

# Creative Writing in Schools

Paper Nations Analysis

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## 2 Executive Summary: Paper Nations' CWiS programmes and activities

Paper Nations was part of the Arts Council England-funded Creative Writing in Schools (CWiS) programme between 2015 and 2018, supporting work with pupils, teachers and writers primarily in the South West. Over 1,500 pupils took part in creative writing activities through Paper Nations, and over a quarter were eligible for pupil premium funding.

This report is based on data collected for the CWiS evaluation, published in February 2019.<sup>1</sup> It highlights key findings specifically in relation to Paper Nations. We find:

**Throughout Paper Nations' involvement, young people's perceptions of creative writing remained overwhelmingly positive or were boosted.** Pupils emphasised the value of writing creatively because of how it made them feel, as opposed to emphasising its instrumental benefits (such as impact on spelling, punctuation and grammar). The wordle (right) visualises the words pupils gave in their endpoint survey responses to describe a good writer (n=372):

**Involvement in Paper Nations encouraged young people to participate more regularly in creative writing.** Young people reported writing more frequently by the end of their involvement with Paper Nations, particularly those who were least engaged to begin with. Young people said they will do this at school and at home, suggesting Paper Nations may have helped them see creative writing as something they can do in their free time.



**Young people found working with Paper Nations writers especially valuable,** with writers encouraging pupils' self-expression, developing pupils' confidence as writers, and responding to pupils' needs and interests.

**Paper Nations provided teachers and writers with important networks,** helping mitigate cost and time barriers impeding creative writing. Networks (such as those supported through Paper Nations) help writers secure professional writing opportunities with schools and other partners, and in doing so make writing more financially sustainable.

**Writing is about connecting with others.** One of the reasons most commonly cited by writers for engaging in creative writing is the connection it creates with others. Writers felt that involvement in Paper Nations helped them forge new connections with peers and young people:

**Paper Nations boosted teachers' and writers' confidence and practice in teaching creative writing,** encouraging classroom teachers to adopt a wider range of strategies as part of their regular lessons. Writers involved in Paper Nations highlighted the benefits of having space and structure to generate ideas, reflect on one another's writing, and engage in the process (rather than focusing purely on outputs).

<sup>1</sup> <https://cfey.org/reports/2019/02/developing-creative-writing-in-schools/>

## 3 Introduction

### 3.1 The 2015-2018 Creative Writing in Schools evaluation

Creative Writing in Schools (CWIS) was a programme of work undertaken by Paper Nations and First Story, supported by Arts Council England. First Story and Paper Nations developed their own separate activities as part of CWIS, with a shared aim of increasing access to and engagement with creative writing in primary and secondary schools, and among young people, teachers and writers outside schools. Paper Nations' work predominantly took place in the South West.

The CWIS evaluation took a mixed methods approach that combined breadth through longitudinal survey data, and depth through detailed qualitative 'intensive studies'. The evaluation sought to help Paper Nations and First Story hone their delivery and impact, and identify wider lessons to enhance access to quality creative writing. The final CWIS report was published in February 2019.<sup>2</sup>

### 3.2 This report

This report takes the findings from the CWIS evaluation, and picks out key trends relating to Paper Nations' delivery and impact. It follows the same structure as the February 2019 CWIS report.

### 3.3 Paper Nations<sup>3</sup>

Paper Nations is a creative writing incubator based in Bath Spa University's Research Centre for Transcultural Creativity and Education (TRACE). Led by Professor Bambo Soyinka, Paper Nations carries out research to ensure that the benefits and possibilities of creative writing are available to as many people as possible.

Paper Nations operates in partnership with a range of organisations, such as NAWE (National Association of Writers in Education) and Arts Council England. They collaborate with community networks as well as established and emerging authors in order to nurture writers of all backgrounds.

In addition, Paper Nations researches and maps writing communities and writing life-cycles in order to strengthen the overall writing ecology. Paper Nations seeks to contribute to a resilient, inclusive and innovative writing culture through on-the-ground research in action in collaboration with schools, communities and online. Their research explores how writing can be instrumental in fostering personal wellbeing and initiating cultural transformations.

Every three years, Paper Nations identifies a new priority area of focus. Between 2016 and 2018, it focused its work on children and young people. Building on its success and the partnerships it has forged, Paper Nations has now turned its attention to the theme of 'diversity and innovation' and has launched a 'Writing for All' programme for people of all ages and backgrounds.

