

London Writers Awards 2026

Application Pack



www.bit.ly/londonwritersawards

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The application pack is **available in the following formats**: docx, pdf, audio, inclusive read document from the London Writers Awards webpage:

<https://www.spreadtheword.org.uk/projects/london-writers-awards/>

We encourage all applicants to **read through the pack** and, in particular, the Eligibility Requirements, Terms and Conditions and Frequently Asked Questions.

We will be hosting a **free online information session** on applying to the London Writers Awards on Tuesday 30 September, 7pm-8.15pm. Please see page 7 for more information and to book a place.

If you require further information on submitting your entry or a question regarding access, please **contact** Bobby Nayyar: bobby@spreadtheword.org.uk

About Spread the Word

Set up in 1995 by Booker Prize winner Bernardine Evaristo and former Director of Arvon Ruth Borthwick, Spread the Word is London's literature development agency, a charity and

an Arts Council England National Portfolio Organisation. Our mission is to help London's underrepresented writers get their work into the world and connect communities to words and stories.

We have a national and international reputation for initiating change-making research and developing programmes for writers that have equity and social justice at their heart. In 2020 we launched *Rethinking 'Diversity' in Publishing* by Dr Anamik Saha and Dr Sandra van Lente, Goldsmiths, University of London, in partnership with *The Bookseller* and Words of Colour. And in 2022, the Access to Literature report, in partnership with CRIptic Arts, presenting the first national picture of the barriers deaf and disabled people experience in accessing the literature and publishing sectors.

Our programmes of work include: the Wellcome Collection Non-Fiction Awards, CRIptic Arts x Spread the Word Salon, Poetics Lab, Deptford Literature Festival and the Lewisham, Borough of Literature campaign.

www.spreadtheword.org.uk

About the London Writers Awards

The London Writers Awards is Spread the Word's flagship writer development programme. It aims to increase the number of writers from underrepresented communities being signed by agents and publishers.

Originally launched in 2018, the programme ran for 4 years and supported 120 writers. Since then, 50 writers are now agented and there have been 62 book deals. Alumni of the programme include Natasha Brown, Tice Cin, Oisín McKenna, Ashani Lewis, Tom Newlands, Pam Williams and Santanu Bhattacharya.

The programme was cited as an example of 'what works' to improve equity, diversity and inclusion in the creative sector in the APPG for Creative Diversity's Creative Majority¹ report.

¹ <https://www.kcl.ac.uk/cultural/projects/creative-majority>

The new iteration of the London Writers Awards funded by philanthropic donation from Sam and Rosie Berwick will support 24 writers each year from 2025 to 2027.

The programme will offer unagented and unpublished writers:

- A ten-month development programme running from February to November 2026.
- 2 Writers Labs to open and close the programme, which feature authors, agents and publishers.
- 13 critical feedback group sessions for each set of 6 writers with 7 sessions chaired by an experienced author.
- 5 creative writing masterclasses.
- 3 career seminars.
- 121 professional developments meetings with a Spread the Word team member.
- A meeting with an agent or editor.
- Showcase booklet of awardee projects distributed to over 300 literary agents towards the end of the programme with enhanced support to introduce agents to awardees.
- A bursary fund for writers on a low-income.
- An access fund for deaf and disabled writers.

Eligibility Requirements

The London Writers Awards aims to increase the diversity of writers actively writing a prose fiction book for adults or children. In this iteration of the programme, we will be supporting 24 writers of:

- Literary Fiction (including short stories) (12 spaces)
- Commercial Fiction (for e.g.: crime, thriller, science fiction, romance) (6 spaces)
- Young Adult /Children's Fiction* (6 spaces)

*By Children's Fiction we are looking for middle grade projects. See **Frequently Asked Questions** (page 10) for more information.

Applications will be open to writers who are at least one of the following:

- Black, Asian, or Global Majority*
- Deaf and/or Disabled
- LGBTQIA+
- Working Class Upbringing
- On a Low Income**

*Global Majority defined as Black, Indigenous and people of colour.

**Writers whose income is through benefits or paid on or below the London Living Wage hourly rate, and whose savings do not exceed the amount needed to pay for three months of living costs (rent, gas and electricity, food etc.).

In addition, applicants will need to be:

- Unpublished (see **Terms and Conditions** (page 14) for guidance on this)
- Unagented
- Aged 18+
- Full-time resident in London
- Not currently working in publishing or at a literary agency
- Have written at least 50% of the project they want to develop in the programme

What you need to do to apply

Applications will **open from 12pm (midday) on Tuesday 23 September** and **close at 5pm on Thursday 30 October**.

