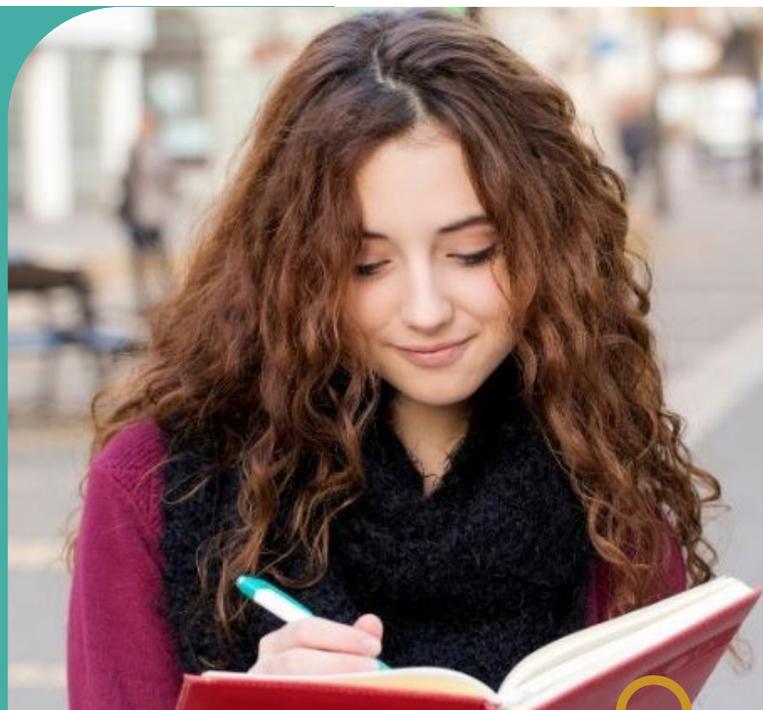


Sussex Writes

Creative writing as a powerful outreach tool

The Sussex Writes project focused on supporting the creative writing needs of secondary school pupils, particularly those who are underrepresented in FE and HE, through interactive, engaging workshops. The project aimed to enthuse pupils about creative writing, and increase their confidence, creativity and critical thinking in a way that supported their performance in the English Language GCSE and entry into higher and further education. It also aimed to offer Sussex University students the opportunity to gain teaching experience and give back to the community.



METHODOLOGY

A team of some 30 students at the University of Sussex (most from the School of English) worked with writing and mentoring charity Little Green Pig to develop and deliver twice-yearly creative writing workshops for Year 9 to 13 pupils in schools across East Sussex and Brighton.

The participating schools selected between 20 and 40 11 to 17 year-olds for each workshop – attendance was voluntary – focusing on young people underrepresented at HE and FE level, including: predominantly looked-after students (not disclosed), those eligible for Pupil Premium (20-40% of participants) and free school meals (10-30%), first-generation students (80%+), BAME (5-20%) and white working-class males (30-50%). The make-up of the groups varied due to the different locations and profiles of the participating schools, with attendees ranging from those struggling with dyslexia or learning English, to those just keen to know more about creative writing.

Beacon Academy near Crowborough was the first school to take part. Others involved in the 2017-18 academic year were Oriel, Patcham, Dorothy Stringer, Ringmer, Ratton, Gildredge, Eastbourne Academy, Blatchington Mill, Longhill, Claverham and Felpham Community Colleges, and Seaford Head.

Teams of three to five university students developed and delivered the workshops in each school, with guidance on running the sessions from senior teaching staff, but creative freedom to choose the content. The workshops focused on areas such as creative techniques, narrative structures, storytelling, critiquing other writers' works and essay writing – skills that pupils could

PROJECT SUMMARY

Context

English is a target subject required by all school leavers; most universities require GCSE grade C or above regardless of degree. However, students from the poorest postcodes in England are almost twice as likely to fail English GCSEs compared with their more advantaged peers (Teach First), and young white men often identified by their schools as the least engaged in creative writing.

Duration

February 2018 to September 2018

Partners

University of Sussex, Little Green Pig and Beacon Academy and a selection of Uni Connect priority schools

Funding source

Uni Connect (Innovation Fund)

use in life and in their studies. Learning packs were developed to support the workshops, which were held in the schools as well as on-campus to give pupils the chance to explore what university could offer them.

The workshops demanded huge commitment from the undergrad and postgrad leaders, who weren't paid for their preparation, only training, delivery and travel. Each uni student worked for 10 to 50 hours on the project, about half that time given for free. The funding allowed students from a range of backgrounds to participate and not just those who could afford to volunteer for free.

At the end of the workshops, those taking part completed evaluation forms – postcode-only forms for off-site events and the University of Sussex Widening Participation department's valuation forms for on-site events.

IMPACT

In 2017-2018, the project recruited 13 schools and made contact with more than 500 pupils at their schools. Schools heard about the programme and asked to join, meaning the project exceeded its initial target of 10 schools for that year.

Feedback from pupils attending the workshops was extremely positive. Of 107 students in five schools taking part in Sussex Writes workshops in 2018:

- 100% said they felt more motivated to achieve well
- 98% said the event would with their current studies
- 100% said they felt encouraged to consider university in the future, with 98% considering studying creative writing.

