

# Writing Development in the Highlands and Islands

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For HI-Arts  
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## **Executive Summary**

### **Introduction**

*'Writing from the Highlands and Islands is an untapped goldmine',*  
Writer at discussion group

The Highlands and Islands have a strong tradition in literature. Some of the 20<sup>th</sup> century's greatest Scottish writers were born in, lived in, or were strongly associated with the area – Neil Gunn, Naomi Mitchison, Sorley MacLean, George Mackay Brown, Norman MacCaig and Iain Crichton Smith. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century the area's links with literature are still evident, with contemporary writers such as Mollie Hunter, Alan Warner who was raised in Oban, and Ali Smith, born in Inverness. A number of high profile writers have chosen to make their home in the Highlands and Islands such as Michel Faber, Anne Perry, John Byrne, Tom Morton, Duncan McLean, Andrew Greig and Mairi Hedderwick.

Traditionally a writer could be based anywhere and live by his work. This holds true for writers who have made their names, but it is increasingly difficult for new writers remote from the publishing and literature centres to understand and access the marketplace for their work. Certain interventions have helped in the past, most notably the Ross and Cromarty Writing Fellowship which assisted the writing careers of a group of Highland-based novelists – Anne MacLeod, Moira Forsyth, Tom Bryan, Cynthia Rogerson.

This report, commissioned by HI-Arts, is in the context of a programme of development in the music industry, under the banner of MIDAS (Music Industry Development and Support). The programme has had a significant impact on the international profile of music and musicians from the Highlands and Islands, and has helped a large number of bands and individual musicians to work towards a viable professional career.

HI-Arts wished to explore whether a long term programme of development, based in some aspects on the MIDAS model, might have a significant impact on raising and maintaining levels of success for writers based in the HIE area. At an early stage of the project, HI-Arts enlisted the help of the North East of England writing development agency, New Writing North, as a possible model for a new organisation in H & I.

### **Aims**

- To survey writers, aspirant writers, and relevant agencies in the Highlands and Islands
- To draw up an audit and dataset of writers, publishers and opportunities for writers
- To consult this sector on their needs, on potential opportunities, and on the best methods of supporting and developing the sector.
- To work with New Writing North in Newcastle to prepare a programme for development that matches the outcomes of the audit and consultation process.

A steering group was established to oversee this stage of work on the project. It was formed of individuals who represent some of the major stakeholders. The Steering Group comprised:

- Robert Livingston, HI-Arts (an independent charitable company, contracted by Highlands and Islands Enterprise, and funded by the Scottish Arts Council, to deliver an annual programme of arts development)
- Jenny Attala, Literature Officer, Scottish Arts Council
- Sophy Dale, Literature Officer, Scottish Arts Council
- Iain Hamilton, Highlands & Islands Enterprise
- Anne MacLeod, writer
- Claire Malcolm, Director, New Writing North

A brief was drawn up and Jenny Brown, Moira Forsyth and Philippa Johnston were appointed to undertake the independent research. They met twice with the Steering Group:

- In February, to agree parameters of the research
- In May, to present findings from the research, and to discuss possible options

A database was drawn up comprising writers, publishers and opportunities for writers in the area. A series of interviews took place with writers and agencies in Skye, Shetlands and Orkney. Two broader consultative meetings were held in May to discuss the findings and options. One was held with agencies, and the other with writers.

This report is in summary form, for ease of reference. The authors would like to express their gratitude for all the help and assistance they have received.

## **Context**

*Literary festivals and writers' services are usually (logically) urban-based. This is an excellent move towards including writers often isolated in remote/rural areas. Look forward to its development (writer, Poolewe)*

## **Writers**

The Highlands and Islands are home to a sizable body of published and aspirant writers. This group had not been quantified before. 350 individuals were identified, and were contacted during the course of this study. 141 individuals, or 40%, returned questionnaires.

The survey found that the majority of writers surveyed write fiction and poetry. A third write non-fiction. Most of the writers have been published. Almost all writers write in English, but a small proportion also wrote in Scots and Gaelic. Half of the writers surveyed use their creative writing in other ways, such as tutoring, editing, or copy writing.

