

Project Lead: Young Poetry Activists R&D

Purpose: We are looking for an accomplished freelance programme manager with hands-on schools experience to plan and codesign a prototype for a new pilot programme for young people.

This role will work closely with the Co-Executive Directors to deliver Forward's mission to support talented, underrepresented poets at all stages of their careers and to build more diverse, mass audiences for poetry.

## ABOUT FORWARD ARTS FOUNDATION

Forward Arts Foundation is the national charity that promotes knowledge and enjoyment of poetry. We strive toward a society where everyone regardless of their background can develop creativity and agency by making, experiencing and sharing new poetry.

As a national poetry organisation, we champion excellence in new poetry and create opportunities for all to develop our creativity and agency. Through this, we aim to build a society where anyone's voice can open new ways of navigating into our collective future.

We do this through partnerships and collaborations with our network of poets, educators, young people, broadcasters, funders, communities and cultural institutions. By bringing together our professional and lived experiences, we will create a vital nerve system for poetry that is relevant and representative.

Our flagship initiatives are the annual Forward Prizes for Poetry, with associated anthology and education programmes and National Poetry Day – a mass celebration on the first Thursday of October.

Forward Arts Foundation has a highly motivated Board of Trustees and a small staff team based in London and Liverpool. We are a National Portfolio Organisation funded by Arts Council England.

## PROJECT OUTLINE:

### Evidence of need

1. Numbers of young people reading and writing poetry for pleasure has increased<sup>1</sup> as has their need for help with their mental health.<sup>2</sup>
2. Poetry on the curriculum can be seen as difficult by teachers and students<sup>3</sup>. A curriculum lead at a large Multi Academy Trust described how working class boys from her schools see poetry as a trick that they don't understand.
3. Teachers are overburdened, and under confident when it comes to poetry, making it difficult to engage them as activists<sup>4</sup>.
4. There is a lack of provision nationally for young people who want to develop their writing outside of the curriculum. Talent development organisations would welcome an intervention.

So, how might we harness the energy and creativity of young people who love poetry to activate poetry communities at their schools?

### Phase 1: initial co-design and prototype

January - June 2024

#### Prototype Goals

1. To empower young people to be activists and leaders for poetry within their communities, and provide a creative way for schools to act on student voice.
2. To nurture talent and provide progression opportunities for young people.
3. To inspire teachers and students within the broader school community to enjoy poetry without fear.
4. To create a programme that is sustainable and can adapt to young people's needs.

#### Learning goals

In phase 1, we hope to learn more about the following areas.

1. What are the necessary conditions for a low cost, scaleable student-led programme to survive and to thrive in a school environment?
2. What are the obstacles and what helps when beginning and sustaining a programme?
3. How can we design for [poverty proofing](#)?
4. What kinds of impact does the programme have for participating students, teachers and the wider school community?

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<sup>1</sup> In 2022, nearly 3 in 10 (28.0%) children and young people said they had read poetry in their free time at least once a month. Nearly 1 in 5 (18.5%) children and young people said they write poetry in their free time. National Literacy Trust: Children and Young People's Engagement with Poetry in 2022

<sup>2</sup> Young people in the UK have higher mental health needs than ever. 1 in 6 young people in England (aged 5 to 16) experienced a mental health problem in 2020, up from 1 in 9 in 2017: NHS Digital (2020) Mental Health of Children and Young People in England, 2020: Wave 1 follow up to the 2017 survey.

<sup>3</sup> In the 2021 optionalisation of the English GCSE following the lack of teaching time during the pandemic, 44% of schools chose to drop the poetry module (OCR).

<sup>4</sup> A 2023 study by the CLPE and Macmillan Books found that there are 'many barriers' to teaching poetry, with one being a lack of training and confidence in teachers.

The project is designed along the principles of human centred design, beginning with a deep consultation with young people and teachers, and then rapid prototyping of a programme in 2 schools, alongside market research questionnaires for a broader range of schools. The pilot schools will be selected with partner support to ensure a sample with a high proportion of children receiving Pupil Premium, and with a group of students who are engaged with poetry.

#### SKILLS SPECIFICATION:

##### Essential skills & experience

- Experience of co-design with children or young people, and understanding of how to put children in the lead and encourage their agency
- Experience working in UK schools and knowledge of poetry pedagogy
- Understanding of the barriers faced by children from socio-economically deprived backgrounds and how programmes can address these.
- Meticulous, efficient, highly organised and tech savvy
- Good knowledge of UK contemporary poetry and poet educators
- Project management experience, delivering a project from idea stage to evaluation and using findings to develop and enhance projects.
- A demonstrated practical approach to solving problems and making decisions: ability to work on own initiative

To ensure the safety and welfare of the young people, any appointment will be subject to satisfactory pre-employment checks, including CRB.

#### TERMS:

Contract: £6750, 27 days to be scheduled as the project develops

Location: remote, with occasional travel to London, Liverpool and school partner locations