The Paper Nations 2016-18 Creative Writing in Schools Programme involved a partnership with three key organisations:

- The Bath Spa University Research Centre for Transcultural Creativity and Education

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<sup>2</sup> <https://cfey.org/reports/2019/02/developing-creative-writing-in-schools/>

<sup>3</sup> This description in section 1.3 was written by Paper Nations.

- Bath Festival
- National Association of Writers in Education (NAWE)

More information about Paper Nations, what it delivered during CWiS, and its partners throughout CWiS, is available in the appendices.

## 4 Methodology and data collection

### 4.1 Key themes and outcomes

The CWiS project began with a literature review, exploring factors that support and inhibit creative writing in schools.<sup>4</sup> Based on this literature review, and discussions with Paper Nations, First Story, and Arts Council England, the following set of themes and outcomes were chosen to underpin the CWiS evaluation:

Overall outcome/theme	Specific outcome
<i>Sustainability</i>	Schools and teachers want to continue writing post-project.
	Schools' and teachers' motivations for involvement change.
	Teachers, schools and writers have the capacity and ability to continue.
	It is economically viable to continue delivery.
	Knowledge is mobilised.
<i>Engagement (of pupils, teachers, writers)</i>	Participation in creative writing increases.
	Teachers and pupils enjoy creative writing more.
	A range of participants engage in creative writing.
<i>Best practice in creative writing</i>	Teachers write authentically by, for example, writing in front of pupils rather than using pre-prepared texts.
	Use of good creative writing pedagogy among teachers and writers increases.
<i>New and extended networks</i>	Existing networks are expanded and new networks are created.
	Barriers to partnerships between schools and external partners are reduced.
<i>Valuing creative writing</i>	Values and approaches are shared by all involved.
	People value creative writing more.

These programme-wide outcomes were explored predominantly through a series of longitudinal surveys, described in section 2.2, below.

However, in addition to exploring these 'cross-cutting' outcomes, we conducted a series of 'intensive studies' (described in section 2.3, below) to evaluate specific areas of Paper Nations and First Story's work. Using qualitative research tools, these intensive studies enabled us to explore the outcomes listed above whilst also focusing on specific areas of Paper Nations' work.

<sup>4</sup> Eleanor Bernardes and Loic Menzies (2016) *Creative Writing in Schools: Literature Review*, available from: <https://cfey.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/CWIS-Literature-Review-FINAL.pdf>

## 4.2 Surveys

We used a range of different surveys to gather data on the programme-wide outcomes listed in section 2.1. Some pupils, teachers, and writers completed baseline and endpoint surveys although, where appropriate, participants completed standalone perceived impact surveys about their experience of a programme that year, or of a one-off session.

### 4.2.1 Overview of survey data gathered

33 schools involved in Paper Nations submitted survey data.<sup>5</sup> A full breakdown of these responses is given in the appendices. Throughout this report, we predominantly refer to 'matched' survey data baseline and endpoint surveys completed by the same person, within the same year. However, where we refer to other sources of survey data we make this clear.

From Paper Nations' survey responses, we collated the following matched samples:

Which group of people?	How many matched sets of survey responses?	From how many schools? <sup>6</sup>	From which years?
Young people	190	7	158 sets are from 2016/17. 32 sets are from 2017/18.
Teachers	9	6	7 sets are from 2016/17. 2 sets are from 2017/18.
Writers	5	Not known	All 5 sets are from 2016/17.

### 4.2.2 Overview of survey analysis

We analysed the survey data in Excel, in the following stages:

1. Data cleansing, removing duplicate, blank, or test responses;
2. Matching responses in baseline and endpoint surveys, using respondents' names, schools and/or dates of birth as necessary, and;
3. Examining trends in the data both within that academic year, and over the course of the evaluation.

Generally, we report findings from the baseline and endpoint, and perceived impact surveys, separately. This is because the surveys contained differently worded questions and answers. Where possible, though, we combine the findings from different sources.

<sup>5</sup> The actual number of schools involved in a Paper Nations CWiS programme or project will be higher, as some schools involved did not submit survey data.

<sup>6</sup> This is the number of schools given by respondents. The true number is higher, as some respondents did not list the schools in which they work.



## 4.3 Intensive studies

Over the course of the CWiS evaluation, CfEY conducted two 'intensive studies' for Paper Nations, focusing on important issues facing that organisation. Here, we provide a brief overview of the intensive studies undertaken throughout the CWiS evaluation for Paper Nations.

