

# Inside Publishing with Will Mackie Final

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## SUMMARY KEYWORDS

Publishing industry, talent development, New Writing North, Scottish Book Trust, mentoring, financial support, literary prizes, industry connections, MA in Publishing, Hachette UK, Channel 4 TV Awards, screenwriting, regional representation, career guidance, internships.

## SPEAKERS

Will Mackie, Megan Dawson, Speaker 1

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Speaker 1 00:01

Welcome to this episode of Inside publishing, the series where we interview industry experts on everything publishing.



Megan Dawson 00:13

Hi, I'm Megan, the podcast officer for SYP north. Today's episode features a conversation with Will Mackie. Will is the Senior Program Manager in talent development at New Writing North and joint program leader for the MA in publishing at Northumbria University. In this episode, we'll be talking about how organizations like New Writing North support authors and how literary prizes help writers to gain visibility. I hope you enjoy



Megan Dawson 00:39

so you started your career as an editor before moving into talent development roles with organizations like Scottish Book Trust and new writing north. Could you just tell us a bit about your journey and how your career evolved?

W

Will Mackie 00:55

Yeah, sure, of course. Megan, so I guess my career has been cut into a couple of sections. Really, initially in the early stage of my career, I kind of knew I wanted to work in publishing. When I graduated. I didn't really know what that meant or what that would entail, but I was interested in books and writing, and I wanted to be kind of part of that industry. It was the only thing that really appealed to me. And so I did go into editorial roles really early on in my career, and I enjoyed that, and I worked, I worked in London for several years, and I moved to Scotland and worked in Edinburgh and Glasgow, and I was really happy in those particular roles, and I thought that that I enjoyed editing. I kind of knew what I was doing with editing. You know, every job that I'd go into, I kind of knew what I was supposed to do if I had a manuscript. I knew how to kind of, you know, over time, what I'd have to do with that manuscript to get it to become a published book. And I did, loved it. I love, I love the whole industry. But, um, I think it became apparent to me that what I was most kind of interested in was probably working alongside the industry adjacent to it. And that's sort of that realization, I guess, came to me when I when I started to work at Scottish Book Trust, which was a sort of pivotal role for me, because it was the first job I'd had that wasn't directly in publishing and wasn't an editorial role. And in that job, I realized that I had a lot of skills, you know, that I developed around working with writers very directly, closely, supportively with writers as an editor that were really useful in these kind of talent development roles. And after working at Scottish Book Trust, I then start to work at new writing north for every for about 10 years now, kind of leading on our talent development programs in the north of England. And that really does feel to me that that was kind of my my home, really, where I wanted to be with the kind of experience I'd had, kind of working in publishing, and now to be in an organization, an arts charity, that works alongside the industry, works closely with the industry, but also works closely with writers, and we can talk a bit more about what that kind of work entails.

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Megan Dawson 03:14

Perfect overview, it kind of sounds like a lot of your work is around supporting people. And would you say that when you were working at Scottish Book Trust, and now you're new writing, more new writing north? Is it a lot more supportive and people focused, rather than more? You obviously mentioned that earlier on, it would be like you look at a manuscript and you knew what you were doing there. What is it that kind of appealed. What was it about those roles that you enjoyed more than when you were an editor? It's

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Will Mackie 03:46

really good question. I think it's the capacity that I have in these in this job, and the job at SBT in Edinburgh to actually have a really meaningful intervention in someone's career, particularly early in their career, when it can be pivotal. I think that you can tell someone that you believe in their work. This organization can recognize their work. We can do kind of practical, tangible things to support them, like give them money, which is really important, or give them other opportunities. And it's the sense that that actually can make a really big difference that could actually be make the difference between whether someone stops writing or continues to write, and it's, I think it's the fact that it's really productive, it's really meaningful, that that I really do value about about my job, not to say that it was important to do that in publishing roles as well, particularly when I worked for a small press where we gave opportunities to early career debut poets, I think we made a really significant impact on those people's careers as well, actually, by doing that. But I like the fact that the dynamic is different. I. Uh, in these organizations that I work from now, you know, we are professional organizations. We work in ways that are, you know, based around kind of good practice and making sure that your work we do is robust and that it's properly kind of supported through fundraising and through other kind of business opportunities. But we're also working with those writers. We're working with them and for them, we're trying to create opportunities for them. And so the dynamic is different from a publisher, where I don't think the power really does lie much with authors. I think authors are very disempowered in that publishing process, which I think is a problem with it.

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Megan Dawson 05:39

That's really interesting. I would like to go a bit more into that, because you obviously said that there are some hurdles that authors would need to face, particularly early on in their lives, in their careers. And you mentioned that you can help through like financial support, but what are the other kind of hurdles that people would face at that point in their career? And what kind of support do you mean, other than financial support?

