Anniversary Prize for Higher and Further Education in recognition of our continuing excellence in delivering innovative courses at a world-class level. Our MFA Creative Writing builds on our extensive connections with publishers and agents, meaning that our students will graduate fully equipped to launch their careers as publishing writers, and will have sufficient training and experience to support their writing careers as teachers of writing.

Over the duration of two years, the first year of the MFA will be coterminous with our existing [MA Creative Writing](#), offering all the benefits of the workshop-based approach to teaching writing, while the second year will be structured on the model of the PhD, offering one-to-one supervision of works-in-progress and culminating in the submission of a full-length work for assessment.

Additionally, the MFA is an entry-level qualification for a career in academia in the USA, giving many graduates the opportunity immediately to pursue roles in teaching at undergraduate level. The MFA presents a less expensive alternative to a PhD, requiring fewer years out of employment, and offers an immediately relevant outcome: under supervision, the completion of a publishable work (60,000-80,000 words) that will enable you to take full advantage of the excellent links we maintain with literary agents and publishers, many of whom visit the campus to talk to students during the programme.

[Rationale for the awarding of the MFA degree](#)

A two-year Master of Fine Arts (or MFA) is the standard offer in Creative Writing in the USA. It is viewed as the 'terminal' degree in the field, i.e the entry-level qualification for a career in academia, and typically an MFA will include an element of teaching experience at undergraduate level.

One motivation for introducing such a degree at UEA is to increase our competitiveness in that market. The international reputation of our MA encourages a significant number of applications from the USA. Of the 213 applications received to May for the 2013-14 Prose Fiction intake, 112 were non-UK; 30 of these were American, of whom we accepted five. Of the 35 applications received to May for the 2013-14 Poetry intake, 21 were non-UK; 8 of these were American, of whom we also accepted five. These numbers are healthy, but we believe they could be improved if we were able to offer a degree that would enhance the employability of US graduates on their return to the States.

A second motivation for introducing this degree is to respond to existing student demand. Most of our Prose Fiction students begin a full-length work (a novel or collection of stories) during their MA. Many of these would welcome the opportunity to complete this work under supervision, and tend to apply to our PhD programme for that reason. For most, their ability to undertake a PhD is conditional on receiving funding. For many, the 'critical' and research elements of the PhD are of secondary importance. An MFA would present a less expensive alternative to the PhD, requiring fewer years out of employment, and would offer a more immediately relevant outcome: the completion or near-completion of a publishable work (60-80,000 words).

The reputation of our Creative Writing programme is founded in part on the success of our alumni in achieving publication and prizes. We believe an extended course, with the completion of a marketable work as its outcome, will enhance the publication prospects of our graduates. Our reputation is also based on our position as pioneers in the field: we introduced the first MA, the first PhD, and one of the first BAs. Currently among our UK competitors only Kingston, Glasgow and Warwick offer an MFA, though we understand that others are intending to follow (City University, St Andrews, Manchester, Bath Spa). UEA should be among the first, and become the most prominent. The 'brand' reputation of UEA Creative Writing will generate publicity on launch and secure the longer-term viability of the course in terms of enrolment. The incorporation of a teaching training and practice element is intended in part to model the proposed course on the typical American MFA model. It is also a response to developments in LDC. The minutes of the 13-2-13 School Staff Meeting record:

"There was a general agreement that writing should form a more prominent and explicit element of the undergraduate programme. The practical and personal emphasis on writing which is central to the experience of creative writing students could be part of that of literature students too. The assumption that students come from A-Level already knowing how to write essays is not well-founded; this needs to be taught. And the expectation that English graduates should have high levels of competence in the written language is a reasonable one which is not always met. There is more work to be done to find ways of embedding writing in the curriculum, perhaps including an imaginative use of PGR students as tutors."

The training of MFA students is designed to create a pool of tutors to answer this need in the School, and to respond to a subsequent development in School planning, which is to introduce structured provision of learning in the post-Easter assessment period, with an emphasis on writing tasks, formatively assessed.

In addition the Creative Writing programme has developed a number of ad hoc relationships with local high schools which involve the voluntary participation of MA Creative Writing students in the delivery of creative writing activities in the Schools. Our intention is to formalise this relationships by establishing an 'agency' at UEA that will actively canvas schools in the region to offer the services of our students. In preparation, the students will be offered a programme of formal training and provided with a specially designed syllabus.

We have previously worked extensively with the UEA Outreach Office in the organisation of ad hoc school visits. The proposed 'agency' will be established in consultation with the Outreach

Office, the UEA Careers Office and the LDC Employability Director (meetings are currently scheduled with Louise Bohn in Outreach, Justine Mann in Careers, and Sarah McIntyre in LDC). Students would enrol on the existing Outreach PPD module for training and instruction in UEA procedures and safeguarding policies, including compliance with the University's Code of Practice for Placement Learning and Work-based Learning. In addition the proposed Teaching Training and Practice module will include a half-day session provided by Writers' Centre Norwich, which also has an existing package of training for volunteers (health & safety, project management, etc). Either the Outreach Office or WCN would be able to undertake DBS checks on our behalf.

The existing Creative Writing MA comprises three strands – Prose Fiction, Poetry, and Scriptwriting – with a sibling fourth strand in Biography and Creative Non-Fiction. These four strands are jointly marketed and share a similar course structure, but are convened, taught and marked separately, and have separate admissions procedures. Our intention is that the MFA should be organised on similar lines. The MFA will be piloted by the Prose Fiction strand: consequently most of the detail in this proposal concerns the Prose MFA. Poetry, Scriptwriting and Biography and Creative Non-Fiction may be introduced as MFA strands in future years.

ENDS

Andrew Cowan  
Jean McNeil  
LDC