## **Training provision**

There are a number of creative writing classes in the area, organised by local authorities and the Workers' Educational Association. There are also a number of lively writers' groups, some led by the four writing fellows based in the area - Shetland, Orkney, Sabhal Mor Ostaig on Skye, and the Iain Crichton Smith Fellowship which covers the Highlands. These posts, jointly funded by Scottish Arts

Council and host organisations, are designed to stimulate writing in the community while also supporting a writer's own development.

There is strong evidence of a supportive informal network of writers in the area.

The principal creative writing centre in Scotland is based near Inverness. Moniack Mhor Writers' Centre is associated with the Arvon Foundation, and offers a range of short residential courses on different aspects of writing. It is core funded by the Scottish Arts Council.

Castle of Park near Banff run short seasons of week-long creative writing courses on different aspects of writing. Tutors include Peter Guttridge on crime writing and Maggie Hamand on the novel.

There is an annual writing and painting retreat in late spring on Iona, led by Anna Locke. The Last House on Lewis offers writers' retreats.

### **Literature events**

The Cromarty Book Festival is now an established event, taking place in late spring. It is aimed at writers rather than the general public, and attracts around 200 people to its weekend programme. Its main funders are Scottish Arts Council and Highland Council. A week-long literature festival in Orkney was organised by then writing fellow George Gunn in 2001, and is taking place for the second time in June 2003. Shetland organised a highly successful literature festival for children in 2002 which attracted 3500 people.

Most of the live literature events tend to be bookshop-based on the mainland. Independent booksellers such as the Ceilidh Place Bookshop in Ullapool are singled out for praise for their support of local writers, both in terms of events and stocking policy. On Skye, a number of events are held at Sabhal Mor Ostaig. The number of events and author visits taking place in the Highlands is set to rise, with an increase to 85 author visits funded in 2003/4 to the Council by Scottish Book Trust under the Writers in Scotland scheme.

### **Outlets for writers' work**

Grey Coast Theatre Company is based in Caithness, and has an active new writing policy. It has recently commissioned a play from Highland writer Bess Ross. Tosg, based at Sabhal Mor Ostaig, is a Gaelic theatre company.

Other Highland companies have commissioned new writing, especially the Highland Festival through [theatrecollective@highland](mailto:theatrecollective@highland), but also Theatre Highland (now Theatre Hebrides). The Traverse Theatre has undertaken a six year programme of playwriting development linked to their Highland tours, which resulted in two full-scale productions by Highland writers: Henry Adam and I F MacLeod.

There are a number of publishing opportunities in the area for writers - Northwords arts magazine, and several publishing companies including House of Lochar on Colonsay, Whittles Publishing in Caithness, and The Shetland Times (7% of Scotland's publishers are based in the area). The first e-book about Lewis, written by a local author, was published in 2003 by a partnership between Work Global and a South African based e-publishing company considering relocation to the Western

Isles. Most writers look further afield for outlets for their work – many to Scottish publishers and literary magazines, and a proportion to publishers based in London. There was little evidence of work sold to international outlets.

### **Strategic context**

The arts strategies of Highland Council and Western Isles Council have sections on Literature Development. Both recognise the lack of a supportive infrastructure to support creative writing. Highland Council wishes to increase visits by professional writers to the Highlands, and to develop readership. Western Isles wish to develop community publishing and story-collecting.

The Scottish Arts Council's Literature Strategy 2002-2007 *Literature, Nation* sets out its aim to build a robust, adequately-funded and sustainable national framework for literature development with key partners, local authorities, libraries, schools, colleges, universities, Literature Development Officers and Writing Fellows. It aims to develop and support a network of Literature Development Officers and Writing Fellows in every local authority. Also relevant to this study, the feasibility of a network of Literature Centres will be investigated, and arts centres and festivals will be encouraged to develop regular literature programmes.

## **Writing in the Highlands and Islands**

### **Strengths**

- Home to established and new writers
- Reputation of 20<sup>th</sup> century writers from area
- Established annual Festival for writers at Cromarty
- Moniack Mhor Writers' Centre
- Four writer in residence posts in area

### **Weaknesses**

- Geography
- Far from publishing centres
- Few publishers and no agents in area
- Fragility of Gaelic publishing
- Writer in residence posts temporary, tend to be oversubscribed and don't cover whole area
- Only one literature development officer for area (Shetland)
- Writers in area earn less than Scottish average from their writing (£5000 pa)
- Weak link between writers and publishers – most writers in area write fiction or poetry yet output of Scottish publishers predominantly non-fiction
- Changed focus of Northwords means more limited scope for publication of local writers