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Will Mackie 06:05

Yeah, sure. I mean I think that just, I'll just go back to that about money. I do think it's essential, and I think it's writing is so poorly paid. We know that writer incomes are falling and that it's impossible for the majority of people to make a living through writing alone. So that creates a really difficult situation where writing becomes something that is for people who can afford to do it, and that, I think is something that impacts negatively on our writing culture, because that's limiting the number of stories that can be told. So I do think bursaries money is really important, and we through our awards program will give bursaries of 2000 pounds or 3000 pounds, maybe 5000 pounds, to people. And that has an enormous, enormous impact. Because what you can do practically, it can allow people time to set aside for writing, not to be worried about freelance work, or pushed into this corner where they're so worried about their income that they can't creatively, have the space to write. So I do think that's, you know, that's really important. But yeah, there are lots of other ways that I think writers can be supported. I think one way, one thing that's really significant is validation. So an award from New Writing North, or from Scottish Book Trust, or from the London writers center. These, these are organizations where we are properly assessing the work. You know, we receive 2000 more than 2000 entries

for our awards program. So to get through all the different stages and have won an award is a really significant achievement, and that sense of validation can be hugely impactful. It can make someone realize that actually writing is for them, and it can massively boost their confidence. It's also kind of an accolade that they can take when they go and approach literary agents and approach publishers that say that I've won this award from this organization. And it really is meaningful. The industry recognizes these awards as being important, so that sense of validation and creating, you know, recognition around a writer, I think is really important. Other things we do, I think mentoring is massively significant. It's a really high value thing to work with a mentor. Mentoring gives a writer the opportunity to work with someone who has more experience than them has been through some of the challenges that they're going through themselves, and could offer them that really incredible insight and guidance with really specific things that that writer might be facing at the moment in their own work, so they have the value of that mentoring is so different from more hierarchical structures like tutoring or editing, which are really valuable themselves, but mentoring is less hierarchical. It's two people, a mentor and a mentee, working together to try to successfully realize a particular project. So it's its unique, that dynamic, and we as an organization are really good at setting those mentoring partnerships up because we have that experience. So I've worked on a lot, probably like 100 more than 100 mentoring partnerships in my career, matching people with a mentor and a mentee, and that getting that match right is crucial to how it's going to function. If you get the match correct. And that match can be esthetic, artistic, it can be do to do with personality, it can do with experience, genre, art form, all kinds of different areas. You get that match right, then those mentoring partnerships from really flourish and be massively successful and have a lasting legacy. You know, they'll support a writer to complete a manuscript or to deal with some really challenging thing in the manuscript, but it will also have an impact on that writer's longer term career, because they've learned elements of practice and process from their mentor. So those things are important. Other things, you know. We might give people a writing retreat. For example, we have an award with Arvon for which affords a writer the opportunity to go on a week long Arvon retreat, which can be again, just something really special. You know, you can go on those retreats and have a really significant breakthrough in your work that allows that writer to then go and complete their manuscript or initiate it, or take it to the direction that they hadn't quite worked out before. So there are lots of different ways that I think we support writers we you know, one thing is as well that I think is really essential, is creating a peer community of writers. Writing can feel disparate. Writers can feel disconnected from each other, and organizations like us bring bring those writers together, and those peer networks just putting people together who are kind of relatively similar, sort of career stages, bringing them together, linking them up, offering them guidance and how they can connect to each other and talk to each other and meet up and support each other, read each other's work. Those those connections can last for years and years. And you know they that I know writers who we put together as in peer groups 8,10, years ago, who still meet up now, and their circumstances are completely different. They've gone from being unpublished to quite experienced writers, and they're facing different challenges now, and they're facing the challenges of how you navigate your relationship with your publisher when you publish two books, and where you go next. Where do you go after a two book deal? Completely different sort of things that they're facing, but they're still supporting each other and sharing those experiences. So those are some of the, some of the areas that I think are really important.

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Megan Dawson 11:46

Those sound really meaningful. Can I just go back to the mentorship scheme? Just one step back? Because it sounds like I think, when you think of a mentorship scheme, it's easy to imagine the benefits for the mentee, who is the person who's being mentored, but it sounds like with the partnerships that you create, they're equally beneficial for both parties, so the person who is doing the mentoring, what is, what are they likely to get from from those relationships as well?

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Will Mackie 12:19

Yeah, that's a really good point you've made, actually, and it's one that I've become aware of over time, that actually those mentoring relationships are often really beneficial for the mentor as well as the mentee, and you want to get that right at the start. So when I put people together, I really want the mentor to be given the chance to really consider if they want to invest in this project. So I will talk to them about the project. I will share sample of writing for this project, and importantly, just give them time to really consider if they want to take it on. Because if they're fully invested in it and invested in it in the way that the mentee is, that's ideal. So you've got those two people working together, so they can get enormous satisfaction from working with a writer on, you know, developing a manuscript together, and that can manifest itself in them having the opportunity to share what they've learned. And I think, you know, the deeper get into your career, the more that becomes important to people. I think that chance to actually share your own learning with people who are emerging, who are an early stage in your career, in their career. And I think that the mentors you know, they have that chance to really pass on their experience and their learning and their enthusiasm for something and to like, just basically help someone pass through something that might for them, it seemed, for the mentor at one point, have seemed an impossible thing that they managed to overcome in time. And it's about, you know, managing those kind of natural dips in confidence that come with any sort of creative pursuit. Your confidence is going to go up. It's going to go down with times when it goes down, that's part of the process. It's part of working your way through a particularly difficult moment. And the mentor can help the mentee to sort of maintain faith at that point. And I think that's really, really rewarding for for the mentor to have seen the mentee through that. Yeah, they can. They can also learn mentors about their own practice from it. Obviously, it's a professional relationship as well. But, you know, they they have to be paid properly. They have to be paid well for it. So there's all those combinations of things you want them to you want them to be invested in it creatively, but you want them also to be properly, professionally rewarded for it as well.