There are 3 ways you can apply:

1. Online through a Submittable form for Text responses to questions
2. Online through a Submittable form primarily for Audio or Video responses to questions
3. On paper for a postal entry

For the first two options applications will be managed through Spread the Word's [Submittable](#) and you will need to create a free Submittable account to enter.

There will be a separate Submittable form for each genre (Literary Fiction, Commercial Fiction and YA/Children's Fiction) plus a Submittable form for writers who would like to enter with Audio or Video responses to the form's questions.

The **Submittable** links are:

Commercial Fiction: <https://spreadtheword.submittable.com/submit/16aae8e8-f715-4942-acc2-52847ee243b1/london-writers-awards-2026-commercial-fiction>

Literary Fiction: <https://spreadtheword.submittable.com/submit/0aae94b3-8544-4447-856d-fefa60582e59/london-writers-awards-2026-literary-fiction>

YA/Children's Fiction: <https://spreadtheword.submittable.com/submit/c9d9aab2-4261-42dd-a6d3-1d43038e7bdf/london-writers-awards-2026-ya-childrens-fiction>

Audio or Video submission (covers all three genres):

<https://spreadtheword.submittable.com/submit/028adc7a-d60d-4f60-9a13-ebbab02f3d8b/london-writers-awards-2026-audio-or-video-submission>

If you would like to submit a **paper form** and post it to us along with a printout of your extract, please visit this webpage to download the form:

<https://www.spreadtheword.org.uk/projects/london-writers-awards/>

Postal entries will need to be sent to us by the deadline at:

London Writers Awards

Spread the Word

The Albany
Douglas Way
London SE8 4AG

For each of the three ways to apply there will be a **form to complete** with your contact details plus:

- An **eligibility statement** about your writing life, what you aim to achieve in the programme, and how you meet the eligibility criteria (250 words or 2 minutes 30 seconds for Audio or Video submission)
- A **short summary of the project** (30 words or 1 minute Audio or Video)
- A **synopsis of your project** (300 words or 2 minutes 30 seconds for Audio or Video submission)
- **Optional bursary and access information** if you want to apply for those funds (150 words or 2 minutes for Audio or Video submission)
- Upload a **sample of writing from the project you want to develop** in the programme – generally this would be from the start of the book (3,000 words max)

A form will be available to download from the London Writers Awards webpage for you to draft your responses prior to making your submission.

Online Information Session

Spread the Word will be holding a free online information session on **Tuesday 30 September, 7pm-8.15pm** hosted by Spread the Word's Director Ruth Harrison. The session will include an overview of the programme, advice on applying and an opportunity to ask questions. They will be joined by one of the judges and an alumnus of the London Writers Awards to share their experiences of the programme. The session will be BSL interpreted and will be recorded and available to view upon request for two weeks after the event.

To **register for the session** please visit:

<https://buytickets.at/spreadtheword/1843039>

How is it judged?

We are looking for writers who are fully committed to making a step-change to develop their craft, learn more about working as an author and reach a completed draft of their book project.

There will be several stages of assessment of your application plus an interview to select the final 24 writers for the programme. These are the stages:

- All entries will be anonymised and read by two external first readers and a Spread the Word staff member.
- Following selections by the first readers there will be a second round of reading of a selection of entries by the staff members to select the longlist.
- A longlist of entries will be read by each pair of judges to select an interview shortlist.
- There will be up to 9 writers interviewed for each group of 6 awardees (two Literary Fiction, one Commercial Fiction and one YA/Children's Fiction group).

The **judges for the London Writers Awards 2026** are:

Tom Newlands - Literary Fiction A*

Ashani Lewis - Literary Fiction B*

Tasneem Abdur-Rashid - Commercial Fiction

Alexandra Sheppard - YA/Children's Fiction

Liv Maidment, Madeleine Milburn - Literary Fiction A*

Juliet Pickering, Blake Friedmann - Literary Fiction B*

Kerry-Ann Bentley, KAB Literary - Commercial Fiction

Christabel McKinley, DHA - YA/Children's Fiction

*Please note there is no distinction between Literary Fiction A and Literary Fiction B – in order to create two cohort groups of literary fiction writers we split the submissions into two groups.