### **Opportunities**

- Highland Year of Culture 2007
- Branding of Highlands and Islands writers for festivals, writers' tours, etc
- Development of Moniack Mhor
- Lottery funding for two Gaelic publishing projects

- Development of Sandstone Press and Northwords
- Scottish Book Trust developing services to writers nationally
- University of Highlands and Islands
- Scottish Arts Council initiatives may lead to new opportunities – Writers' Factory, Review of Publishing, Review of Writing Fellowships
- Establishment of Playwrights' Studio

### **Threats**

- Growing professionalism of urban creative writing courses

## **Writing in Scotland**

### **Context**

- International demand for writing from Scotland
- Demand for Scottish writing from Scottish-based producers
- Scottish writers tend to be unaware of the potential outlets for their work
- Strength of fiction writing for publication; non-fiction less developed
- Strength also in writing for theatre
- Production-led economy : too little attention paid to distribution
- Most Scottish writers earn less than £5000 pa from their writing
- Screenwriting skills seen as weak, but good potential to develop through Writers' Factory proposals
- Survey of Scottish publishers shows that very few books are agented
- Agency sector in Scotland under-developed
- Scottish-published books predominantly Scottish-authored
- Renewed confidence in Scottish publishing with recent success of Canongate, Mainstream and Birlinn/Polygon

### **Key trends**

- Increase in number of successful writers choosing to live in Scotland
- Increasing professionalisation of new writers, developed by university creative writing courses
- Increasing difficulty for writers to send unsolicited manuscripts to publishers

## **Summary of Findings from Survey and Consultation**

*I think this project is a brilliant idea as it's about time people in the Highlands had clear opportunities to realise their creative talent. I know that if some of these suggestions are implemented then it will have a great and tangible effect on the area.*  
Writer, survey

The research involved 160 writers and individuals engaged in writing in the Highlands and Islands and is included in the appendices to this report. In summary, this research found:

- Writers have expressed a need for more advice, support and access to information.

- The overall structures for support and advice to writers are fragmented and therefore writers' needs are not met.

There is unsatisfied demand for

1. Advice and mentoring from other writers
  2. Critical feedback
  3. Support and advice in publishing, marketing, business start up
  4. Networking and information
  5. Readings, launches and events
- There was overwhelming demand for this support to be made available in the Highlands and Islands.
  - Writers are seeking long-term help rather than short-term projects
  - Writers are frustrated by the lack of outlets for their work, both locally and nationally

## **Conclusions**

The clear conclusion of this study is that there is a gap between current provision of support for writers and demand from writers.

The creation of a new resource to fill this gap is generally held to be desirable by those involved in writing in the area.

*My key problem is isolation. I'm 100 miles from Dingwall, the nearest writers' group. There are other writers dotted about up here but what's needed is a friendly person to get us all out of the woodwork and able to network and support each other. Support for getting published would be great – where do I send my novel? Is it ready to send? Who else might publish my writing? (writer, Lochinver)*

## **Options**

There are a number of options available.

### **Option 1: Status quo – no direct intervention**

Rely on current activity in area, plus increased presence from national agencies such as Scottish Book Trust with improved web site and to deliver training, including occasional training in Inverness.

### **Outcomes**

- Similar to present situation, but with access to better web-based resource and some training

### **Strengths**

- No additional funding required
- No danger of duplication of effort

### **Weaknesses**

- Does not address majority of identified needs of writers
- Dependent on third parties
- No link with distributors/publishers

### **Option 2: Fund increased number of writers in residence posts**

#### **Outcomes**

- More activity
- Increased opportunities for critical feedback and mentoring
- Match Iain Crichton Smith Gaelic language fellowship with equal resource for English language writers

#### **Strengths**

- Low cost
- Familiar and trusted model
- Quick start
- Funding directly to writers
- Clear partnership between funding bodies
- In line with SAC's Literature Strategy (writing fellow and literature development officer in each local authority)
- Likelihood of stimulating bursaries for local writers

#### **Weaknesses**

- Low impact
- Lack of strategic direction
- Limited knowledge of commercial market
- No direct income generation
- Risk of lack of continuity between fellows
- Success dependent on strong support from host organisations
- Residence posts in isolated areas tend to suit writers only at a particular stage of their career

### **Option 3: Establish writing development agency for Highlands and Islands**

Dedicated person working in Agency offering training, promotion of H & I writers, liaison with commercial outlets

#### **Outcomes**

- Web presence
- Income generation

#### **Strengths**

- Network of contacts
- Sustained programme of higher profile events
- Own identity

- Profile
- Commercial bias

### **Weaknesses**

- Cost
- Perception that funding going to bureaucrats rather than to writers
- Possible risk of duplication of activity with national agencies
- Risk of not being fully plugged into national writing scene

### **Recommendations**

The option which would seem to best meet the identified needs of writers is Option Three, the development of a Writing Development Agency.