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**Megan Dawson 14:36**

Yeah, it sounds incredibly rewarding. Yeah, that's exactly the right word. So I think all of those themes blend nicely into if we speak about the the importance of supporting talent in the north, because, as you say, all of these having a network and those kind of things, I assume that that's always going to be more difficult for people who are you know, in Scotland, when you're working with people who based in Scotland and now people in the north with new writing north, what other kind of imbalances still exist between opportunities in the north versus opportunities in the in the South?

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**Will Mackie 15:17**

It's still very prevalent. And I think there are two there are two broad kind of angles. One One is writing and creativity, and the other is the industry. And both of these are obviously really closely interlinked. We know that the publishing industry is mainly centered around London and that the workforce is largely from London and South East of England. There's some pockets of activity elsewhere, Edinburgh, Oxford. There are a few, a few areas of where there is some publishing activity, as well as London. But there are really kind of antiquated reasons for why publishing is based around London, which, you know, go back a long time to how the the, you know, to where printers were based, like assumptions about literary but these are not really relevant today, and publishing can really, practically, can take place anywhere, but the industry remains centered where it's always been centered. So we know this disadvantage talented writers in the north. This is because people are disconnected from the opportunities. And it's the industry is. It's a sociable industry. Is a connected industry. It's an industry where people do meet each other networking events. Or, you know, publishers and agents, or agents are also obviously based largely in London. There are a few elsewhere, but publishers and agents are in London, and writers who are in London meet those agents. They're on the radar of them. The whole kind of literary culture is in London as well. So things like newspapers that feature writers are there. So you much more likely to be in those those circles. Not everybody, obviously, is in London as well. And there are, there's obviously people who are massively disadvantaged in London too, but, but many people are obviously connected in those in those rights of networks, in those circles that are around London in the south east, it's not easy for a writer in Newcastle or Leeds or Manchester to just go and meet an agent for a coffee. You know, obviously there's far more meetings happening online now, which is, which is great, which is obviously even things out a little bit, but it's still, still disconnected from that heart of the industry. The other side of that is the workforce as well. So the workforce is largely from people who are based in London and south east, and largely people who grew up in the south east and a very, very middle class workforce, a very committed workforce of people or amazing people who work in the industry, incredible editors and agents who are absolutely devoted and do amazing work. But it's always been difficult for people outside of London and the southeast to work in the industry because the entry points are so challenging. So to get a publishing job, you really need to have a base in London, which is really very expensive, unless you've got someone that you can live with, a family member, ideally somewhere, somewhere that you can stay. So it's very difficult for anyone outside of the industry to have those opportunities to entry level roles and to things like internships. All of this is, has created quite a, quite a wide imbalance. And then, you know, you also don't have that representation of like Northern culture kind of working within the industry as well. So that disadvantage is arguably how work is assessed when it gets to agents and publishers, and what, what is considered to be something that can pass through that kind of writing culture. So, I mean, we've at New Writing North , we've run the Northern

WritersAwards for 25 years now, and that program has all been about creating change. So it's been supporting right, you know, supporting writers in the ways that we talked about, through bursaries, through mentoring, through industry connections. Part of my work is really about building partnerships within the industry. And that's the approach I think that new writing North has taken that's been really successful because we've wanted to engage. We've always wanted to engage with the industry. We've always kind of reached out to the industry. We work with publishers, we work with agents, we set up events where we've taken writers from the north of England to a networking event in London. So very simple thing to do really with, you know, taking 1520 writers into a room in London have some Wine and crackers or whatever. And that is really impactful, because what we see from that is people form connections with agents. Some people get signed shortly after that event, and it's a really simple thing to do, but that's not easily available for most writers, right? It's something that we've been able to facilitate. Yeah, we know that partnerships are important, that partnerships are a bridge, really. Partnerships form bridges between writers, talented. Writers and the industry. And I think writers have known that for a long time. And I think the industry now also knows that it knows, like an organization like new writing North will give them access to really talented people outside of their typical channels, because, partly because the way we assess writing, partly because of the fact that we have, like, an open call for submissions where we can, you know, we accept things. We don't charge people to kind of approach us. We we're open to people to send us their work through our Northern Writers Awards program. So we really connect to the talented, talented writers here. And I think publishers and agents, a lot of them now do know that, and they will invest in us. So like Hachette UK, who run a children's novel writing award with us, which they've done for several years now, to identify talented children's writers in the north of England. And that's that's created some really, you know, really meaningful, long term success stories, like the writer James Harris, a children's writer from Middlesbrough, gone on to publish several books. It's winning that particular award this year. We're working with literary agent Johnson Alcock, who really like delighted to be working with them on a an award for commercial and genre fiction. Great for us, because we really wanted to kind of be reaching writers in that area, and I think also really beneficial for them as an agent to be exploring where the talented writers exist in that particular area in the north of England. So, yeah, I think that having an organization that can act in that way, in a bridge, in that way, is it has definitely gone some way to ironing out some of those imbalances. There are lots more, I think, lots more imbalances that still exist. There's a lot of work to be done. We're always, you know, a priority of ours is to address all forms of under representation in the industry. We support writers of color. We support working class writers through specific programs that we've run, disabled, neuro divergent writers, LGBTQ writers. We we know that the writing culture that we live in is only going to benefit from the broader and more varied culture of publication that that exists. So we, you know, we're really committed to addressing all those forms of under representation, which I think are more firmly sort of entrenched in the north of England, because so many other kind of forms of disconnection here as well. So I think if you know, if you're, if you're a working class writer or a writer of color in the north of England, you are likely to be facing pretty significant disadvantages in getting your work out

