

MEDIA RELEASE

For immediate release

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Creative Industries Trafford celebrates 10th Northern Lights Writers' Conference at Waterside

Creative Industries Trafford (CIT) marks a major milestone this spring as its popular **Northern Lights Writers' Conference** returns for its 10th edition at Waterside.

Taking place on **Saturday 9 May**, the conference is designed to inspire writers, build connections and deepen understanding of the industry. Bringing together a diverse range of voices, Northern Lights offers a dynamic mix of panel discussions, workshops, in-conversation sessions and one-to-one advice – all centred on both the craft and business of writing.

Now firmly established as a key date in the region's literary calendar, the conference supports writers at every stage of their journey, from emerging creatives to those developing professional careers.

Exploring the future of writing

A highlight of this year's programme is **Writers & the Impact of AI**, a timely panel discussion examining how emerging technologies are reshaping the writing landscape. Featuring **Monica MacSwan** (Aitken Alexander Literary Agency) and screenwriter and former Writers' Guild GB Chair **Lisa Holdsworth**, the session will explore how AI is influencing careers, creativity and the wider industry, alongside questions around authorship and bias.

The programme also includes **Critiquing for Writers**, where scriptwriter **Natalie Beech** and novelist and editor **Melissa Welliver** will share insights into giving and receiving feedback, working with editors and using critique to strengthen creative work.

Practical advice and creative development

Alongside panel discussions, attendees can take part in a range of practical sessions tailored to developing skills and confidence. These include:

- **To Self-Publish or Not to Self-Publish**, an informal discussion led by Kristina Turner, offering a candid introduction to independent publishing
- **Poetry for Performance: Engaging Your Audience**, a hands-on workshop with Louise Fazackerley exploring performance techniques, voice and presence
- **Writing Competitions, Schemes and Awards**, a focused session led by Natalie Beech to help writers identify opportunities and strengthen applications;

- **From Page to Screen**, led by Kevin Duffy (Bluemoose Books) this is a discussion around how books are optioned for film & TV and what this means for a writer;
- **Building Your Digital Audience**, a practical talk led by Danni Davis on growing readership through social media, audio content and podcasting.

The conference also offers valuable opportunities for personalised support, including drop-in advice sessions with experienced writers and industry professionals, including Lizzie Flanagan, Jazmine Linklater, Okechukwu Nzelu and Melissa Welliver.

For those seeking direct industry feedback, a limited number of **Agent 1-2-1 sessions** with literary agent **Monica MacSwan** are available via application. Selected participants will receive dedicated time to discuss their work and career development.

A day of connection and creativity

Running from 10:00 to 16.00, the event is structured to encourage both learning and networking, with space for informal conversations, idea-sharing and collaboration throughout the day.

From navigating the realities of the publishing world to honing creative practice, Northern Lights Writers' Conference continues to champion writing talent across the North and beyond.

For more information and booking, visit: watersidearts.org/nlwc26

- ENDS -

For interviews/further information please contact: Claire Saville/Emily Lyons

marketing@watersidearts.org | 0161 912 5616

NOTES TO EDITORS:

Link to images: [NLWC 2026](#)

LISTINGS

Northern Lights Writers' Conference

Sat 09 May, 10:00 - 16:00

£40 / £25 (students/concessions)

A full day event on the craft and business of writing, featuring inspiring talks, industry panels and one-to-one advice sessions for writers of all kinds.

SCHEDULE

	In the Robert Bolt Theatre	In 'Sup Bar & Coffee House	In the Chambers/ Studio
10:00	Introductions		
10:15	AI & Writing with: Monica MacSwan Lisa Holdsworth		
11:15	Editing for Writers with: Natalie Beech Melissa Welliver		
12:15	<i>Lunch</i>		
12:15			Self Publishing with Kristina Turner in the Studio
13:00	From Page To Screen with Kevin Duffy	Drop In Advice with: Liz Flanagan Jazmine Linklater Okechkwu Nzelu Melissa Welliver	Poetry for Performance with Louise Fazackerley in The Chambers Agent Surgeries with Monica MacSwan in the Studio
14:00	<i>Break</i>		
14:15	Building Your Digital Audience with Danni Davis	Drop In Advice with: Liz Flanagan Jazmine Linklater Okechkwu Nzelu Melissa Welliver	Writing Competitions, Schemes and Awards with Natalie Beech Agent Surgeries with Monica McSwan in the Studio
15:15	<i>Break</i>		
15:30	Reflections on the Day		
16:00	<i>Close</i>		

About The Speakers

Natalie Beech

Natalie Beech is a freelance writer based in Manchester.

In 2022 she won the Channel 4 Writing for Television Award with New Writing North, in 2023 she was selected for the LOOP Audio Fund and the BFI Script Lab, and in 2024 she won the Women X Film Festival Script Competition, as well as being selected for BBC Voices and the Warner Brothers Access programme.

