

CDA-3-Mentoring

Mentoring Practice in Contemporary UK Poetry

How to apply and further details: <https://www.sww-ahdtp.ac.uk/prospective-students/apply/collaborative-doctoral-award-projects-2021/>

Supervisors

- Dr Will May (University of Southampton, w.may@soton.ac.uk)
- Dr Samantha Walton (Bath Spa University, s.walton@bathspa.ac.uk)
- Matt West (Artful Scribe, artfulscribe@artfulscribe.co.uk)

Dr May is Associate Professor in English, Dr Walton is Reader in Modern Literature, and Matt West is CEO of Artful Scribe. The supervisory team have overseen more than a dozen doctoral projects to completion, including 4 poetry and creative writing PhDs. They currently supervise a further 3 SWWDTP-funded doctoral students.

Both academic supervisors have an established record of working with external organisations to deliver funded research that transforms our understanding of creative practice and the arts. May was CI for StoryPlaces (2015-8), a £183k Leverhulme-funded project which worked with Tudor House Museum and Bournemouth Natural Sciences Society to design location-aware digital writing apps to support the heritage industry. Walton was PI for the £131k ERC AHRC Leadership Fellow project *Cultures of Nature and Wellbeing*, which worked with Wildlife Trusts to establish new understanding of human-nature interactions. Walton is also a poet and co-editor of the independent publisher Sad Press, with extensive professional contacts in regional and national poetry networks.

The project is underpinned by May's £178 AHRC Fellowship Grant *Invisible Mentors* (Nov 2020-Jan 2022), which works with Winchester Poetry Festival to develop the pilot scheme which the doctorate student will further develop through their work, while Walton's directorship of the new Centre for Mental Health, Wellbeing and Creativity at Bath Spa University will offer additional opportunities for the candidate to consider the emotional impact and health contexts of mentoring practice. Southampton's City of Culture bid for 2025 will see further development of youth engagement and literary networks across the region over the next four years.

Artful Scribe is a regional literature development agency based in Southampton founded in 2011: it runs a range of projects across Hampshire and Dorset including writer-in-residencies, training workshops, poetry slams, Southampton's annual literature festival, and commissioned projects with external bodies including English Heritage and the National Trust. Previous collaborations with University of Southampton have included a Writing for Wellbeing project (Health Sciences), Writing in the Community CPD workshops for postgraduates (Faculty of Arts and Humanities), and 'Budding Stories', an Arts Council England-funded postdoctoral project to train PhD Creative Writers to workshops short stories with young people (English department). It is currently working towards NPO

(National Portfolio Organisation) status, and increasing its HEI research collaborations is a key part of its organisational development plan.

Subject

The proposed CDA research area explores mentoring practice in contemporary UK poetry. Working in tandem with Artful Scribe, a regional literature development agency based in Southampton, the doctoral candidate will consider the practical, ethical, critical and creative implications of mentoring in the creative arts. The candidate will have the opportunity to chronicle and support a new regional mentoring scheme, Poetry Ambassadors, as it moves from a pilot project to an annual scheme, and to draw on their observations for their own research.

Research questions and methods

Central research questions for the doctoral project will include:

- What is the relationship between existing theoretical models of mentoring and current creative practice?
- What are the opportunities for mentoring across creative and critical practice?
- How has mentoring shaped the landscape of contemporary UK poetry?
- How effective are inclusion, participation, and diversity outcomes in specific poetry mentoring schemes?
- How do communities of care and wellbeing operate in the contemporary poetry network?
- How do we evaluate wellbeing and effective mentoring in our creative practice?

The student may be a practising poet, and working towards a creative writing outcome as part of their doctoral work. The project would support a range of other practice-based approaches: the candidate's work with Artful Scribe will help them articulate the relationship between specific mentoring schemes and outcomes for participants, from publications to mental health benefits.

The candidate will be encouraged to combine critical and creative methods with cross-disciplinary research: recent publications on the creative industries, such as Banks' *Creative Justice: Cultural Industries, Work and Equality* (2017), will help furnish a language for exploring the economies of mentoring and poetic friendship, while Bazalgete's 2017 Independent Review of the Creative Industries outlines the need for more sector-specific understanding of the mentoring process.

Research context

UK mentoring projects have made a number of significant interventions into the contemporary poetry landscape in the UK, building new connections, infrastructures, and networks. Key areas are youth mentoring (Foyle's Young Poets of the Year, Poetry London mentoring scheme), regional literature development (New Poets North, Writing East Midlands), and schemes to support diversity and inclusion in the poetry, from Ledbury's

Emerging Critics programme, which sought to increase the diversity of poetry reviewers and reviewing, to The Complete Works, a BAME mentoring initiative led by Bernadine Evaristo and Arts Council England.

However, while a number of recent academic works note the significance of mentoring schemes in contemporary UK poetry, including J.T. Welsch's *The Selling and Self-Regulation of Contemporary Poetry* (Anthem, 2020), the only existing academic research on mentoring in poetry either explores earlier historical accounts (Lee's 2010 edited collection on mentoring in 18th-century British literature), or American traditions (Goldman-Price and Zucker's *Women Poets on Mentorship*). While previous schemes have prompted key policy documents and reports, such as 'The State of Poetry and Poetry Criticism in the UK' (2020), there is no critical literature or language for explaining how we might describe mentoring in contemporary poetry.

Mentoring is an established research topic in the social sciences, and key insights on youth mentoring will suggest models for building and sustaining the pilot scheme. The research will help uncover the role of mentoring in supporting, challenging, and transforming both the work of individual poets and the institutions that support poetry, from journals and universities to festivals, publishers, and arts venues.

Existing research into mentoring also offers a number of interdisciplinary starting points for the project: psychology has explored ethical and EDI practice in workplaces and academic settings, offering potential models for assessing current practice in the creative industries. Social sciences research has also generated a range of existing models for measuring mentoring and well-being, including relational scales, self-evaluation methods, and the Kirkpatrick Model for mentoring, which assesses engagement, confidence, behaviours, encouragement, and desired outcomes.

Main resources/collections in this area

This doctoral project will involve archival research, case studies, and interviews with practising poets and mentors. Carcanet and Bloodaxe's newly-accessible archives in Manchester and Newcastle will provide a recent context for understanding how mentoring can take place through editorial practice, while Walton and West's connection to the small press community will offer the candidate access to a range of publishing networks.

Skills developed by student and employability enhancement

The project will foster a diverse range of interdisciplinary skills, including careful project planning and management, creative engagement, collaborative work, and independent research and analysis. The research student will be invited to observe mentoring training, benefit from Artful Scribe's tailored training for writers and facilitators, and be given the opportunity to present their research findings to key stakeholders in regional and national arts organisations.

Literature is a key part of Southampton's offer for its 2025 City of Culture Bid, and the planned literary activity and network opportunities in the city from 2021-4 will give the

doctoral candidate unique opportunities and unrivalled opportunities to a range of discrete and distinct mentoring schemes.