There was agreement amongst those consulted in the discussion groups that some kind of strategic literature development agency would be desirable.

Such an agency could deliver training, develop awards and competitions, liaise with publishing outlets, promote writers from H&I to festivals, agencies etc. The agency should have a website to provide information about events, opportunities (competitions, sources of funding etc) and to facilitate networking.

New Writing North (NWN) is an obvious model, and there is a great deal to be learned from their experience. NWN is the literature development agency for the Northern Arts Region, and it exists to create an environment in which new writing in all genres can flourish and develop. Since its establishment in 1996, NWN has become a source of fundamental support for writers in the North, and it has also originated a host of projects, festivals and opportunities that provide work for local writers and develop a profile for new writing in the region.

It would be important to make clear to writers the benefits of such an agency, and to involve them in its operation. It would be worth considering a grant-giving function of an agency, eg dispersal of training grants.

A third of the writers felt a not for profit literary/writing development agency would be of value within H & I, although the sort of services which could be provided by such an agency figured largely – training, events, networking, information, etc.

### **Possible partners**

A decision would have to be taken as to whether the agency is a stand-alone organisation, or a part of an existing agency – the obvious home would be HI-Arts. Further possibilities could be Scottish Book Trust or Moniack Mhor.

Funding partners for such an agency would be Scottish Arts Council and Highlands and Islands Enterprise.

Other potential partners could include Moniack Mhor for office space/ liaison with programmes; Scottish Book Trust for programmes and website, and University of the Highlands and Islands which has expressed interest in working with HI-Arts on writing development and could offer office space/ potential provision of creative writing courses.

## **Appendix One**

### **Context**

#### **Agencies/writers organisations**

##### **Past interventions**

Writing Fellowships are a demonstrated way of working with local writers. These posts are funded jointly by Scottish Arts Council and by local host organisations, usually local authorities. Before local authority organisation in 1996, the Ross and Cromarty Fellowship fostered the writing careers of a number of local writers.

In terms of inward investment, these posts more than paid for themselves – in equivalent 2003 terms, the host organisation's stipend was £7,500 per annum, attracting a similar amount from SAC. Three writers from Ross and Cromarty were awarded bursaries from Scottish Arts Council in the 1990s. Two writers from the area went on to become writers in residence themselves – Tom Bryan in Banff and Buchan then the Borders, and Angus Dunn in Aberdeenshire.

Following Janet McInnes's six month fellowship in Orkney, three writers have been awarded bursaries from SAC.

##### **Current Writing fellowships**

There are currently four writing fellows in H & I – Angus Peter Campbell has recently been appointed second Iain Crichton Smith Writing Fellow, following Kevin MacNeil's successful three-year tenure. The post is jointly funded by SAC and Highland Council, and is managed by the Council's Gaelic Development Officer. The remit of the post is to encourage writing in Gaelic and English.

Rob MacIllechair is based at Sabhal Mor Ostaig College on Skye

Struan Sinclair is Writing Fellow in the Orkney Islands, again jointly funded by SAC and Orkney Council. The emphasis of this post is heavily slanted towards education.

Shetland has a writer in residence post and literature development officer, both posts funded by National Lottery project funding for a three year programme (with the writer in residence post funded for two years).

##### **Neil Gunn Writing Competition**

Started in 1988 by Ross and Cromarty, this writing competition has helped to launch the careers of a number of prominent writers, including Michel Faber and Bess Ross. It is now organised by Highland Council and the Neil Gunn Trust.

##### **Moniack Mhor**

Linked with the Arvon Foundation, though no longer part of it, this writers' centre currently provides writing courses in a wide variety of disciplines for writers from all over the country. It is core funded by Scottish Arts Council, and has recently been awarded funding from the National Lottery towards a new building. The Centre attracts students from all over the UK to its courses, and under 50% come from Scotland. The courses are tutored by established writers, most of them Scottish,

but few are Highland-based writers – just three in the 2003 programme out of 42 featured writers.