The interviews will take place either in person at our offices at The Albany or via Zoom and will last up to 30 minutes. Reasonable adjustments will be made. The **interview dates** are:

Tuesday 20 January 2026 – Literary Fiction A and YA/Children’s Fiction interviews

Wednesday 21 January 2026 – Literary Fiction B interviews

Thursday 22 January 2026 – Commercial Fiction Interviews

We will undertake our own **due diligence** at the longlisting stage to ensure that applicants are eligible. Shortlisted candidates will need to prove their full-time residency in London. In addition, shortlisted candidates who have listed their eligibility as low income will need to provide proof. Please see page 10 in Frequently Asked Questions for more details.

Key dates

Tuesday 23 September 2025, 12pm (midday) – Application window opens

Tuesday 30 September, 7pm-8.15pm – Zoom event about London Writers Awards with Q&A

Thursday 30 October 2025, 5pm – Application window closes

Thursday 8 January 2026 – All applicants will be contacted to let them know if selected for interview

Tuesday 20 January 2026 – Literary Fiction A and YA/Children’s Fiction interviews

Wednesday 21 January 2026 – Literary Fiction B interviews

Thursday 22 January 2026 – Commercial Fiction Interviews

Monday 26 January 2026 – Shortlisted applicants contacted to let them know if selected for programme

Saturday 21 February 2026 – Writers Lab 1 in person event to start the programme

Thursday 26 November 2026 – Writers Lab 2 in person event to close the programme

We will be running the creative writing masterclasses and career seminars in person, while the critical feedback group sessions will take place on Zoom. We will make reasonable

adjustments for awardees who have access needs. Dates are provisional at this stage. A full schedule of dates will be given to the successful candidates in January 2026.

Bursary and Access Funds

There are bursary and access funds available to support writers on a low income and deaf and disabled writers.

Bursary and access fund applications are not visible in the judging process and are not factored into any decision making on who is selected to be on the programme. Writers can apply for both the bursary fund and the access fund.

The **bursary fund** is aimed at writers who are:

- Carers
- Single parents
- Care leavers
- Experience of being homeless
- Ex-offenders
- Unemployed
- On a low income either on benefits or earning on or below the London Living Wage, and whose savings do not exceed the amount needed to pay for three months of living costs (rent, gas and electricity, food etc.)

The bursaries are intended to cover the cost of travel to the in-person sessions and any cost of materials (e.g. books, paper, stationery). The bursary amount is determined by the number bursary applications and the need expressed in each application. In some exceptional cases the bursary may be used as a partial contribution to equipment (e.g. a computer).

The **access fund** is set up to enable reasonable adjustments to be made for writers who are deaf and disabled to attend the sessions in person and online, and participate in other areas

of the programme. The access fund amount is determined by the number of applications and the reasonable adjustments expressed.

Frequently Asked Questions

Do I have to pay anything?

No. Participation in the Awards is free at the point of delivery. Travel and other costs associated with participating in the Awards will not be covered by Spread the Word. There are limited bursaries available for writers most in need. There is also an access fund to support deaf and disabled writers to participate in the programme.

Will it be online or in person?

We are preparing for the majority of the programme to take place in person with the exception of the critical feedback groups, which will take place online. The feedback we have received through previous iterations of the London Writers Awards is that awardees prefer to meet in person. We will make reasonable adjustments for writers with access needs.

Will it take up much of my time?

The London Writers Awards are for writers who are committed to taking their work to the next level and who aspire to being published and having a career as a writer. You will need to be available to participate across the ten months of the programme. The critical feedback groups will take place in the evening twice a month and last 2 hours each time (thirteen sessions will take place in total). You will also be expected to spend 1-2 hours reading your group members' writing in preparation for each session. There will be five creative writing masterclasses, and three career masterclasses. These will take place on Saturdays from February 2026 to November 2026. There will also be two WritersLabs – one to open the programme on **Saturday 21 February 2026**, and one to close the programme on **Thursday 26 November 2026**. Attendance is mandatory as part of the terms and conditions of the programme. You will also need to find time to work on your writing project so that it can

progress during the programme. We estimate that the programme will take up approximately **30 hours per month** – please consider this carefully before applying.

What do you mean by YA/Children's Fiction?

There is a YA/Children's Fiction group. YA means Young Adult while Children's Fiction is middle grade. Middle grade are books written for children aged roughly between 8-12 years old. They are generally 30,000 – 50,000 words in length (though fantasy can run longer). Content restrictions include: no profanity, graphic violence or sexuality. The protagonist age is typically 10 for a young middle grade novel, and up to age 13 for older, more complex books. Middle grade books tend to focus on friends, family and the character's immediate world and relationship to it; characters react to what happens to them, with minimal self-reflection. Please note that we do not accept picture book or graphic novel submissions.