### 4.3.1 Intensive Projects in 2017

#### Exploring writer identities and motivations

Paper Nations wanted to deepen its understanding of how different writers and young people within its network view themselves as writers, and the importance of creative writing. CfEY interviewed nine writers about their motivations, and factors that shape their identities. CfEY also ran pupil focus groups in three primary schools, exploring young people's views on writers and writing. During their focus groups, pupils drew writers, and used these drawings to stimulate subsequent discussion.

CfEY randomly selected schools (and therefore writers) from a list provided by Paper Nations.

### 4.3.2 Intensive studies in 2018

#### Success factors for achieving financial sustainability in creative writing

This intensive study explored how writers and organisations coordinating creative activities with young people feel about financial sustainability, and what factors help and hinder the financial sustainability of creative writing activities. As part of this, we explored the trade-offs involved in achieving financial sustainability.

CfEY conducted interviews with ten writers and writing organisations in September and October 2018. Paper Nations identified the interviewees.

### 4.3.3 Analysis of interview and focus group data

CfEY researchers carried out the interviews and focus groups conducted as part of the intensive studies, using a semi-structured approach based on questions and tasks agreed with Paper Nations. All interviewees and focus group participants gave informed consent before taking part.

Each interview and focus group relating to a particular intensive study was transcribed and analysed as a set. Transcripts were tagged with specific themes that were tailored to each intensive study in order to reflect the research questions for that project. 'Cross-cutting' tags, relating to programme-wide outcomes, were applied where there was evidence in an interview that there had been a change in one of these fourteen outcome areas. The cross-cutting outcomes were not the primary focus of the Intensive Projects, and the different projects did not explore these outcomes evenly.

Each tagged transcript was then analysed a second time, with sub-themes identified in order to provide a detailed, but highly structured, commentary on each of the outcomes in the framework.

In total, over 114,000 words of transcribed interview data were reviewed from Paper Nations' intensive studies.

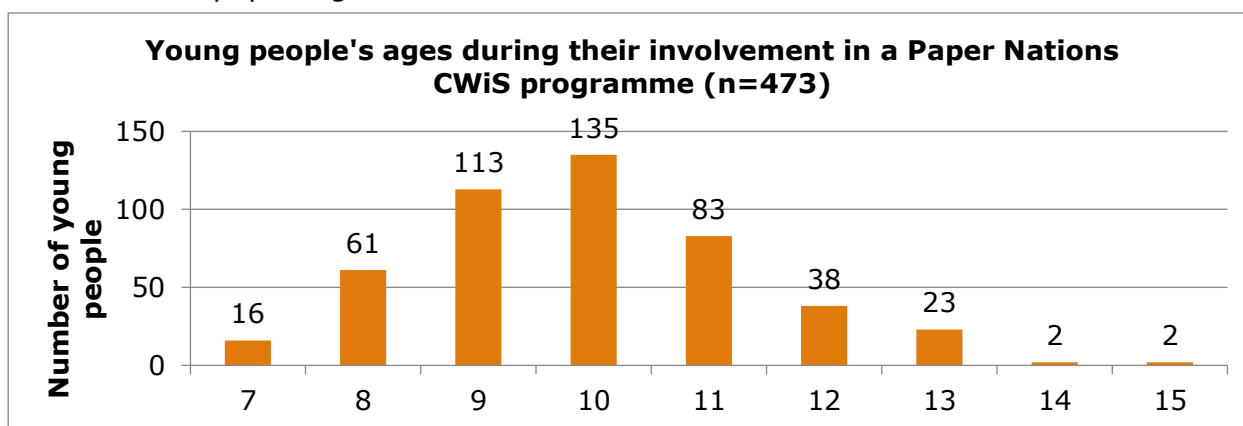
In this evaluation report, we draw together insights from across the programme-wide surveys and intensive studies to explore the impact of Paper Nations through CWiS.