Her play *Bears Bears Bears* recently won the DCC Playwriting Award 2025 and will be premiering at Contact Theatre in May 2026. She is also the writer of the BFI-funded short film *Cass & Roya*, set for release later this year.

www.nataliebeech.com | Instagram @nataliebeech

Danni Davis

Danni is a social media and digital strategist with over 20 years' experience working in television, where she was an experienced programme maker and idea developer in all genres of unscripted & more recently scripted comedy.

In her freelance career she has experience in casting, access negotiating, generating ideas, writing treatments and pitching. She specialised in character-led and access documentaries, as well as working in pop factual and fact entertainment.

Instagram @snackydandigital

Kevin Duffy

Kevin Duffy has worked in publishing for over 35 years setting up his own publishing company in 2006 in Hebden Bridge with his wife, Hetha.

Bluemoose is a multi award winning independent publisher based in Hebden Bridge, West Yorkshire and their authors include Benjamin Myers, Colette Snowden, Heidi James, Rónán Hession and Devika Ponnambalam whose novels have been short listed and won major literary prizes. Bluemoose's books have been translated into 14 languages and we have had national and international bestsellers.

<https://bluemoosebooks.com/> | Instagram @bluemoosebooksofficial

Louise Fazackerley

With work rooted in word-witchery and the working class, Louise explores the synergy between poetry and movement in a way that makes the ugly beautiful and the mundane fantastical. Winner of BBC Radio 3 'New Voices ' and European Slam Finalist, as seen and heard in The Guardian/ BBC Breakfast/ Radio 4 Women's Hours/ Radio 3. Published poetry collections include *The Lolitas* and *The Uniform Factory* (Verve Poetry Press) *Bird St.* (The Secret Writers Club) and 'The Pleasure Dome ' (Burning Eye)

www.louisethepoet.co.uk | Instagram @louisethepoet

Liz Flanagan

Liz is an award-winning author from Hebden Bridge. *When We Were Divided* is her first historical novel for adults. Although her previous books are for children, all her novels combine vivid landscapes and emotional depth with fast-paced, gripping stories. She teaches Creative Writing in many different settings, and previously worked as a book editor and as Centre Director for Arvon at Ted Hughes's former home, Lumb Bank.

lizflanagan.co.uk | Instagram @lizziebooks17

Lisa Holdsworth

Lisa's TV writing career started with a 50-minute stand-alone episode for *Fat Friends*. She was then part of the *Emmerdale* writing team for several years before going on to write numerous episodes of dramas including *New Tricks*, *Robin Hood*, *Midsomer Murders* and *Waterloo Road*, as well as radio and stage work. She won the Writer of the Year award in the RTS Yorkshire Awards 2011 for her 90-minute opener for Series 4 of *Waterloo Road*. More recently she's written episodes of *Call the Midwife*, *All Creatures Great and Small* and *A Discovery of Witches* (on which she was co-showrunner on Series 3). She created, executive produced, and wrote several episodes for Channel 4's series *Dreamers*, broadcast in 2025.

Her stage adaptation of Adelle Stripe's novel *Black Teeth and a Brilliant Smile* about the life of northern playwright Andrea Dunbar opened in 2019 and was included in the Observer critics' review of the top 10 theatre shows of 2019. She is also developing several original TV pilot scripts and treatments, and spent four years as Chair of the WGGB.

<https://www.haworthagency.co.uk/lisa-holdsworth>

Jazmine Linklater

Jazmine is a poet, writer and editor based in Manchester. Her pamphlet, *Figure A Motion*, was published in September 2020 by Guillemot Press and she has previously published two pamphlets of

poetry: *Toward Passion According* (Zarf Editions, 2017) and *Découper, Coller* (Dock Road Press, 2018).

Her work can be read in journals including *Paratext*, *Zarf*, *The Litterateur*, *Stride*, and a glimpse of, among others. Recent work has been included in the anthologies *Prototype II* (Prototype, 2020) and *Writing Utopia* (Hesterglock Press, 2020). She is an editor for *Corridor 8* and her most recent work, *Snagged On A Red Thread* was published by Monitor Books in 2025.

She is one third of *No Matter*, an artist-led experiment with Nell Osborne and Hilary White, dedicated to poetry and performance.

<https://jazminelinklater.wordpress.com/> | Instagram @jjlinklater

Monica MacSwan

Monica is an Associate Agent at Aitken Alexander, where she has worked since 2020. She is actively building her list and looking for new projects to work on collaboratively with authors.