Why do I need to have written 50% of my project to apply?

The ideal outcome for each awardee is that they will finish the programme with a completed draft of their book project. This will put them in the best position to submit to agents and get a book deal. Through running the programme five times we have learned that writers who have at least 50% of their book written at the start of the programme are in the best position to reach these outcomes.

I've done/ am doing a creative writing course – can I apply?

If you are currently or are about to be enrolled in a graduate or postgraduate creative writing programme (BA, MA or PhD) or are part of a longer-term development programme for writers (such as the Faber Academy, Curtis Brown Creative, Penguin Random House Write Now, London Libraries Emerging Writers scheme) you are not eligible to apply. If you have previously completed a creative writing programme in the last two years, you are also not eligible to apply. We have made this eligibility requirement to reach people who have not had sustained writer development.

I'm currently in higher education or on another development programme – can I apply?

If you are currently studying in higher education (e.g. at university either full- or part-time) then unfortunately you cannot apply for this programme.

I work in publishing or at a literary agency – can I apply?

For this iteration of the London Writers Awards we have decided to introduce an eligibility requirement that applicants do not currently work in publishing or for a literary agency. This is a result of our evaluation of the programme, where there was a perceived disparity in access to networks for some awardees. We want to ensure that this programme reaches those most in need of support and will review what impact this change makes and adjust if needed for future iterations of the programme.

I'm a self-published writer, can I apply?

Previously self-published writers can apply with a currently unpublished work.

I'm a writer on a low income, how do you define this and what proof will I need to supply if I'm shortlisted for interview?

By low income we mean people:

- whose income is through benefits (i.e.: Universal Credit, PIP etc.);
- or whose income is paid at or below the London Living Wage hourly rate:
www.livingwage.org.uk/what-real-living-wage;
- and whose savings do not exceed the amount needed to pay for three months of living costs (rent, gas and electricity, food etc.).

The proof we require for shortlisted candidates is:

- For applicants on benefits, a letter or statement from the Department for Work and Pensions for each benefit received
- For those who also work, a bank statement or payslips

The financial information will need to be unredacted and recent, so within the last two months. The type of information will be bank statements (income, and savings); DWP letters/ confirmation for Universal Credit, PIP etc. All documentation will be held securely and then deleted once the selection process is complete.

When is the deadline to apply?

The application window will open at 12pm (midday) on Tuesday 23 September 2025 and close at **5pm on Thursday 30 October 2025**. Entries submitted after the closing date will not be accepted.

What happens after I submit my application?

Spread the Word will respond to all applicants regarding the status of their application in January 2026. Please note that due to the high number of applications we expect for this programme, we are unable to give individual feedback.

When does the programme start?

The London Writers Awards will start on **Saturday 21 February 2026** with a Writers Lab bringing together all the writers on the programme, judges and industry professionals. The programme will run through to November 2026.

My question isn't listed here – what do I do?

Please also refer to the terms and conditions in this document. If you still have any questions, please email Bobby at bobby@spreadtheword.org.uk.

Terms and Conditions

1. This year we are accepting writing in the following categories for the Awards:
 - a. Literary fiction (including short stories);
 - b. Commercial fiction (includes: romance, crime, science fiction, thriller, fantasy, historical fiction);
 - c. YA/Children's Fiction (includes: middle grade and YA fiction, excludes picture books).

2. Applications are open to writers aged 18+ who live full-time in London. Applicants who reach the interview stage of the process will be required to bring proof of their address. Check if your home postcode is in London here:
https://www.doogal.co.uk/london_postcodes.php

3. The Awards are for writers from the following underrepresented backgrounds in UK publishing:
 - a. Black, Asian and Global Majority
 - b. D/deaf and Disabled
 - c. LGBTQIA+
 - d. Working class upbringing
 - e. Low-income

4. Applicants must be un-agented and unpublished. We define this as meaning:
 - a. You do not currently have a literary agent representing you;
 - b. You do not have an existing book contract with a publisher;
 - c. You have not previously published a full-length work (i.e. a work of fiction or non-fiction over 30,000 words, or ten or more short stories published either in a collection or individually, or twenty or more poems either in a collection or published individually, or a full-length theatre script, screenplay, or radio play that has been professionally produced and/or broadcast);