### **Grey Coast Theatre Company**

This company, based in Caithness, has supported the writing and performing of drama with great success – so much so that Highland Council's only drama teacher is based in Caithness. Play Harvest has allowed writers not experienced in drama to develop their writing in this field, work with actors, and see their work performed.

### **Writers Groups/creative writing classes**

A number of well established writing groups and classes operate in the area. These include WEA Inverness and Dingwall creative writing classes; Dingwall Writers, Riverside Writers, Inverness Writing Group.

### **Cromarty Book Festival**

Now an established annual festival aimed at writers which is funded by Scottish Arts Council and by Highland Council. It attracts around a total audience of around 200 over its weekend programme.

### **Northwords Magazine**

This literary magazine started in 1991 as a platform for writers from the north, but has recently changed editorial focus to become more national and international in outlook.

### **Proposed Literary Festival 2007**

Highland Council proposes that the preparation and build up to the Year of Culture in 2007 could include:

- Regular occurrence of the two main Highland Writing Competitions
- Growth in literature events, workshops and readings by visiting writers (a key objective within the Council's Arts strategy)
- A secure and sustainable future for Northwords magazine
- Expansion of Cromarty Book Festival
- Further successful publications from Highland writers

A literary festival could also be part of the Year of Culture itself, The theme of the Festival would be to promote and celebrate the Highlands as a source of literary inspiration. This could incorporate a major conference hosted by key Highlands-based writers and the launch of new anthology of Highland writing

### **Publishing in Scotland**

7% of Scottish publishers are based in the Highlands and Islands. This compares with 53.5% based in Edinburgh and Lothians, 28.5% based in Glasgow and Strathclyde, and 7% in each of Borders and Fife.

Publishers based in H & I include the following (all members of the Scottish Publishers Association)

Acair Ltd, Isle of Lewis – children’s books in Gaelic; adult books in Gaelic and English  
Argyll Publishing, Gledaruel – general  
Brown & Whittaker – Isle of Mull – local history, traditional stories  
House of Lochar, Isle of Colonsay – Scottish interest fiction and non-fiction  
Kilmartin House Trust, Lochgilphead – Argyll local history  
New Iona Press, Strathpeffer – local and natural history, Iona and Mull  
The Orcadian, Kirkwall – local interest  
The Shetland Times, Lerwick – local interest  
Whittles Publishing, Latheronwheel – technical, nature writing, maritime/nautical

Other Scottish publishers strongly feature books about the Highlands and Islands, such as Birlinn, based in Edinburgh. Their website lists 60 books relating to the Highlands, 32 titles about the Western Isles, 10 titles about Orkney, and three relating to Shetland. The list is a mixture of reprints and new books. Many of Birlinn’s authors are local to the area they write about, and include Jim Miller and Bess Ross.

The output of Scottish publishers is pre-dominantly non-fiction. Across UK publishers, fiction accounts for 50% of output : it accounts for just 16% of the output of Scottish publishers.

24% of Scottish publishers’ output is popular non-fiction, and 28% is academic. It is generally recognised that non-fiction is suited to niche or small publishers as markets are easier to identify.

### **Local Publishing**

A significant proportion of the publishers based in the area publish books of local interest. There are signs that the market for these books is developing. The Bookseller magazine carried an article about local publishing in its 16 May 2003 edition:

‘(local books) are the unsung heroes of the book business – the product of a low-profile, highly intensive industry, producing thousands of titles a year, all over the country, and contributing their own small, but locally very important, element to a surprisingly vibrant, successful and growing sector of the book trade.’

The article stated that local booksales account for 1-2% of Ottakers or WHS’ total turnover – but the market is steady and secure and there is room for growth. The main local books business have a geographically local subject, direct appeal to the local community, and often a pitch midway between history and nostalgia. Most local books rarely sell nationwide, are bought at local branch level and therefore bypass the discount war – it’s an area where independent booksellers can make a splash without being undercut by the chains.