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Megan Dawson 22:40

there. Yeah, they kind of compound each other

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Will Mackie 22:45

Absolutely, yeah.

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Megan Dawson 22:47

It kind of sounds like it's the definition of getting a foot in the door, as in there's people with talent and they have something to give, but then you're making that connection, even as you say, that first meeting, that first coffee with a publisher or somebody in a network that they would never otherwise have access to. Does that sound about right?

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Will Mackie 23:10

Yeah, that sounds a really good summary, actually, of how we do it, and a lot of that is to do with, you know, working with people individually, which we always try to do with the rights that come through our program. We there's no one sort of set way of working for everybody. There's no it's all about understandin

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Will Mackie 23:29

people are coming from as an individual and where they are with their work at that particular time, and understanding a bit about their personality and, you know, the background, what, what is important to them, what resonates with them, and that three dimensional way of kind of working with people, so that we really do understand them well. And, you know, a lot of the time it is about advising people so that they're ready as well for what the next steps are. You know, if people are often people often feel the pressure to be going out there, getting an agent right away, to be getting a publisher right away. And sometimes you just you need to sort of say to them, it's not the time isn't right. You need to put that out of your mind. Focus on what you want to do creatively, and come back to me in six months time, or a year's time or two years time. And I think we're good at that as well. We're good at being there in the long term for people, because it is enormously pressured. I think when you're facing all of these different professional directions, professional routes that you need to take with your writing, there's so many options and things to potentially you can. You can go this way or that way. You can follow a traditional route, you can self publish, you can there's all of these things, and people need to do what's right for them and not feel kind of the expectation on them to take a particular direction. It's got to be right for you and your for your particular projects and and it's Yeah, trying to get that, like good understanding with people. I think it's really. Important,

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Megan Dawson 25:01

definitely. I would assume that if you're maybe from a less privileged background, or you're not from somewhere where you're in these circles, if you do get a break, and if you do see an opportunity, you're likely to take any opportunity. But what you're saying is you kind of hope to support authors and people early on in their career to make the right choices, not just taking the first thing that comes, which I'm sure can be really tempting, if it's if it's your dream to make it anywhere

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Will Mackie 25:36

it is exactly. It's about giving people guidance. And, yeah, you know, when you've worked for something for a long time, for this opportunity to arise, you you are going to take, naturally, going to go for the first thing that comes. But sometimes someone saying to you, wait a while. Wait till you ready. Think about the different options. If there's one agent is interested in you now, it's likely to be another one interested you soon, so make sure you get that right. That match right, that relationship with the agent is so important as well. So you feel, when you're signing with a literary agent, for example, that that it's exactly right for you. So that sort of relationship you shouldn't run it rush into, I don't think, but it's hard to, it's hard to sort of resist doing that as well. Because, you know, if you've been trying for months and months or years to get an agent that someone's like, awesome, you then obviously you're gonna be like, Yeah, that sounds good. So there's a lot of yeah, a lot of nuance, I guess, in these conversations that we have, and we're sort of my colleagues and I in talent development, we're pretty open. So if a writer wants to talk to us about a particular difficulty they're having, or decision they've got to make, that can be like a difficult decision. Can be an amazing decision. It can be that they've been offered something incredible. So incredible. We will talk them through through these particular points in their in their career. I mean, I don't we don't have all the answers, but we'll listen and we'll try and help them to make the decision that's best for them. Has to come from them, obviously, but we'll help them to think about what the options are and guide them in those ways. So having that channel open to the rights that we work with, the rights that come through our awards programs, is, I think, is kind of key to our work, actually, that, yeah, that we will, if someone gets in touch with us and says, I'm having a particular difficult time is something we will sit down and chat to them and try and help them figure out a way.

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Megan Dawson 27:46

Yeah, it sounds like everything centers around having, as you said, just an individual approach to every person. And it's fantastic that you feel that there's enough time and capacity to work with people as individuals and work out what's what's the plan, yeah, based on their different needs and their backgrounds, as you said,

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Will Mackie 28:12

Yeah, you'd always like more time, always like more time, more capacity, but, but we kind of do what we can. Yeah.

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Megan Dawson 28:20

So you are the Co leader of the MA in publishing at Northumbria University. Could you just give us an overview of the course and what the students actually study?