- d. Previously self-published writers can apply with a currently unpublished work.
5. If you are currently or are about to be enrolled in a graduate or postgraduate creative writing programme (BA, MA or PhD) you are not eligible to apply. If you have completed a BA, MA or PhD in creative writing in the last two years, you are also not eligible to apply.
6. If you are or will be part of a longer-term development programme during the application window and programme activity (e.g. Penguin Random House Write Now, Faber Academy, London Libraries Emerging Writers scheme etc) you are not eligible to apply.
7. If you are working at a publishing house or at a literary agency during the application and judging process (23 September 2025 to 22 January 2026) then you are not eligible to apply.
8. Applications will only be accepted online through our Submittable page: <https://spreadtheword.submittable.com/submit> Or as a postal entry sent to our office address. If you have access requirements and need assistance to apply please contact bobby@spreadtheword.org.uk.
9. To qualify, an application must consist of two items: the completed online/postal/audio/video form and a sample/extract from the creative work in progress the applicant would like to develop as part of the programme.
10. If you are completing the application form questions using audio files, they will need to be in one of the following formats: MP3; WAV or M4A. If you completing the application form questions using video files, they will need to be either in MP4 or MOV file format.

11. Incomplete applications will not be considered or acknowledged.
12. Applications must be written by a single author who meets the eligibility criteria of the Awards.
13. All work submitted must be the individual and original work of the applicant.
14. Applications and uploaded extracts will be checked for the use of generative AI. Any application or extract found to have used generative AI will be disqualified.
15. Applicants must be permanently resident in London.
16. Applications must be in English.
17. Applications received after the deadline of 5pm on Thursday 30 October 2025 will not be accepted.
18. The writing sample sent as part of your application should be from the project you would like to develop during the programme. The sample could be from a novel, novella or short story collection. Applications to develop individual short stories or poems will not be accepted. The sample must be a maximum of 3,000 words, please ensure your prose extract is double-spaced, 12-point font and paginated.
19. Entries will be judged anonymously. To that effect, please do not include your name on any uploaded documents. This includes your writing sample. Any writing samples with names or identifying information on them will render the application disqualified.
20. Only one application will be considered per writer.

21. If a writer applies for more than one genre category, only their first application will be accepted. All other applications will be disqualified.
22. Due to the high number of applications, Spread the Word will not be able to offer any feedback on applications.
23. Shortlisted applicants will be invited for an interview on either Tuesday 20, Wednesday 21 or Thursday 22 January 2026 either online via Zoom or at the Spread the Word offices at The Albany, Douglas Way, London SE8 4AG. Please check that you are available on these dates before applying. We will confirm the interview format and other details in January.
24. Successful applicants must be available to attend all the activities associated with the Awards, including a launch event on Saturday 21 February 2026, critical feedback groups, masterclasses, one-on-one support, and a final event on Thursday 26 November 2026. A full schedule of dates will be made available to successful applicants.
25. Participation in the programme is free at the point of delivery. Travel and other costs associated with participating in the Awards will not be covered by Spread the Word.
26. Bursaries will be awarded to writers deemed to be most in need and made at Spread the Word's discretion. If you request a bursary, you must complete the bursary section of the application form.
27. Access funding is available to make reasonable adjustments within the financial means available to the programme. If you request access funding, you must complete the access funding section of the application form.

28. Spread the Word reserves the right to withdraw and reclaim the financial value of an Award, bursary or access fund monies and to ask an Awardee to leave the programme if they fail to attend activities without a valid reason, break our code of conduct, or are found to have fabricated any information or material in their application.
29. Spread the Word will make final decisions on eligibility and perform due diligence checks on longlisted candidates. Our decisions are final, and no correspondence will be entered into on the subject. Please also refer to the eligibility criteria section.
30. Successful applicants must be available to participate in media and PR for the Awards' announcement and related activity.
31. It is the writer's responsibility to inform Spread the Word if they are offered a contract to sign up with an agent and/or publishing contract during the application and judging process. In this case you will become ineligible for an Award.
32. If you are a previous recipient of a London Writers Award you are not eligible to apply for the programme.
33. Judges, their close family members, employees or trustees of Spread the Word or our major supporters Arts Council England, and Sam and Rosie Berwick are not permitted to apply.
34. Submission of an application to the London Writers Awards will be taken to mean acceptance of these terms and conditions. Entries that fail to comply with these terms and conditions will be disqualified.
35. The judges' decision is final and no correspondence or discussion about the judging process will be entered into.

36. Spread the Word reserves the right to alter dates, timeline, and terms and conditions stated above should it be necessary for any reason.