

ISC14D023

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Issue

Statement on the upcoming launch of the British Archive for Contemporary Writing (BACW) and its programme of work over the coming two years.

Recommendation

Recipients are asked:

- To note plans for the launch of the BACW
- To endorse the work planned over the two year project.

Resource Implications

The project has funding initially for two years, some external (Doris Lessing Estate, Foyle Foundation), some from ISD and HUM. There is a sustainability element to the project plan.

Risk Implications

As part of its offering, the BACW is adopting an innovative approach, incubating manuscripts and related material at a much earlier stage in an author's career, providing the scholarly community with access to research resource much sooner than would be possible under a traditional archive model. There is a low risk that it will not be wholly embraced by the wider literary community. We expect any initial scepticism to be overcome once we have some exemplar agreements with contemporary writers in place.

Equality and Diversity

No impact anticipated.

Background and Discussion

The aim is to create a research resource of British contemporary writing by building on UEA's literary heritage and existing archive collections of significance, including Doris Lessing; JD Salinger; Nadine Gordimer, Roger Deakin and the publishing archives of AP Watt, the world's oldest literary agent, and the publisher Charles Pick.

The archive will look to grow significantly, capitalising on UEA's strong links with writers of world renown through our international literary festivals, the British Centre for Literary Translation and more than forty years of highly successful creative writing programmes. It aims to reinforce the reputation of the University and the status of Norwich as a UNESCO City of literature. Key stakeholders, including the Arts Council, the British Council and the emerging National Centre for Writing, have provided strong endorsements.

As part of its offering, the BACW is adopting an innovative approach, incubating manuscripts and related material at a much earlier stage in an author's career, providing the international scholarly community with access to a potentially outstanding set of research resources much sooner than would be possible under a traditional archive model.

To facilitate this, the archive is in two parts:

- *The Storehouse*, enables contemporary writers to house their emerging archives at UEA on a temporary basis. It is expected to be dynamic, evolving as new writers come on stream while offering the writer the flexibility to remove materials at a later stage (with safeguards for researchers who may be working on the materials at that point), possibly for sale if this proves to be a viable option.
- *The Collection* will contain writers' archives fully gifted to the University or on long term loan, with an emphasis on long term preservation, discovery and access.

It is hoped that many using *The Storehouse* will choose move their papers to *The Collection* at a later stage but there is no obligation to do so.

The sale of British literary archives overseas has been a national concern for decades, not least because of the loss of access to UK researchers. This approach is aimed to help raise UEA's profile within the international scholarly community, attracting new researchers and new depositors and contributing to the retention of some of the UK's literary heritage.

A press launch of the archive will take place in June 2015, highlighting existing collections, particularly the most recent gift of papers from the Doris Lessing's estate, although the latter are currently embargoed.

Deliverables during the first two years of the project, will include:

- Developing relationships with authors to acquire new archive material - a process which is successfully underway, having secured commitments from a number of significant authors including Tash Aw, Naomi Alderman, Mark Cocker, Richard Mabey and Amit Chaudhuri.
- Raising the profile of the collections within the scholarly community – through proactive and targeted communications.
- Piloting the digitisation of existing collections – including the literary festival appearances of major writers and a high profile collection of love letters written in post war Rhodesia by the Nobel Laureate, Doris Lessing. It is anticipated that a pilot digital repository will enhance the reputation of the archive and its credibility and draw new researchers to the paper based collections.
- A strategy for sustainability that identifies opportunities for further funding

The additional collections have the potential to enhance current teaching programmes within the University and work is underway with teaching staff to embed these within relevant modules.