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Will Mackie 28:31

So I'm the co leader, along with Richard Kelly, who's academic at Northumbria University and a writer, the course has been going for about four years now, and I was sort of involved in it from the start with getting this course set up. It's a unique course, I think, in that it's the partnership again, and I've talked a bit about partnerships, but the partnership element is what makes it so unique. It's a partnership between new eight North Hachette, UK, one of the big five global publishers and North umbrella University, which is a leading and very pioneering University in the in the north, north east of England. So it draws together the expertise, the resources and the talents of those three partners who each bring something quite different to the course. And I think it's worked really successfully as a way of creating something that gives students all those different elements that you get, so that you get this incredible sort of access to Hachette, UK, and that sense of a leading publisher being part of this course. Alongside that, you get the kind of academic excellence of Northumbria as well. And you could bring what you know, you get the chance to work with new right north, kind of small values driven arts organization. So really a kind of multi dimensional course there, and we are lucky enough in the Hachette UK, and a new writing North will. Will. People will literally step out of their day jobs to come into the classrooms with the students. So it's very, very kind of contemporary, everything's very kind of up to date. People will come in to talk about specific things that are happening in the industry at that moment, specific trends, specific elements of their job. So we get something that I think, is very much reflective of how Hachette works, as much as it's kind of underscored by this kind of structured academic course that Northumbria have the rights experience putting together. We'll also bring in writers, translators, and there's a whole kind of module that's that I curate as part of my job at new writing north, which is very much kind of centered around our works, around issues of kind of representation, access to the industry, diversification of the workforce. So yeah, and in that, you know, we draw on our network a little bit, so we have people in coming in, like the writer Lizette Orton, is a real, really inspirational speaker who comes to talk to the students every year, or a translator, translator, sahad Hussain in recently, who is a translator from Arabic writing to English, and is able to kind of really take us kind of directly into, Like, her job as a translator and how translation works. So so much real world experience that I think this, this course manages to deliver, actually, the cohort of around 20 students every year. So it's, it's a decent size group, not too huge, and it gives a chance to sort of build a bit of a dynamic in that course environment. I think, I think both Richard and I get a huge amount from working from this with the students, as well, from understanding where they're coming from and learning about their interests, what what they're reading, what sort of resonates for them. All of that is really fascinating for me, for someone who works in the arts, to get that chance to sort of, you know, really understand, like, what that generation, that

people are interested in, how they're finding books, particularly things like, you know, booktok. I've learned, I've learned more from my students about booktok than they will have learned from me about booktok, because I can like, really don't understand it, so, so that sort of thing is very rewarding. I think, is it a real, real joy to to work with those students. They do dissertations. So dissertation supervision is jointly supervised by the three partners, by Hachette New Writing North or Northumbria. So that means that the students can opt for something that might be like a business proposal, the proposal a proposal for a new publishing imprint, for example, which probably Hachette would supervise, or they could do something more traditionally academic, which Northumbria would supervise. Or perhaps something that's related to our work could be New Writing North around, like literary festivals or work in libraries or translation. So I think that, yeah, the dissertations are really important. Obviously, that comes towards the end of the course and the third semester of the course, and they start to think about the dissertations about now. So by that stage, they've really built up, you know, a good body of knowledge about what they want to explore further in publishing. So there's a lot of scope for really interesting projects and been brilliant things that I've been lucky enough to read in the last few years.

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Megan Dawson 33:25

That's fantastic. I feel like sometimes, when you do an undergraduate degree, you get to the end and you're faced with a decision whether you try and get some real life experience or if you do post graduate study, whereas it feels like the course brings together, yes, you're studying and you're doing a dissertation in the academic work, but you're getting so much exposure to the industry at the same time. And would you say that is through that three way partnership that that's possible?

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Will Mackie 33:59

Yeah, I think so. We always wanted it to be a course that felt very much about how the industry is today and vocationally connected to the industry, so that you're seeing real world aspects of publishing. And we also wanted it to feel like a course where people would be feel ready to go into the industry afterwards, ready, in the sense of understanding it, understanding the different types of roles and the different types of skills and qualities that are needed and ready, and also in the sense to have been confident, to feel that they could go into the industry, and, you know, contribute to changing the industry as well. Because that's an important part of, obviously, our work at New writing north, but also important part of the course that that sense that the industry does need to be changed, and is also open to change, I think, as well,

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Megan Dawson 34:48

because I can see where you're coming from with wanting to build that level of confidence. Because what I'm imagining is a student who has done like an is based in the North East, has done. In their undergraduate degree in the North East, and then studied this MA in publishing, and has a big dream of going and working, perhaps for publishers in London, which is really intimidating and really daunting. Would you say that that's the kind of pathway that your students take? Do you know what kind of they look at doing after they study, do most people stay in the North East, or they all have big dreams of moving to London?

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Will Mackie 35:25

There are a lot of students who study who are from the North East of England. And it's really important to us that there is scope for talent talented people in the North of England. We want to keep talented people in the North of England, but we also know with the industry, that most of the jobs are in London, although Hachette is a really important example of how publishing is changing for its decentralization. So Hachette does have offices in Newcastle and Sheffield in Manchester, Bristol and Edinburgh. So there are growing opportunities outside of London, but also as well. I think working in London, having the chance to live in London, is an amazing thing when you're a young person as well. And I think that should be an opportunity for anybody to and, you know, I'm really happy for people who get a job in London and go and go and live there is a great place to live. Basically, it's kind of, you know, an amazing multi cultural city full of arts and culture, and to have that experience, to be there, I think, is fantastic. Obviously, we also want there to be opportunities in the north of England, and I think that's part of the work, really, to develop those opportunities here as well, so that there are pathways for people to follow, to stay in the North East, if they, if they, if that's what they really want to do. We know that people, people have gone to work in publishing roles. People have gone to work. Some people have gone to work at Hachette itself, and some people have gone to work for other publishers. Some people have gone into roles are in related industries as well. And some people obviously go into roles that are completely different from publishing, to which I think is not uncommon as well. I have like a MA in museum studies, but I've never worked in a museum and but I still glad I did the course.

