

Claire Malcolm

Doctor of Letters

Durham Cathedral, 5 January 2023

Claire Malcolm is the founding CEO of New Writing North, the development agency for reading and creative writing in the North of England. New Writing North has helped to bring the work of hundreds of novelists, poets, short story writers, playwrights and screenwriters to local, national and international readerships. NWN and Claire, have long championed creativity and culture, and that of the North of England, and of its young people in particular.

An Arts Council National Portfolio Organisation, New Writing North was founded in 1996 to create opportunities for writers to work in the region and to grow audiences for their work. It has become a model since for similar agencies across the country. NWN's current activities include: the Annual Northern Writers Awards, which support new writers, with grants, mentoring, and opportunities for publication; The Gordon Burn prize, awarded for innovative work in fiction or non-fiction; The David Cohen Prize, awarded for a lifetime's creative work; Read Regional, a partnership which puts library audiences in contact with writers.

Since 2011, New Writing North has been contracted by Durham County Council, in partnership with ACE and Durham University, to programme the Durham Book Festival. Durham Book Festival is recognised as an industry leader for innovation and diversity; it is also unique for the emphasis it places on commissioning new writing. Recent guests have included Philip Pullman, Jung Chang, Nikesh Shukla, Caroline Criado Perez, David Olusago, Colm Toibin, Jeremy Vine - and Durham University Chancellors Bill Bryson and Fiona Hill. The Festival has partnered each year with the Faculty of Arts and Humanities to sponsor a 'Festival Laureate': incumbents have included Raymond Antrobus, Helen Mort, Fiona Benson, Lorna Goodison, Paul Muldoon, and past and current Poets Laureate Andrew Motion and Simon Armitage. The Festival Big Read sees 3000 copies of a book distributed across Durham in the run-up to a Festival to get the whole county reading the same book in advance of an event with its author.

The first in her family to attend University, Claire has long championed equality of access to, and diversity within, the Arts. In 2018, New Writing North commissioned the landmark report *Common People: Breaking the Class Ceiling in UK Publishing*. Claire has advocated in the national and the trade press as well as in Parliament and to local government for better access to opportunities in the cultural industry for people from working-class, BAME and Northern communities; she is also a passionate advocate for the role that literature and reading can play in addressing the climate crisis. Claire is a trustee of Booktrust, Bookworks, the Tyne and Wear Community Foundation and the Northeast Cultural Partnership. She was awarded the MBE in 2021.

Claire Malcolm has played a key role in hundreds of good books being written, published, and put into the hands of their readers; she is a significant national figure in the creative industries, a champion for the North, and a much valued cultural partner with Durham University.

Vice-Chancellor, I present Claire Malcolm for the award of Doctor of Letters *honoris causa*.