Student workshop leaders gained skills such as teaching preparation, curriculum design and classroom management as well as opportunities to network and share good practice. Some also reported an improvement in their mental health, including increased self-worth and self-belief, leading them to seek more career-orientated employment (such as tutoring and professional childcare) while studying.

Involvement in the project gave Little Green Pig a higher profile among local schools and a more secondary school focus that it could explore. Through the project's connections, Little Green Pig expanded its local involvement with literacy workshops associated with the East Sussex Music, Glyndebourne and Uni of Sussex singing project, the Big Sing.

For the university's School of English, the project strengthened its connections with a network of schools and writing groups, creating creative writing communities across the region. It also resulted in the School of English considering creating a schools placement module and a community-based creative arts residency as a volunteering module.

The project continued with funding from other sources throughout the 2018-19 academic year, working with new schools, consolidating the relationships already built, with a view to building the project into the curriculum and creating a digital presence www.sussexwrites.org to make it more sustainable.

100%

said they felt more motivated to achieve well

98%

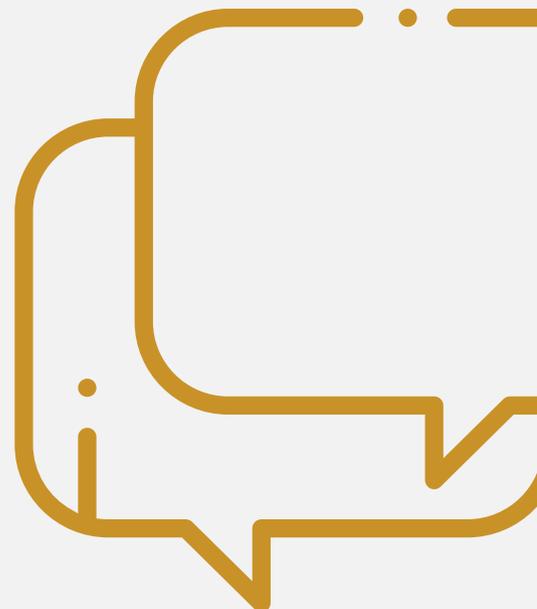
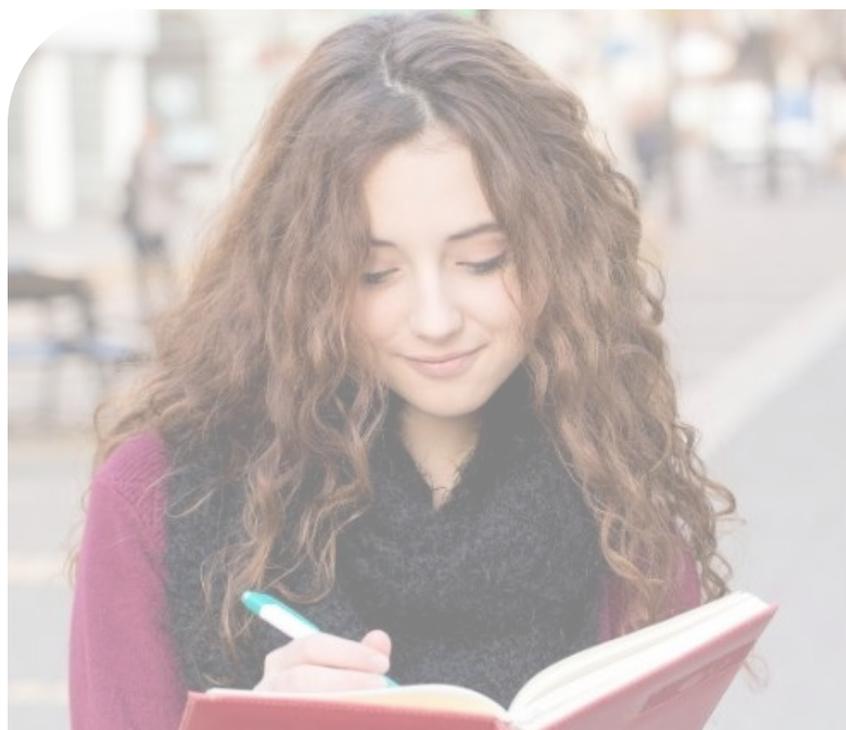
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KEY FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

- There is a need to create space in the curriculum for imagination and individualism to allow young people to boost their confidence by doing and taking calculated risks, and to think about English as more than just an exam to pass but as a space to express themselves.
- The students really enjoyed learning using non-school methods and focusing on tasks that were non-grade orientated; working in small groups with a workshop leader; and moving around the classroom. Feedback from GCSE participants, however, indicated that they would like more time to write, and a chance to perform and share their work.
- The workshops run by student leaders close in age to the pupils had a different dynamic from the more 'hierarchical' lessons in school, and helped the pupils to develop their creative writing in a different direction
- Unexpected mental health improvements (especially around confidence and self-belief) were experienced by student workshop leaders through tackling a challenge that gave back to the community and that wasn't part of their assessed degree.
- Working with a preselected group of pupils created a different atmosphere than working with whole class groups. Targeted pupils can often feel bombarded with interventions, and this can create a barrier to learning. Working with whole class groups is ultimately more inclusive and positive for young learners but can conflict with the criteria set out by funding bodies.



TALKING POINTS

How can we encourage schoolchildren to see English as more than just a subject to pass but as a skill and a means of expressing themselves? And how can the use of non-traditional teaching methods help unlock this for some pupils?

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