### **Gaelic Publishing**

Around 30 titles are published each year in the Gaelic language. The majority of titles receive assistance from the Gaelic Book Council. An independent report was undertaken by EKOS in 2001 which identified issues which need to be addressed by Gaelic publishers:

- Over reliance on the educational book sector
- Lack of representation for writers and publisher
- Absence of a reading culture
- Lack of policy co-ordination

- Small fragmented and under-resourced publishing houses
- Gaps in the youth market

Key recommendations were made:

- A book publishing development programme based around a Gaelic creative industries cluster
- The establishment of a Gaelic literature board to provide writing fellowships
- A fully funded marketing programme
- Development of intellectual property rights
- Establishment of a training programme
- Allocation of new resource to libraries
- Online site for books no longer under copyright

A recent National Lottery award to the Gaelic Books Council is an attempt to meet the need to encourage new publications and writing in Gaelic for adults. The project will enable the publication of unpublished writing by prominent Gaelic writers. The first two books will be launched at the Edinburgh International Book Festival in 2003.

## **Appendix Two**

### **Approach to Research and List of Those Consulted**

#### **Approach**

This Report has been compiled in the period February – May 2003.

#### **Desk Research**

The report takes detailed account of a number of recent studies to examine the economic situation of writers, the stated needs of writers to develop their work, and current access to professional services. Information provided by:

- Research into Writers' Economic Status, Nicholas Bone for Scottish Arts Council, 2001
- Audit of Literature Organisations, Iain More Consultants for Scottish Arts Council, 2000
- Research into Writers' Centre, Bonnar Keenlyside for Scottish Arts Council, 1997
- Report on Feasibility of Playwrights' Centre, Faith Liddell, 2001

Review information to look at the existing and potential markets for writers' work.

This included:

- Feasibility Study of The Writer's Factory, Phil Parker for Scottish Arts Council, 2002
- Scottish Publishers' Association Survey of Member Publishers (2002)
- Review trends in output of British book publishers
- Scoping Study on Role of Agents in Scotland, Jenny Brown for Scottish Enterprise, 2002

#### **Database Research**

A comprehensive database has been compiled of new and published writers, publishers and related activities in the HIE area.

A questionnaire was drawn up in consultation with the Steering Group. It was piloted with eight writers before being finalised. A copy of the questionnaire is appended. It was sent to

- writers listed in Writers in Scotland Handbook (Scottish Book Trust)
- writers in the area who have applied to Scottish Arts Council for Writers' Bursaries and New Writers' Bursaries over past five years
- Via Highland Council to contacts established during first Iain Crichton Smith Writing Fellowship and entrants to Neil Gunn competition
- Via Arts Development Officer in Argyll to writers groups in Argyll
- Writers who have submitted work to Northwords magazine
- Via Shetland Arts Trust to writers in Shetland
- Via leaders of writers' groups to members of the groups

Features about the research appeared in Highland News and a diary piece in Press and Journal. These elicited four enquiries.

Approximately 350 questionnaires were sent out, and 141 were returned by the deadline, 40% return rate.

## **Consultation with the sector**

A programme of meetings and telephone consultation was undertaken. Visits were made to writers and organisations in Shetland, Orkney and to Skye. Meetings and telephone interviews were also undertaken with agencies – New Writing North, Scottish Book Trust, Gaelic Arts Agency and Scottish Arts Council.

Two discussion groups were held in Inverness to discuss issues arising from the research. One group was held with agencies (libraries, Highland Council, education, publishing etc) and the other with writers at different stages of their careers and writing for different genres.

## **List of Those Consulted: face to face interviews/by telephone**

### **Agencies**

Professor Robert Cormack, University of Highlands and Islands  
Marc Lambert and Amanda Liddle, Scottish Book Trust  
Claire Malcolm, New Writing North  
Tom Bryan, Arts Development Officer, Caithness, Highland Council  
Malcolm Maclean and Marisa Macdonald, Gaelic Arts Agency  
Morag Anna Macleod, Gaelic Officer, Highland Council  
Arthur Watt, Shetland Arts Trust  
Kathy Hubbard, Shetland Arts Trust  
Alex Cluness, Literature Development Officer, Shetland  
Penny Aberdein, Orkney Islands Education Dept  
Alastair Peebles, Stromness Academy  
Leslie Manson, Director of Education, Orkney Islands  
Gavin Wallace, Scottish Arts Council  
Alastair Macdonald, Highland Festival  
Elly Rothnie, Co-ordinator, WORD Festival, Aberdeen

### **Writing Fellows**

Struan Sinclair, Orkney Islands  
Raman Mundair, Shetland  
Rob MacIllechiar, Sabhal Mor Ostaig