## 5 Pupils and their characteristics

***Paper Nations predominantly worked with primary-age pupils through its CWiS programmes and activities. There was a fairly even split in terms of gender, and a little over a quarter of the pupils who participated in Paper Nations were eligible for pupil premium funding.***

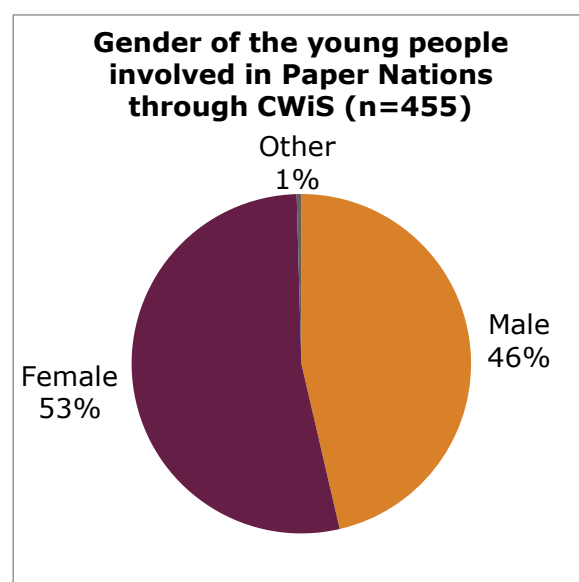
### 5.1 The characteristics of pupils involved in Paper Nations' CWiS programmes and projects

Paper Nations works predominantly with primary-age pupils and this is reflected in the distribution of pupils' ages:<sup>7</sup>



In total, teachers' survey responses indicate that over 1,500 children and young people participated in a CWiS activity through Paper Nations, across the 2016/17 and 2017/18 academic years. These figures are approximations and undercount the actual total number, as not all schools completed surveys.

A little over half of pupil participants (who responded) were female.



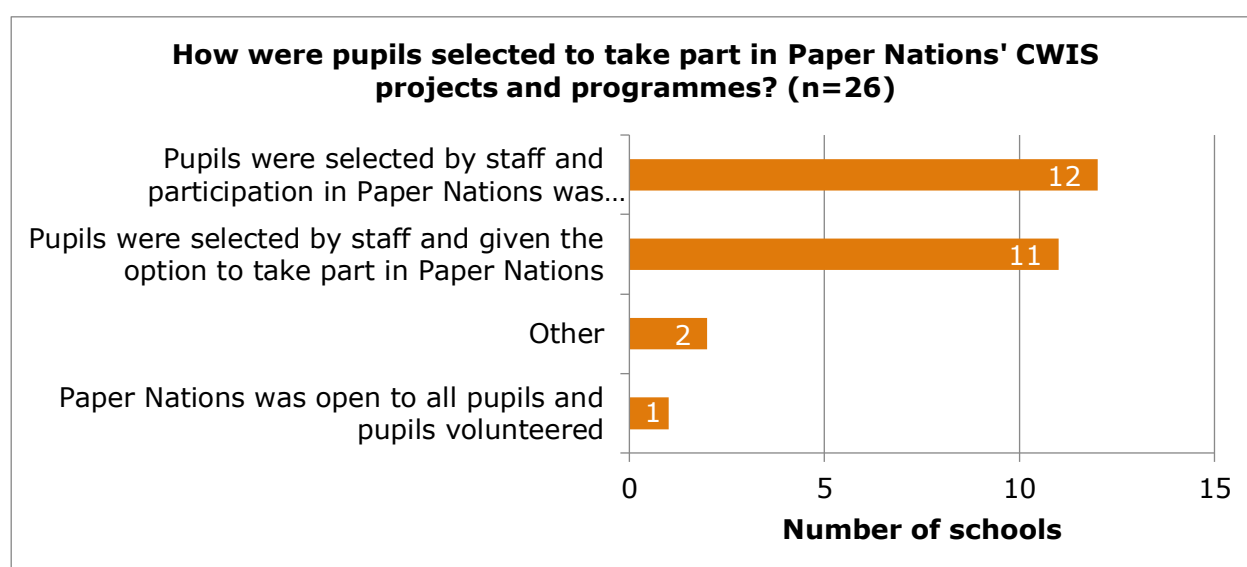
<sup>7</sup> While collating age and gender information, duplicate pupil names were removed, as were birthdays on the date 01/01, which was how some unknown birthdates were entered into the surveys. Pupils' responses across all survey types were collated, to obtain the most complete data possible.