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Megan Dawson 37:13

Yeah, so I like that, because I like the idea that there is, I suppose it's hard to balance, as you say, wanting to keep talented people in the North East, but then also making sure people feel confident enough to go, and if they wanted to move to somewhere like London, that they feel equipped to do that. I suppose a part of that would be the London Book Fair, where you've been recently. So it'd be great to talk about that, as it's a little bit timely, and we're obviously slightly past it, but it would still be quite interesting. What kind of what were like the aims of the visit, of the trip that you took to London book fair?

W

Will Mackie 37:53

Yeah. So as part of the course, we take the students on a two day, two day study trip to London, and one day that is spent to London book fair, and one day that's spent at the Hachette UK central office at Carmelite house. And we've done that since the course began, I think. Have you been to lbf?

M

Megan Dawson 38:15

No,

W

Will Mackie 38:17

okay, yeah. So, I mean, it's an enormous sort of but you basically get, like, you know, so much of the industry in one kind of gigantic place. And I think it's exhausting. I find it well, I find it exhausting anyway, but you can get so much from just going and experiencing it for a day, of seeing the industry they're working together, seeing all the different types of publishers, seeing all the agents there that are kind of meeting and meeting with publishers and meeting with each other. And you can just get a really vibrant sense of what the industry is like and the scope of it. There's also very kind of useful seminars and events at London book fair as well, and I think the seminar programs are something that I really encourage the students to go along to. So the organizations like English pen, who run a seminar program at London Book Fair, which I thought was brilliant this year, like really fascinating discussions with industry professionals and writers and around subjects like freedom of speech and freedom of expression, really. So that stuff is really valuable. So yeah, the point of that trip is to give the students that that chance to experience the book fair, to learn kind of, and also to kind of crystallize their learning, to sort of bring together a lot of things that we've been talking to them about on the course. And then we stay overnight, and we get to Hachette the following day and get a chance to kind of tour around the company there. And they were incredibly welcoming and friendly. And it's, you know, that's a lovely part of it. And travel back. And I think it's, you know, I think the trip is a nice way of bringing all the students together as well, and like solidifying. That dynamic, they have too.

M

Megan Dawson 40:02

especially, as you say, of a cohort of 20 people, that sounds like a nice, nice trip. What kind of access do students get if they attend the book fair as part of your course, as opposed to if they had attended independently?

W

Will Mackie 40:20

Well, I guess the main thing is that it's free. We it's right, it's part, we're part of the course. So and, you know, the travel there is inclusive in the course, and the accommodation. And also, I guess the other thing is that they get to go together, so they experience it together. And that's, I think, a very positive learning experience, because they're kind of absorbing everything. They're talking to each other about it, and I think that's heightening their learning.

M

Megan Dawson 40:49

I can imagine it'd be quite a daunting experience to go on your own. As I said, I've never been and probably part of the reason would be, if you're not given the opportunity through something like your course, it would just be quite overwhelming to go independently.

W

Will Mackie 41:06

It really is. It's still the Book Fair is really difficult for anyone who doesn't have an actual kind of stand at the book fair as well, because very few places that you can actually kind of sit down meet people. So it's, it's a difficult thing to go to in many respects, but one I think is really essential for people who are students are publishing, to kind of have a bit of awareness of

M

Megan Dawson 41:31

can you just touch on placements? I think would be useful. I think, did you say that you say they can do placements? New writing North Hachette and with with the university as well. Or, Yeah, could you just tell me a bit more about the placements that students do and how these help prepare them for their careers?

W

Will Mackie 41:53

Yeah, I mean, the core part of the placement module is working on placement with Hachette UK, so the students are given key contact at Hachette who sort of kind of guide them a little bit in their placement. And then they move between different departments and divisions of Hachette so they it's quite a structured placement. They get experience in editorial, in rights and production. They get invited along to meetings. They get assigned sort of particular tasks to do, because Hachette is such a big company, it's really a really, yeah, a really big scope that they have, I suppose, in terms of that experience that they're going to get through that placement at Hachette. It's all kind of coordinated by the Hachette altogether network, which is one of their internal internal networks for staff well being and staff connectedness. And they do an amazing job of kind of structuring this placement and allowing each student to have that opportunity of a really rich placement that introduces them to very different roles they can, yeah, also do some work with me and my colleagues in new writing north. So that might include working with me on talent development projects. That could include, sort of doing some reading and assessment on our awards program. But this also could be something like taking part in event delivery for one of our conferences. So we did a screenwriting conference in February, and some of our students on placement were able to kind of be part of that sort behind the scenes with some of the screenwriters industry, like broadcasting professionals and people that we had at that conference. So I think there's that kind of experience too that we can deliver from new right north, because we're, you know, we're here on the ground, and we've got lots of different things happening all the time.

