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Winners announced in new award for TV writing talent

Nuzhat Ali and Sharma Walfall have won the first Channel 4 and Northumbria University Writing for Television Award at this year's Northern Writers' Awards ceremony.

Launched by Northumbria in partnership with Channel 4 as part of the Northern Writers' Awards last November, the new award seeks to identify raw and diverse writing talent from the North of England.

Nuzhat and Sharma were selected from 264 entrants to win the award, which

offers them the unique opportunity to be mentored through the script commissioning process with Lime Pictures and RED Production Company. As part of the judging process, six finalists pitched their ideas earlier this spring. From July 2015, the writers will spend ten months being mentored by Lime Pictures and RED Production Company.

Lee Mason, Commissioning Editor, Channel 4 said: “Channel 4 is committed to creating opportunities that support new talent and find diverse voices, so we are delighted to be working with Northumbria University and New Writing North on the first Channel 4/Northumbria University Writing for Television Awards.

“The awards offer a unique opportunity for emerging writers to work alongside some of the best producers in the industry, gaining experience and building knowledge with the support of Lime Pictures and RED Productions. We were very impressed by the quality of writing that we encountered in this year’s submissions, and we are looking forward to continuing to work with Northumbria University and New Writing North to support and develop writing talent across the North.”

The winners were revealed at the Northern Writers’ Awards 2015, which were held at Northumbria’s city campus this June and saw 27 writers receive a share of the £46,000 prize fund. The University confirmed its support of the awards for another three years on the night as part of its long-term partnership with New Writing North. The Channel 4/Northumbria University writing for television awards will also continue.

Lucy Winskell OBE, Pro Vice-Chancellor (Business and Engagement) at Northumbria University, said: “The University is delighted to be offering this opportunity for new writers, through our continued partnership with Channel 4 and our work with New Writing North on the Northern Writers’ Awards. This is a fantastic award, which gives new writers the chance to develop a career in television and I am very excited to see how our two writers benefit from this opportunity.”

The award is one of the many initiatives launched as part of Channel 4’s 360 Degree Diversity Charter launched earlier this year. Nuzhat Ali, from Bradford, has won the award attached to RED Production Company, whose recent productions include Cucumber, Banana and Tofu. Nuzhat will receive mentoring in script development from top television professionals, who will

support her towards pitching her own ideas for broadcast.

She said: “I am really looking forward to working with RED Production Company and am hoping that this opportunity will take my writing to a professional level.”

Caroline Hollick, Creative Director, RED Production Company said: “Nurturing raw talent is what we strive to do and we were impressed by all of the finalists. We’re going to stay in touch with all of them, as they are all interesting new voices.”

“However, for us there was one clear winner, and that was Nuzhat Ali. We were blown away by her passion, her strength of opinion, and wealth of interesting experience.”

Sharma Walfall, from Manchester, will be mentored by Lime Pictures, the makers of Hollyoaks, where she will shadow the process of script development, from first draft to broadcast script. This may lead to a commission to write an original episode of Hollyoaks that will be broadcast on Channel 4.

She said: “It means the world to me and feels a bit unreal to have won the competition. I’m extremely grateful for the award. To have the chance to work with and learn from the Hollyoaks team at Lime Pictures is unbelievable.”

Di Burrows, Producer, Lime Pictures said: “Sharma’s script sample was full of real characters, raw energy and insight which really made it stand out for us. She’s hungry to tell stories, has a fresh, original voice, an infectious enthusiasm and is bursting with ideas. We look forward to welcoming her on board Hollyoaks, harnessing all that passion and imagination and helping her to realise her dream.”

Northumbria University, New Writing North and Channel 4 will continue developing and growing the Writing for Television Awards as a strand of the Northern Writers’ Awards, the largest talent development programme for writers in the North of England. The Northern Writers’ Awards will open again for submissions in the autumn.

Claire Malcolm, Chief Executive of New Writing North, said: “We are delighted that we have been able to uncover such promising writers for this award. As they are relatively new writers we will ensure that the support they get is bespoke and takes into account their individual development needs, so that they have the best chance possible of seeing their work on screen.”

“We feel very fortunate to bring such a brilliant opportunity to writers through our rewarding partnership with Channel 4, Northumbria University, Lime Pictures and RED Production Company.”

Northumbria offers a range of courses in Creative Writing. To find out more, sign up for one of its open days on 26 and 27 June by visiting www.northumbria.ac.uk/openday

Northumbria is a research-rich, business-focussed, professional university with a global reputation for academic excellence. To find out more about our courses go to www.northumbria.ac.uk

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