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Audiobooks studio launched for North East

New Writing North and publishers Hachette UK have opened a dedicated new audiobook recording studio in the North East.

Sounds Good Audiobooks is based within Northumbria University's city centre campus in the heart of Newcastle.

The studio has officially announced commercial production with its first frontlist audiobook, *Barrowbeck* by the award-winning Lancashire author, Andrew Michael Hurley.

Andrew's debut novel, *The Loney* was a Costa Best First Novel Award winner and Book of the Year at the British Book Awards and his Yorkshire-set 2019 novel *Starve Acre* was released as feature film on 6 September.

Barrowbeck is a dark, suspenseful folk-horror story about the inhabitants of a remote valley on the Yorkshire-Lancashire border. It is read by actors Gabriella Pond and Matt Jamie, and produced by Lucie McNeil, who pitched the original concept of a collaborative audiobook studio to Northumbria University, New Writing North, and Hachette UK.

Lucie McNeil, Audio Development Producer for New Writing North and studio lead for Sounds Good said: "The North East has an incredible array of talent and graduates primed to work in audiobooks, and now we have a central hub where they can be created locally. The studio is right in the heart of Newcastle and all its transport links, so it's easy to get to."

Lucie added: "We are excited to continue working with our long-term partners Hachette to build publishing infrastructure and opportunity in the north, and New Writing North's partnership with Northumbria University has always had a creative, collaborative approach. We want to build our audio work into Northumbria University's MA in Publishing and other courses and provide industry experience for students and creatives."

Northumbria University and New Writing North have worked in partnership since 2012, delivering a wide range of teaching, community engagement and research activity. The two organisations are in the second year of a [ground-breaking MA Publishing](#), which is co-delivered with [New Writing North](#) and global publishers, [Hachette](#).

The audiobook studio will open up opportunities for staff and students, with plans to incorporate writing for audio across a number of programmes in [Humanities](#).

[Neil Percival](#), Acting Director of Cultural Partnerships at Northumbria University said: "One of the reasons we have established strong cultural partnerships with local organisations such as New Writing North is to sustain and build the creative ecology of the region.

"We're looking forward to providing new opportunities to our students

through this collaboration, including co-designing and delivering a new undergraduate module alongside New Writing North across courses such as English Literature and Creative Writing.”

Barrowbeck is published by John Murray, an imprint of John Murray Press (a division of Hachette UK) and is out on 24 October in its print hardback edition.

Dominic Gribben, co-Audio Content Director at Hachette, said: “*Barrowbeck* was at the top of my list when Lucie and I originally discussed books that could be recorded as part of the partnership. I’m delighted that we’re kicking things off with this production, and I’m looking forward to many more audiobooks coming out of Newcastle later this year and through 2025.”

Author, Andrew Michael Hurley, said: “It’s such an honour to know that *Barrowbeck* will be recorded and produced by Sounds Good Audiobooks. It’s a wonderful, collaborative venture that will give writers, publishers, actors, and sound technicians across the North so many opportunities.”

The UK’s publishing industry contributes £11 billion to the economy.

The number of UK audiobook downloads increased by 17% between 2022 and 2023, according to data from the Publishers Association (PA). Revenue from audiobooks rose 24% across the same period to £206m in 2023, reflecting an increase in the number of audiobook downloads from 50m to 59m and the growth in the audiobook market.

New Writing North leads the development of creative writing and reading in the North of England.

The charity has worked with Hachette, one of the largest publishing groups in the UK, on various initiatives to rebalance career opportunities in publishing and the writing industries in the north.

Claire Malcolm, CEO of New Writing North, said: “The audio studio is a practical and tangible way of expanding the creative industries in the North East. We’re incredibly grateful to Creative UK who have supported this venture and associated talent programmes for writers and producers.

“The studio supports our mission to increase content production in the region which in turn supports Newcastle City’s Council’s industrial strategy and the creative and cultural ambitions of the North East Combined Authority.”

In 2024, Creative UK partnered with New Writing North to establish the Sounds Good Audiobooks, it aims to run workshops and training with experienced audiobook narrators, commissioners and editors training acting talent to become narrators and producers, as well as creating collaborative new research about the audio industry.☒☒

The studio booth was part-funded by Creative UK’s Cultural and Creative Investment programme with funding from North East Combined Authority. The new studio’s ambition is to work with an array of publishers across the UK who are keen to have talent working effectively and cost efficiently in studios close to their home base.

Carol Bell, OBE, Associate Regional Director for Creative UK said “We were delighted to collaborate on this project to support the creation of the studio, and enable talented writers to have the opportunity to gain new skills and diversify their skills. We’re pleased to be supporting creative ambition in the region, and look forward to seeing the opportunities this will create in the future.”

In addition to creating audiobooks, New Writing North is running an eight-month audio-making development programme for six writers with☒ *Shadows At The Door*☒ writer-producer, Mark Nixon culminating with each writer creating their first episode.☒

The charity also runs a range of courses and masterclasses as part of Sounds Good audio programming and, to date, over 50 local writers have been supported via bursaries and courses to adapt their written work for audio.☒

Sounds Good has also created a corporate and academic podcasting course, supporting regional universities to broadcast their research work.

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--- Please contact media.communications@northumbria.ac.uk with any media enquiries or interview requests ---

Contacts



Rik Kendall

Press Contact
PR and Media Manager
Business and Law / Arts, Design & Social Sciences
rik.kendall@northumbria.ac.uk
07923 382339



Andrea Slowey

Press Contact
PR and Media Manager
Engineering and Environment / Health and Life Sciences
andrea.slowey@northumbria.ac.uk
07708 509436



Rachael Barwick

Press Contact
PR and Media Manager
rachael.barwick@northumbria.ac.uk
07377422415



James Fox

Press Contact

Student Communications Manager

james2.fox@northumbria.ac.uk

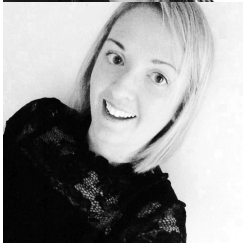


Kelly Elliott

Press Contact

PR and Media Officer

kelly2.elliott@northumbria.ac.uk



Gemma Brown

Press Contact

PR and Media Officer

gemma6.brown@northumbria.ac.uk