M

Megan Dawson 43:43

Would you say so it kind of sounds like at Hachette, it's more of a overview of lots of different departments. Would you say that that tends to be the case? Or is there scope for people who really know what they want to do, what they want to focus on, to say, I just want to be an editorial. Or do you think there's a benefit to saying, Okay, well maybe, but let's be open minded to having a look at all the different areas.

W

Will Mackie 44:08

Yeah, no, we actually take into account very carefully what the students are interested in. So someone's interested in children's fiction or children's editorial particularly, or editorial or production, we will try and match them very closely with the key their key contact, who will be from that particular area. So there is definitely that chance to make it structured around a little bit, around what the students are interested in. But we also know that we want them to kind of learn about different areas of the industry too, in that placement. And so it's a very it's a very reflective placement. We ask as part of the assessment for that placement, the students need to reflect on what they've learned through that process, what they didn't know when they went in, and what the process of being being on that placement has taught them. So it is, it is really carefully. Is my my colleague, Richard, who does most of that, matching up with the students. To the key contacts. And he does that incredibly meticulously, and taking into account what the students are interested in and who might be the right contact for them. So that does make it very much structured around the students interest which they have kind of developed quite a long way by that stage of the course, because of, you know, starting in September and learning so much in that time. So we do encourage them to yet, to be reflective, to be open to what's on placement, but also to be understanding of their of their own particular interest.

M

Megan Dawson 45:34

That makes sense. I was going to ask about prize culture, but I feel like we've obviously touched on that at the beginning, but the only thing that we didn't speak about was the channel four writing for Television Awards, which I thought maybe would be if you wanted to say anything more on that, that would be quite interesting, just because it's something that's maybe more recognizable to all audiences. So could you just say a bit more about your role in that, and what and what that looks like?

W

## Will Mackie 46:00

So we've worked in partnership with Channel Four for around 10 years. Now what we have at the moment is really strongly structure support with Channel Four in that partnership from four skills, which is the part Channel Four that's responsible for kind of outreach and training and developing talent and activities, so very much chiming with the kind of work we do. So four skills is an amazingly supportive team at Channel Four who we work with. So that's allowed us to set up and develop our channel four write for TV awards. So what we offer at the moment are four placements. So for your four awards through the through the channel for working for TV awards. So each, each of those four awardees receives 3000 pounds, a placement with a production company and mentoring and also kind of support as a group, as well as a cohort. A key part of it is, is those production companies that we work with. So our current four, just to go through them, are a warp. We're based in Sheffield and made adolescence So absolutely, unbelievably brilliant company to have bonafide who've been a partner for with us for several years, who create really incredibly high quality TV, drama film nation, who have a specific remit of creating and developing work in the north and the North East of England, who, again, are just amazing, amazing partners. And rope ladder, who part of rope ladders remit is producing Waterloo Road. So these are companies which are very much invested in the north of England and really work in very specific ways with the rights that they work with. So it's obviously a really popular program. We get a lot of a lot of people submitting to it, and the the process for selecting those rights is pretty sophisticated. There's they set us a script, and then that goes through various kind of phases of assessment, and we interview people before awarding them a place on the program. It's also sort of connected with outreach work we do around screenwriting in the north of England. So we do like write for TV events which are kind of open access for people to attend and to learn more about how you write for TV and the options that are out there for to write for TV. So we did one of those events in Kendal in Cumbria last like on Saturday, and we've got another one coming up in Durham in May, and another one in Leeds in June. So we, you know, we're keen to, always keen to get out there and to talk to people about these opportunities, about the work. But some, yeah, those, those Channel Four TV awards, are really flagship part of our whole talent development program. And for me, it's been really fascinating to work in on screenwriting program, which I've done for quite a long time now, because obviously my backgrounds in books. And I don't really know anything about screenwriting when I started working on this program, and I kind of think I do now. I've learned about broadcasting. I've learned about the structure of scripts and screenwriting and what works for TV, what stories you know we want for TV. And I've, again, sort of tried to kind of create that connection between the industry, between broadcasting and talented writers in the north of England. But yeah, we we're really grateful for the support for Channel Four, for that particular program. It's been transformational for for a lot of screenwriters that we've worked with.

M

Megan Dawson 49:39

Yeah, that sounds brilliant. I yeah, I feel like screenwriting is obviously a little bit more of a niche. I personally don't know much about it, but to know that there is such amount of well support and interest from Channel Four, especially reaching into the north, is obviously really good. So the final, the final theme would just be some General advice about getting into publishing for somebody who's hoping to build a career in publishing today, what practical advice would you give?