Her list of authors includes the poet & spoken word artist Belinda Zhawi and journalists Moya Lothian-McLean, Anna Cafolla and Peter Apps, whose book *Show Me The Bodies* won the 2023 Orwell Prize for Political Writing and second book *Homesick* was published in September 2025. In fiction, she represents the novelist Nicola Dinan, whose debut *Bellies* won the Polari First Book Award and second novel *Disappoint Me* won the inaugural the New Adult Fiction Prize; Onyi Nwabine, whose debut *Someday, Maybe* was a Good Morning America Book Club pick and second novel *Allow Me To Introduce Myself* won the Diverse Book Awards; and prize-nominated author of *Dominoes* Phoebe McIntosh.

In fiction, she is drawn to literary and upmarket novels which provide its readers with a sense of escapism through imagination and adventure.

In non-fiction, she likes to read books by writers who want to shift public discourse by putting forward a new framework for their subject of expertise. She is on the lookout for books about health, medicine, history, politics and biographies or memoirs of fascinating lives.

<https://aitkenalexander.co.uk/literary-agents/monicamacswan> | Instagram @monicamacswan

Okechukwu Nzelu

Okechukwu is a novelist, freelance writer and teacher based in Manchester.

In 2015 he won a Northern Writers' Award from New Writing North. His debut novel, *The Private Joys of Nnenna Maloney* (Dialogue Books, 2019), won a Betty Trask Award; it was also shortlisted for the Desmond Elliott Prize and the Polari First Book Prize, and longlisted for the Portico Prize.

His second novel, *Here Again Now* (Dialogue Books, 2022) was shortlisted for the Royal Society of Literature Encore Award, the Polari Prize, the Jhalak Prize and the Diverse Book Awards.

In 2024 he was elected a Fellow of the Royal Society of Literature. In 2025 he was awarded an honorary doctorate from Kingston University, in recognition of his outstanding contribution to literature and reading pleasure. He has made several appearances on national radio, and is a regular contributor to Kinfolk magazine. He is a non-executive director of ALCS and CLA, and Lecturer in Creative Writing at Lancaster University.

<https://www.nzelu.org/> | Instagram @nzeluwrites

Kristina Turner

Kristina's professional background is in training with a specialist interest in experiential learning and self-development. She is currently working on her latest novel, a totally different genre, which she describes as political fiction. As well as writing, Kristina is a pianist and has performed in the Manchester International Festival and the Manchester Jazz festival.

Melissa Welliver

Melissa writes Young Adult Speculative novels. She works at Writementor and runs the Community Writing Hub for Children's writers. She has two dystopian rom-coms, My Love Life and the Apocalypse and Soulmates and Other Ways to Die, published with Chicken House Books.

The first in her dark dystopian trilogy, The Undying Tower, was published by UCLan Publishing in August 2024.

She has been longlisted for the Bath Novel Award, the #BNAKids award, and Mslexia's Children's Novel Prize, and she was shortlisted for both the inaugural Hachette Children's Novel Award in association with New Writing North, and the Wells Book for Children competition. Alongside her writing work, Melissa provides editorial services for writers.

<https://melissawelliver.com/> | Instagram @melliver

CREATIVE INDUSTRIES TRAFFORD

Artist development at Waterside is delivered through Creative Industries Trafford (CIT).

CIT is committed to providing innovative support, training, mentoring and opportunities for artists and creatives in Greater Manchester and beyond. Featuring a year-round professional development programme, CIT covers a number of fields including literature, visual arts, contemporary design, theatre-making and animation.

The objectives are to increase artistic quality and to help artists build sustainable creative careers. Activities include the Cosgrove Hall Film Archive, celebrating the legacy of the renowned animation studio, and curating the gallery spaces at Waterside which focus on photography, contemporary design, animation and the moving image.

CIT runs the Northern Lights Writers Conference, the Puppet Masters Animation Conference; plus, a very successful theatre development programme that has supported a number of theatre-makers and helped to create touring work. Also acting as creative producers, CIT created theatre and audio commissions for the National Trust on the Live at Lyme Project.

Together with Castlefield Gallery, CIT delivers portfolio surgeries giving critical feedback to visual artists along with support for emerging curators. CIT is supported by Trafford Council and Arts Council England.

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WATERSIDE

Waterside is an award-winning cultural destination in the heart of Sale, Trafford. A vibrant home for performance, creativity and community, welcoming over 100,000 visitors annually.

Renowned for high-quality, engaging and accessible work, Waterside's artistic policy, '*Everything We Do Is Connected*' fuels a programme that blends popular works with bold creative risk, champions young people's talent and voices and places care, listening and growth at the centre of every artistic experience.

Each year, Waterside curates a festivals programme; Pride in Trafford, Refract and Prism, drawing around 20,000 people annually and strengthening the local creative ecology and economy.

The venue, its galleries and Sup Bar & Coffee House are open six days a week, offering a lively, welcoming space for audiences, artists and communities to connect.

Waterside is owned and operated by Trafford Council and supported through grant funding from Arts Council England, Greater Manchester Combined Authority and the UK Government.