Teachers were asked to supply demographic information about the pupils involved in Paper Nations' CWiS programmes and projects. The table, below, provides a breakdown of pupils' characteristics, and shows that over a quarter of the pupils involved in Paper Nations' CWiS activities received pupil premium funding:<sup>8</sup>

Total number of students involved in the CWiS project / programme at this school	1690
How many of those students speak English as an additional language (EAL)?	84 (5%)
How many of those students receive pupil premium funding?	484 (29%)
How many of those students have a recorded special educational need or disability (SEND)?	174 (10%)
How many of those students are recorded as being gifted and talented (G+T)?	84 (5%)
How many of those students are working below the expected level of progress in literacy?	190 (11%)

## 5.2 How were pupils selected to take part in CWiS activities?

Teachers indicated that pupils were mostly selected by staff to participate in Paper Nations' CWiS activities:



## 5.3 Conclusions and implications

Over a quarter of the pupils involved in Paper Nations' CWiS programmes and activities were eligible for pupil premium funding. Most pupils were selected to take part by teachers, and in future Paper Nations should encourage teachers to actively select disadvantaged pupils and those with little prior engagement in creative writing to participate.

<sup>8</sup> The fullest data for each school was retained. No more than one entry per school per academic year was used.

## 6 How do young people, teachers and writers feel about creative writing?

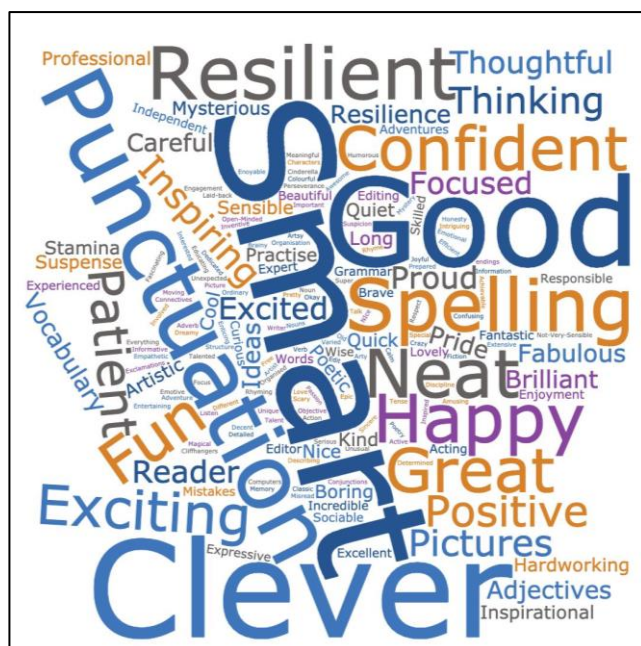
### 6.1 What do young people think makes a good writer?

*Young people's perceptions of creative writing are overwhelmingly positive, as are their perceptions of creative writers. Young people particularly emphasise the creative characteristics of writers and writing, over and above the technical skills involved. This was the case before their involvement in Paper Nations, and remained unchanged throughout.*

We asked young people to tell us three words that describe a good writer, at the start and end of their involvement in the Paper Nations' programmes (at the beginning of both the 2016/17 and 2017/18 academic years), and in the perceived impact surveys.

Overall, young people generally focused on writers' intellectual and creative characteristics over and above their technical skills (see also the table below, which outlines the words young people used most frequently). However, in their baseline responses young people highlighted technical skills such as handwriting and punctuation, and these did not feature so prominently in their endpoint responses. The 'wordles' and tables, right, visualise their responses.<sup>9</sup>

Baseline wordle (n=372):



Endpoint wordle (n=372):



<sup>9</sup> Wordles create images that take into account the frequency of words, meaning the larger a word in the image, the more frequently young people used it.

The table, below, shows the words most frequently used by young people to describe a good writer. The words were overwhelmingly positive in both the baseline and endpoint entries, suggesting young people's already-positive impressions of writers and of writing were maintained during their involvement in activities. The words 'creative' and 'imaginative' were the most commonly used words at both baseline and endpoint:

