

Press release: UK starts selection process for next Poet Laureate

- Advisory panel appointed to advise on recommendation to Her Majesty The Queen
- Next poet laureate will take over from Dame Carol Ann Duffy in May 2019
- Government also announces National Poetry Competition, to increase access to poetry for young people

The process of selecting the UK's next Poet Laureate has begun with the appointment of a new advisory panel, Jeremy Wright, Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, announced today.

The panel, made up of experts from across the regions and nations of the UK, includes the founder of the Bradford Literature Festival and the organiser of a showcase event with the Jamaican Poet Laureate.

It will offer its suggestions on the scope and purpose of the next Poet Laureate, with a recommendation put to Her Majesty The Queen.

The next Poet Laureate will take over from Dame Carol Ann Duffy, who was appointed in 2009, and was the first woman and first Scot to take up the post.

Representatives from the British Council, Arts Council England and Arts Council Northern Ireland, Royal Society of Literature, Scottish Poetry Library, Literature Wales, The Poetry Society, Forward Arts Foundation, British Library and Poetry Book Society are also included in the panel.

The news comes as the Government announces the relaunch of the National Poetry Competition in schools from September next year. The competition will give young people a chance to discover more about the UK's rich literary heritage and experience the joy that comes from learning a poem.

Jeremy Wright, Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, said:

Poetry has the power to connect us to people, places and ideas. It also cuts across social and cultural divides. The important role of Poet Laureate helps to record key moments in British history and celebrates our rich literary tradition.

I pay tribute to Dame Carol Ann Duffy for her dedicated service in championing poetry to the nation. I look forward to working with a new advisory panel, that reflects the whole of the UK and the new ways we consume poetry, in electing her successor.

Nick Gibb, Minister for School Standards, said:

We hope that relaunching the National Poetry Competition will inspire children to read and write poetry and learn from the way the best poets use language.

Our focus on phonics in primary schools is helping more young children open up the joys of the written and spoken word, with 163,000 more six-year-olds on track to be fluent readers than in 2012. This means the world of poetry has never been more accessible to young people.

Since the role of Poet Laureate was established in 1668, incumbents have included William Wordsworth, Ted Hughes and Sir John Betjeman.

When she completes her ten-year term in April 2019, Dame Duffy – well-known for her range of monologues, love poems, children’s rhymes and plays – will have written poems to mark the deaths of Henry Allingham and Harry Patch (the last two British soldiers to fight in the First World War), the wedding of the Duke and Duchess of Cambridge, The Queen’s Diamond Jubilee, and even David Beckham’s injured Achilles in the run-up to the 2010 World Cup.

She has also just published ‘The Wound In Time’, a poem which seeks to remember those who died during the First World War, ahead of commemorations that will mark the centenary of Armistice Day next weekend.

Dame Duffy has spent much of her tenure boosting the national conversation about poetry, carrying out a range of visits to schools and festivals, and launching the Ted Hughes Award for New Work in Poetry, which seeks to recognise excellence in poetry, highlighting outstanding contributions made by poets to our cultural life.

Following the closure of nominations in December 2018, the advisory panel will agree a shortlist of candidates for consideration by the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, before a final recommendation is put forward by the Prime Minister to Her Majesty The Queen in the Spring. A formal announcement is expected to be made in May 2019. The role will be for a ten year period.

ENDS

Notes to Editor:

The news follows National Poetry Day research recently published by [the National Literacy Trust](#), which highlighted how poetry continues to transcend social backgrounds and the changing way children engage with it, finding that:

- Children who receive free school meals are more likely to say that they read, listen to or watch poetry in their spare time (34%) than those who don’t (23%)
- Almost half (46%) of all children and young people said they consume or create poetry in their spare time

Of this group:

- 47% read, listen to or watch poetry in their spare time at least once a week
- 32% of “young poetry consumers” now read poetry online or on a phone, and 31% now watch it as a video
- 68% said they read poetry because it makes them feel creative
- 66% said they write poetry because it is a great way to express themselves and their feelings
- 52% write or perform poetry in their spare time because it is different to other forms of writing they do in school

Those surveyed made a range of suggestions on how to make poetry more appealing, such as “including more narrative, making it more like a story”, “make it more relevant and modern”, and “find more poems about sports or video games”.

Membership of the Poet Laureate Steering Group:

- Alex Higgs, Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (Chair)
- Sarah Crown, Director of Literature, Arts Council England
- Cortina Butler, Director of Literature, British Council
- Molly Rosenberg, Director, Royal Society of Literature
- Judith Palmer, Director, The Poetry Society
- Sophie O’Neill, Managing Director, Poetry Book Society
- Nicola Solomon, CEO, Society of Authors
- Susannah Herbert, Executive Director, Forward Arts Foundation
- Chloe Garner, Artistic Director, Ledbury Poetry Festival
- Jamie Andrews, Head of Culture and Learning, British Library
- Lleucu Siencyn, Chief Executive, Literature Wales
- Syima Aslam, Director, Bradford Literature Festival
- Chris Gribble, Chief Executive, National Centre for Writing
- Asif Khan, Director, Scottish Poetry Library
- Damian Smyth, Head of Drama and Literature, Arts Council Northern Ireland

The Laureateship was a lifetime appointment until 1999. Following the death of Ted Hughes, it was decided that the appointment should be for a fixed term of ten years, to give more poets the opportunity to serve.

The appointment is made by Her Majesty The Queen, acting on the advice of Her Majesty’s Government.

The position is honorary and it is up to the individual poet to decide whether or not to produce poetry for national occasions or Royal events.

The Ted Hughes Award for New Work in Poetry was devised by Carol Ann Duffy, and is supported by The Poetry Society to recognise outstanding contributions made by poets to our cultural life. The £5,000 annual prize money is awarded by Carol Ann Duffy, funded with the honorarium the Poet Laureate traditionally receives from Her Majesty The Queen.