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The digital age beckons at the Newcastle Writing Conference 2015

New Writing North is on a mission to help writers thrive in the digital age, starting with an innovative writing conference produced with Northumbria University this June.

The writing development agency surveyed writers from across the North of England earlier this year and found that 80% would like help with using social networking to promote their work, while 82% want advice on running a successful writer's blog.

Half of respondents to the January 2015 survey have their own website or blog, but of those without an online platform, 68% felt that they should have one, and were put off by a lack of confidence and technical know-how.

Self-publishing is also becoming more mainstream: 67% of those surveyed wanted to find out more about self-publishing an e-book.

But there are many writers' needs that haven't changed – and publishers are still seen as the gatekeepers to success. A massive 88% of respondents to the survey wanted help in approaching and managing relationships with agents and publishers.

The results of the survey are directly informing New Writing North's work, starting with Newcastle Writing Conference, which takes place on Saturday 6 June 2015 in Newcastle upon Tyne.

The one-day conference has a strong 'do it yourself' ethos and aims to inspire writers to embrace the opportunities of the digital era, as well as connecting them with other writers and experts at the forefront of change in the publishing industry.

Following a keynote speech from acclaimed writer Meg Rosoff, whose own career began in her forties, delegates will hear from high profile industry figures on topics including standing out in a digital age and developing your online presence.

Speakers include the influential vlogger Sanne Vliegthart (Books and Quills), books blogger Simon Savidge, digital publicist Ben Willis, editor Francesca Main, literary agents Mark Stanton and Jo Unwin and the editor of We Love This Book, Anna James.

Non-traditional routes to publishing will be explored by Rachael Kerr from crowdfunding publisher Unbound and Debbie Young from the Alliance of Independent Authors. Lecturers from Northumbria University including the novelist Fiona Shaw will run sessions on editing and pitching your work.

The conference is aimed at newly published authors and aspiring novelists, as well as more established writers who are looking at how to approach the digital age.

Claire Malcolm, chief executive of New Writing North, said: "The publishing industry is rapidly changing to keep pace with a digital age, and writers are telling us that they want advice on how to thrive in this new environment. The industry's expectations of writers have become so much broader: almost as standard now writers are expected to promote their work on social media or through blogging, and even for many established writers, that can be a daunting task.

"At the same time, there are many new opportunities for writers, which wouldn't have been around even five years ago. The gatekeepers are changing and it's a really exciting time to be entering the industry. The Newcastle Writing Conference is an opportunity for us to bring together publishing experts and successful writers, who will highlight the very positive changes writers can make to advance their own careers. We want to energise writers to take their careers into their own hands and to encourage an enterprising 'do it yourself' spirit."

Lucy Winskell, Pro-Vice Chancellor (Business & Engagement) of Northumbria University, said: "Our unique partnership with New Writing North enables us to collaborate on events that stimulate and support the outstanding writing talent that exists in the region. The Newcastle Writing Conference is a great platform for academics, writers and the writing industry to come together to explore the changing literary landscape, and to share knowledge about the practical steps that writers can take to enhance their careers. There is a wealth of creative talent in the region, and, like New Writing North, we want to nurture and support that talent, offering more opportunities for writers to come together, share fresh thinking and explore new ways of working."

Newcastle Writing Conference 2015: Do it Yourself takes place on 6 June 2015 at Northumbria University, Newcastle. Tickets are on sale from Tuesday 17 March [here](#) or from www.newwritingnorth.com. Early Bird tickets are available until Friday 17 April or until they sell out.

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Contacts



Rik Kendall

Press Contact
PR and Media Manager
Business and Law
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



James Fox

Press Contact
Student Communications Manager
james2.fox@northumbria.ac.uk



Kelly Elliott

Press Contact
PR and Media Coordinator
Arts Design and Social Sciences / Engineering and Environment
kelly2.elliott@northumbria.ac.uk



Rachael Barwick

Press Contact
PR and Media Coordinator
Health and Life Sciences / Sport
rachael.barwick@northumbria.ac.uk
07377422415



Ruth Lognonne

Press Contact
PR and Media Coordinator
Health and Life Sciences / Sport
ruth.lognonne@northumbria.ac.uk



Emily Morris

Press Contact

Corporate Communications Coordinator

emily.l.morris@northumbria.ac.uk