

# **Review of the British Academy Writing Workshops programme**

## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

### **Background**

The British Academy has run the Writing Workshops programme annually since 2018 with support from BEIS through the Global Challenges Research Fund (GCRF). The programme has built upon the Academy's prior support of a small number of Writing Workshops in previous years; BEIS support has enabled an open call leading to multiple (20-30) awards per year. The training and research workshops bring together UK-based scholars, journal editors and early career researchers in the Global South in order to: support the development of early career academics with promise; promote uptake of Global South research in journals; and increase scholarly interaction between UK and Global South researchers. In advancing their careers, early career researchers in the Global South are encouraged, supported and mentored in: development of competitive scholarly publications in the humanities and social sciences; drafting grant applications; and building networks and connections with and beyond the UK.

This review's principal aim was to 'assess the extent to which the Writing Workshops programme is meeting its objectives to date' – while recognising that the time elapsed for impact development has been short, with the first round of the programme only starting in 2018. Even beyond the effects of a global pandemic, there are inevitable lag-times such as those in writing, review and publishing stages for journal articles. Therefore, 'stage-appropriate' indicators have been sought.

Combining robust assessment of developments to date with gathering of insights for the future, this review triangulated across multiple methods and multiple perspectives. Document analysis was conducted on the materials provided. Online surveys gathered input from 101 respondents (54 PIs/Co-Is from 2018-19 in the principal survey; 29 PIs/Co-Is from 2020 in a complementary survey; 18 participants in a complementary survey of a small sample of workshops). Semi-structured interviews gathered perspectives from twenty-one individuals, including: PIs and Co-Is (UK and non-UK); journal editors; and early career researchers in the Global South who had participated in the workshops. Nine vignettes were generated from applications, reports, website information and interviews to illustrate key aspects and impacts (or impacts-in-progress) of the programme. Integrated analysis ensured coverage of core questions in generating this report, leading toward the evaluators' conclusions and recommendations below.

### **Conclusions**

The Writing Workshops programme is extremely successful. Through its set of modest grants, the programme provides significant value for money. Even within the last few years, it has generated an impressive portfolio of outputs.

- The Writing Workshops have supported many Global South researchers in the development of publications (submissions and publications) and funding proposals.
- The programme has stimulated professional networks, between researchers in the Global South and in the UK and across countries in the Global South. Many of these connections and partnerships are long-lasting.
- The Writing Workshops have proved transformative for the careers of many of their participants, and have also contributed to the careers of both non-UK Co-Is and UK PIs/Co-Is.
- In addition, the Writing Workshops have sometimes contributed towards 'ripple effects' of university culture change (e.g., local replication of workshops or even a publication culture).
- UK award holders, editors and other colleagues contribute time, effort and costs far beyond that covered by the grant.

The Writing Workshops programme is unique.

- The positive aim of the programme is geared toward a widely felt need.
- It addresses a distinctive niche that does not duplicate other programmes or schemes. The inclusion of both Global North and Global South editors is an innovative feature and has contributed to initiatives involving journals, including special issues.
- The provision of time and space for writing, with a focus on academic writing, is rare.
- Capacity-building of relatively early career researchers is nurtured through interactive workshops in which a great deal of mutual learning occurs.
- In the long-term, the capacity-building towards which it contributes will assist Global South researchers tackling challenges such as SDGs in their own, context-appropriate ways.
- Although as yet concentrating primarily on Africa, the sheer geographical scope of the programme is remarkable.
- As a programme, it plays a facilitative role. It benefits from light touch administration and a demonstrated ability to evolve (e.g., including guidance on grant-writing as well as publications).

The Writing Workshops programme has many very enthusiastic proponents, deeply appreciative of the opportunities the programme has provided for themselves and others.

- Informants 'absolutely', 'definitely' want the programme to continue.
- Virtually all informants believe that the Writing Workshops are an effective vehicle for meeting the programme's aims.
- Virtually all informants believe that the Writing Workshops provide critical building blocks for career advancement.
- Triangulation across perspectives demonstrates outstandingly positive views of the innovative scheme and, even in the short term covered by this evaluation, multiple outputs and influences have arisen.

### Recommendations for Consideration

The reviewers' suggestions offered for consideration here are for *enhancements* of what is clearly a very successful programme.

1. Continue the scheme! It has met with extensive and deep appreciation, from multiple perspectives, and many examples exist of contributions it has made to careers in the Global South, including but extending beyond the African continent. This includes but is not limited to augmenting the ability of Global South researchers to share their findings for the benefit of local and international research communities.
2. Consider forms of longer-term engagement, allowing applicants to extend the time involved, perhaps with multiple workshops/sessions, increasing the overall timeframe and/or making follow-on processes an explicit (perhaps funded) strand of activity.
3. Continue to require collaborative proposals that show mutual respect in the management of North/South interactions. Consider innovative ways of recognising the time, effort and expertise provided by non-UK Co-Is.
4. Include among indications of success editorial and participant contributions to the development of strong Global South journals, perhaps involving co-publishing with Global North journals.
5. Be open to proposals that wish to broaden the focus of workshops beyond writing of articles and grant proposals, for example to include broader skills development (including soft-skills such as partnership-building or networking) or provide contextualised advice on career development.
6. Encourage experimentation with the online delivery of workshops, workshop sessions and/or follow-on guidance sessions, building upon adaptations developed during the pandemic.

7. Foster synergy across projects, for example by convening (virtually as necessary) PIs and Co-Is (UK and non-UK) to share lessons learned and good practices (perhaps by helping to train new award holders) and/or by convening participants as 'Writing Workshops Alumni' to explore common career/publication issues, encourage peer mentorship or form new networks (and potential collaborations) around shared research interests/themes.
8. Consider offering (or funding) a shared website as a repository of resources, in which sample workshop agendas, guidance documents and teaching materials could be shared, facilitating not only future Academy-funded Writing Workshops but also similar workshops that might be conducted within Global South countries.