W

## Will Mackie 50:09

Yeah, I do think that you need to be open to what the possibilities are within the industry. So a lot of people think about publishing in a sort of through kind of lens of editorial, of working with manuscripts, of working with writers directly, which is obviously a key part of it, an essential part of it. It's kind of, you know, where my background was as well. But I think being open to all the different potential areas to work in the industry is essential. So working in rights, for example, or production or marketing or design, and also being aware of the sort of more recent opportunities there are as well, particularly around things like audio, which is growing all the time and offers different kinds of jobs within the industry. You know, there are sales jobs, obviously in publishing, which are essential to and people with sales experience can in other in other sectors, can go into into publishing and really thrive. And I think a lot of what I was saying about people just, you know, look really broadly at what those opportunities are, and also don't be restricted in terms of only kind of wanting to be working in one particular area of publishing. I think it's children's publishing is amazing. But if you want to work in children's publishing, you might need to sort of look somewhere else first to get a bit of experience. You know you don't, don't restrict yourself, but at the same time, always hold on to that belief as well. Don't lose that belief that if you really your dream, your aim, the thing you want most is to work in children's publishing. Once you're in the industry, try and guide yourself towards that. Don't lose sight of that. So I always wanted to work in fiction and poetry, but I early in my career, I was editing books about finance and income tax and things like that. And actually, I didn't mind. I actually work on those books which were quite complicated, like open sort of sense of the topics, which I still like. Even though any of those books on income tax, I don't think absorb much of that, but also just in terms of, like, the production of them, that the layout, they had lots of diagrams and lists, they had indexes, things like that, which a nightmare to work on. But I always wanted to work in fiction and poetry, and I did. That didn't happen for me immediately, but I did maintain that belief that that's what I wanted. And I did eventually edit a lot of fiction and a lot of poetry, and felt really happy. And that experience I had editing books about financial markets was was beneficial. You know, it wasn't wasted time at all, but, but, but, yeah, I think it's really important to just hold that belief that there's this area that you really want to work in and never lose, that internships are vital as well. I think to looking out for those, I was going to flag a couple of things, actually, if that's all right. Yeah, one of those is that new right north. We've partnered with the Deborah Rogers Foundation on the David Miller internships. This is offers to internships for places, for people based in the north of England, specifically. So it's a fully paid six week internship focused on rights and agency. Includes a visit to the Frankfurt book fair. So that's open at the moment there's no line for that is the 22nd of May. So I think things like that, the opportunities are that are really worth applying for. And I think often people, you just need to take a punt and just try it. Just apply for something and see what happens. You know, we also offer internship internships through our first edition program, which is for people age 18 to 25 and those are publishing related internships, and that all those are like again later this year. So those sort of opportunities are really important, kind of potential entry level ways into the industry to get experience. You know, it's such a long time since I kind of personally entered the industry, and I don't think you know what I did then is really relevant anymore. I think there are more constructed routes to take.

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Megan Dawson 54:25

Yeah, I felt like there's a lot of important networks to be part of, and even if that's just following the right page on LinkedIn, a lot of these opportunities are kind of hidden. But when you're I think obviously SYP is a great one for having a newsletter where everything comes through, where you can actually see it rather than having to dig around. Is is good. You said earlier that the MA is quite contemporary and always focusing on what's been happening recently in the news. But what trends do you think that early career professionals should be. Paying attention to right now?

W


Will Mackie 55:01

It's a really good question. I mean, obviously the things that are huge at the moment are romance and romantic see those, those areas of books have a huge and fantasy as well is, is massively popular, and it's really exploded. I suppose what I would like to be a trend anyway, is whether it is or not, probably isn't. I like things that are specifically based around communities in place that have kind of real residence for specific, specific communities or specific areas of the country, and that couldn't be kind of transposed and set elsewhere. So there are a couple of books from rights that we've supported this year that I think do that. So it's a book by a writer, Louise Powell, who is a writer from the north east, from Middlesbrough. Her debut novel is out with John Murray press, in print of Hachette later this year, and that that book's really strongly character driven, written in North East dialect and centered around illegal dog racing in the Northeast of England. It couldn't be set, it couldn't be set elsewhere. And I think that, you know, like a wonderful book that I've read in as a proof and I think books like that, I think it's brilliant that's been published by, like, really big publisher has all that behind it as a novel or a work of auto fiction by Sean awn Wilson, working class writer we support from Cumbria, that's also published, actually, like, beginning of May, so really soon. And that's very much kind of also set, really, very much, you know, in Wigton, in Cumbria, captures incredibly strong voice, very, very strongly character driven, like beautifully written, stylistically creative and inventive. So those, I have a real sort of sense of engagement in books like that. I want, I want people to keep believing that they can write about their communities, their areas. You know, particularly in the north of England. I think it's, it's really important that those stories are expressed and that, you know, people look and know that there are, there are kind of just areas of the country, communities in the country that have been underwritten haven't, haven't had the chance to explore their stories. And I think those books by Louise and Sean awn, that's, that's one of the things they're really doing well, you know, Louise is writing about a whole culture and community that hasn't had that opportunity to be represented in our kind of writing culture very often


M

Megan Dawson 57:43

lovely. I think, unless you wanted to add anything else, that feels like a really wonderful note to end on.

 Will Mackie 57:50

No, I think that's lovely. I mean, thank you so much for your brilliant questions.

 Megan Dawson 57:57

Thank you for listening to inside publishing. I've been your host, Megan. If you enjoyed this episode, please rate and review us on Apple podcasts Spotify or wherever you listen to your podcast, feel free to let us know your thoughts on social media or send suggestions our way at [podcast.syp@gmail.com](mailto:podcast.syp@gmail.com). See you next time you.