

WEST MIDLANDS WRITERS' GUILD

Training Needs Survey

The West Midlands' Branch of The Writers' Guild ran an internet survey into training needs of writers in the region.

RESPONDENTS

- 164 people took the survey.
- 35% classified themselves as “professional writers”
25% classified themselves as “emerging writers”
40% classified themselves as “aspirational writers”
- 55% claimed professional credits
- Over 25% of respondents had professional credits in theatre
- Regional writers are working across genres – listing credits in theatre, radio, novel, TV, poetry and online.
- Many writers work in more than one medium.

TRAINING UNDERTAKEN

- Our survey showed the primary importance of SCRIPT as a training provider in the region. Over a third of respondents reported receiving training/support from SCRIPT in the last three years.
- A third of respondents were members of one of the many writers' groups across the region.
- Other training suppliers included the Birmingham Book Festival (at 15%, with particular appreciation of the Industry day last year). Arts Council West Midlands were mentioned tangentially by 6%.

TRAINING WISHES

- Writers at all stages of their careers (from aspirational to full-time professional writers) wanted support of different kinds.
- The survey was answered by people with a wide range of experience and at different levels in their professional development. Clearly, professional writers need a different

sort of support to “beginner writers”. The needs of professional/experienced writers were more complex and specific than less experienced writers.

- In general, respondents wanted focussed and time-limited training. They want one-off sessions (either weekend/daytime or evening) rather than on-going courses lasting for a term or a year. This may be because regional writers generally have good access to writers groups who can give this sort of on-going support.
- Content
 - Two-thirds of respondents wanted mentoring.
 - Half wanted the brokering of relationships with producers.
 - About a third wanted information on agents (and other professional advice).
- The demand for mentoring, relationship brokering and information seems to demonstrate a desire to be connected into the creative/writing infra-structure of the region (and nationally). Relationships with producers, other writers and industry professionals were valued and sought.
- There was a strong demand for information about activities and opportunities in the region. There seems to be no central database detailing writing activity and development opportunities. Some people were asking for training that clearly other respondents are managing to access. Many respondents felt that opportunities and activities were un-coordinated and some felt “out of the loop” in terms of finding out about them
- Some respondents felt that opportunities were all based around Birmingham.
- The above responses seem to demonstrate the some sort of co-ordinating or umbrella group, pointing individuals to the most relevant sources of support and flagging up opportunities as they arise.

CONCLUSION

- The West Midlands is rich in writers working across a wide range of genres.
- Until recently, SCRIPT has provided a good level of support and information, although largely geared to writers in the early stages of their careers.
- Whilst there is quite a bit of literary and dramatic activity in the region (Birmingham Book Festival, Screen WM, the Rep’s writing initiatives), this can be patchy and fragmented. Writers feel that other regions have better and more co-ordinated support.