



OUR NATIONAL PORTFOLIO, 2018-22

Literature Narrative



The 2015-18 literature portfolio comprised 46 organisations and an investment of £6.8 million per annum (2 per cent of the total portfolio spend). The proposed 2018-22 portfolio is 49 organisations and an investment of £7.6 million (2 per cent of the total spend). This increase of three organisations represents a 6.5 per cent increase to the literature portfolio. The artform now makes up 6 per cent of the overall portfolio, compared with 7 per cent in the 2015-18 portfolio. Alongside the National Portfolio, we will also be announcing a four-year £23 million investment via strategic funds in BookTrust to deliver a national book gifting programme.

Literature occupies a unique position in our cultural ecology. Of all the art forms we encounter over our lifetimes, literature comes first (in the form of bedtime stories and fairytales), penetrates furthest (via schools and libraries, three-for-two offers in Waterstones and ebooks downloaded in seconds onto handheld devices), and possesses the power to transport us into other worlds without requiring us to leave our seats.

While Arts Council England's investment in literature traditionally constitutes a small portion of its total spending, that portion plays a significant role in shaping the country's literary landscape. By focusing expenditure on elements that are artistically valuable but commercially less viable, we help sustain the breadth and richness of England's literary culture and ensure its availability to everyone.

By the end of the current funding period (2015-2018), the Arts Council will have spent approximately £46m on literature grants, projects and organisations; of that sum, just over £20m will have been distributed via the National portfolio.

At one end of the scale, our 'time-to-write' grants of a few thousand pounds have provided vital support to individual authors (a notable recent beneficiary is Sarah Perry, whose prizewinning novel *The Essex Serpent* was written with Arts Council support); at the other, our annual award of £5.4m to BookTrust for its celebrated book gifting programmes sees books placed in the hands of every child in the land. In between, we invest in a range of writer development agencies, publishers, festivals, story centres, spoken-word groups, manuscript assessment services and reading charities, among many other things - with a focus across the board on promoting diversity.

The 2018-2022 portfolio responds very strongly to the opportunities presented in the North of England, with three entrants to the portfolio. The Bradford Literature Festival is rooted in the culture and communities of the city of Bradford and champions dialogue, discourse and the ways in which literature can reflect and shape society. Grimm & Co, a children's writing centre-cum-magical apothecary in Rotherham, provides the Arts Council with a flagship model for effective intervention in an area of socio-economic deprivation. And The Reader, based in Liverpool, promotes reader development through a shared-reading model which they hope to roll out across the country, and which will complement our ongoing investment in BookTrust and The Reading Agency.

We have also reinforced our support for the country's independent publishing sector. Additional funding has been recommended for northern publishers And Other

Stories, Peepal Tree Press and Comma Press, to bolster their work around diversity and the newly-formed Northern Fiction Alliance, while in the Midlands, the introduction of Nine Arches Press further strengthens our investment. Among our new Sector Support Organisations is Inpress, an organisation that works in partnership with independent publishers throughout the country to market and sell their books.

In London and the South-East, we have focused additional funding on organisations whose work promotes diversity. Both London's writer development agency, Spread the Word, and New Writing South based in Brighton, focus on supporting writers from all backgrounds. The Discover Children's Story Centre in London will receive additional funding to grow its support of the work of Black and minority ethnic-focused children's publishers and illustrators. Finally, our increase in funding to Writers' Centre Norwich will support its delivery of a collaborative national project exploring how literary translation can connect marginalised communities to the mainstream.

The balance of support for genres (poetry, short stories and literature in translation, as well as literary fiction) remains healthy.

MORE INFORMATION:
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