### **Writers**

Meg Bateman  
Rody Gorman  
Angus Macleod  
Duncan Maclean  
Members of writers' group, Sabhal Mor Ostaig  
Members of writers' group, Shetland

## **Appendix Three**

### **Analysis of Questions**

#### **Survey of writers: Digest of Main findings**

141 questionnaires returned - approx 40% return

#### **Main fields in which writers write (writers invited to tick up to three categories)**

61% write fiction  
57% write poetry  
30% write non-fiction  
17% write children's fiction  
9% write for radio/television  
15% write journalism

#### **Language** (possible to tick more than one)

95% write in English  
7% write in Scots  
8% write in Gaelic  
2% in Shetlandic

#### **Submission of work**

56% submit to book publishers  
47% to literary magazines  
29% to anthologies  
51% to competitions  
63% to newspapers, magazines  
14% to radio  
13% to online publications  
6% to television/film

Respondents had been published in a huge range of outlets including  
Literary magazines : Agenda, Edinburgh Review, Northwords  
Newspapers/magazines : Belfast Telegraph, The Herald, Climbing magazines, Scots magazine  
Publishers : Fourth Estate, Hodder, Mercat, OUP, Colin Baxter  
Theatre Companies : Traverse, Theatre de Complicite, Grey Coast  
Radio/tv/screen : Book at Bedtime on Radio 4, Channel 5, Moray Firth Radio  
Competitions : Neil Gunn, Macallan, Ottaker poetry competitions

48% said they used their creative writing in other ways, eg as tutor, editing, copy writing

#### **Support in writing development**

27 % said they had received no support

Of those who did receive support, the following were thought to be most helpful:

1. support from other writer
2. writing course (BBC Writers Lab/Raindance/MLitt at Glasgow/Strathclyde/Moniack Mhor)
3. writers groups
4. writers workshops
5. literary festivals (Cromarty, Edin Book Festival, Scottish Assoc of Writers Conference)
6. advice from publisher/agent
7. bursary support from Scottish Arts Council

### **Resources**

Most significant resources were The Writer's Handbook/Writers & Artists Yearbook. On the whole, respondents did not use on-line resources, although 24% felt writers' websites to be quite helpful. Those who visited the website of New Writing North thought it to be a very useful resource.

### **Future Provision**

Respondents were asked what they would like to be made available, both within area and outwith. Most respondents firmly indicated that they wanted resources to be available in the area.

Most significant were following:

Writer in Residence post (62%)  
Writers Group (52%)  
Writers workshop (52%)  
Readings/launches (50%)  
Bursaries/travel grants (47%)  
Information/networking events (46%)  
Creative writing course (46%)  
Literature Festival (45%)  
Mentoring from established writer (45%)  
Advice from agent/publisher (38%)  
A not for profit literary agency (33%)  
Writing Development Agency (21%)

There was also significant demand for training in marketing skills, advice from an agent or publisher, a not for profit literary agency, and business start up advice.

### **Internet access**

Only 16% of respondents do not presently have access to the internet.

### **Writers' Income from Writing**

104 writers returned this sheet. Writers were asked how much they had earned before tax from their writing in the last financial year

42% of respondents said they had earned nothing from their writing in the last financial year

29% had earned under £1000

17% earned between £1000 - £4999  
6% had earned £5000-£19999  
7% earned £20000 – 29999

Writers were asked how much they had earned before tax from their writing-related activities in the last financial year

73% had earned nothing from writing related activities in the last financial year  
11% had earned under £1000  
7% earned £1000 - £4999  
3% £5000 - £29999

Writers were asked what was the highest sum they had earned from their writing before tax in any one year

29% of respondents had never earned anything from their writing  
36% earned under £1000 in their best year  
11% earned between £1000 - £4999  
8% earned £5000 – 9999  
6% earned £10000 – 19999  
5% earned £20000 – 99999

### **Comparison with Scottish writers' incomes**

These results can be compared to the findings of Scottish Arts Council's consultation with writers in 2001. A caveat is that SAC surveyed writers with a publication record, whereas the HI-Arts survey also included aspirant writers. 58% of the SAC survey earned less than £5,000 a year cf 88% of HI survey. 31% of the SAC survey earned less than £1000 pa from related activities, compared to 84% of the HI survey.