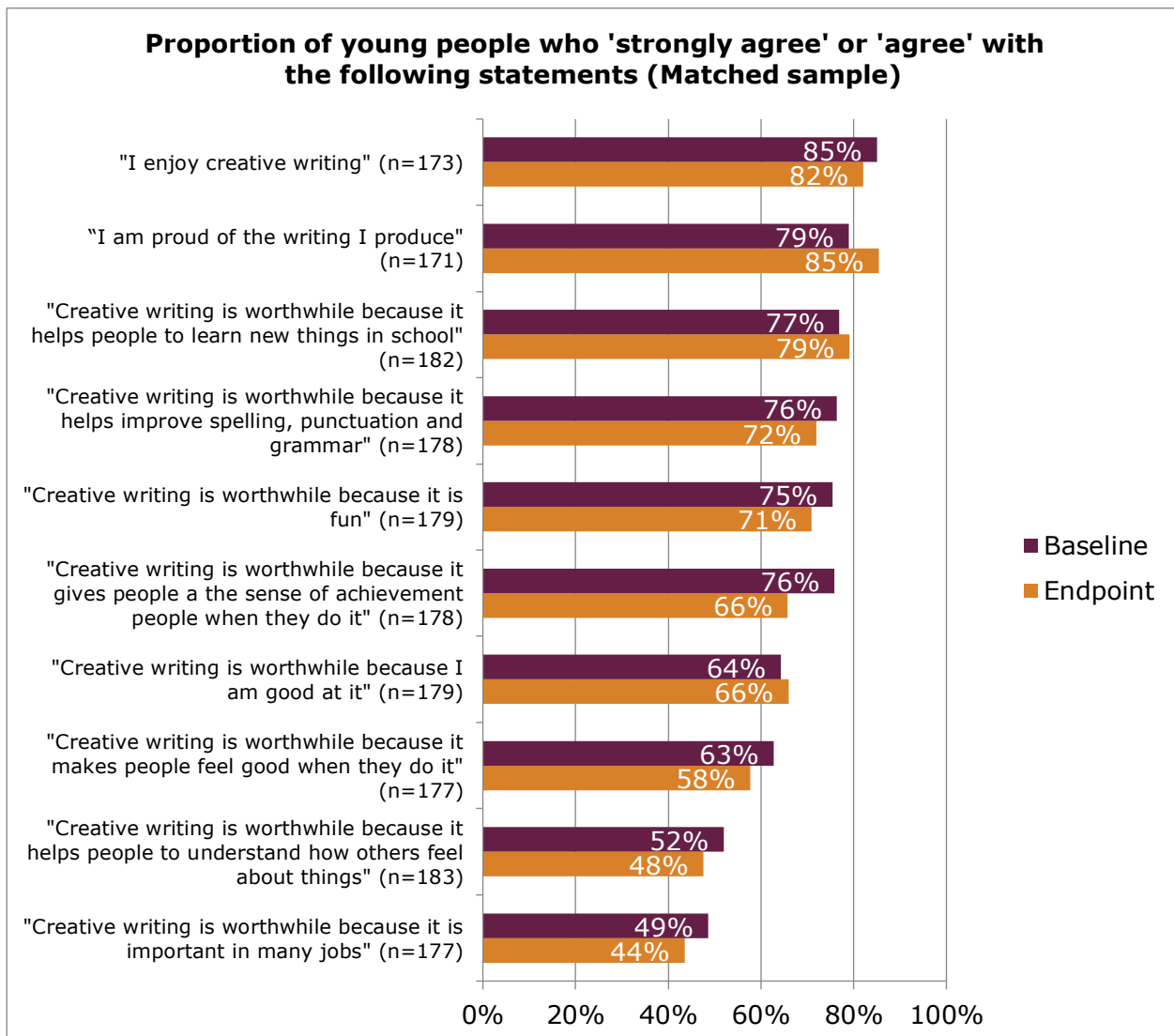
Word	Frequency in baseline surveys and perceived impact surveys (n=372)	Word	Frequency in endpoint surveys and perceived impact surveys (n=372)
Creative	127	Creative	156
Imaginative	83	Imaginative	98
Imagination	35	Imagination	50
Smart	26	Smart	28
Funny	24	Creativity	27
Interesting	22	Amazing	27
Clever	22	Clever	26
Good	20	Growth	21
Descriptive	19	Funny	21
Amazing	19	Descriptive	19
Punctuation	15	Fun	14
Handwriting	15	Adventurous	13
Resilient	12	Handwriting	13
Spelling	12	Artistic	13
Creativity	11	Good	12
Happy	11	Calm	11
Neat	11	Interesting	10
Adventurous	10	Beautiful	10
Confident	10	Unafraid	10
Great	10	Confident	9

## 6.2 How do young people feel about creative writing?

***Young people felt very positively about creative writing when they embarked on Paper Nations, and endpoint responses indicate these positive attitudes were broadly maintained, with an increase in the proportion saying they felt pride in their work. Responses to perceived impact surveys indicate a sizeable increase in positivity of young people's attitudes towards creative writing.***

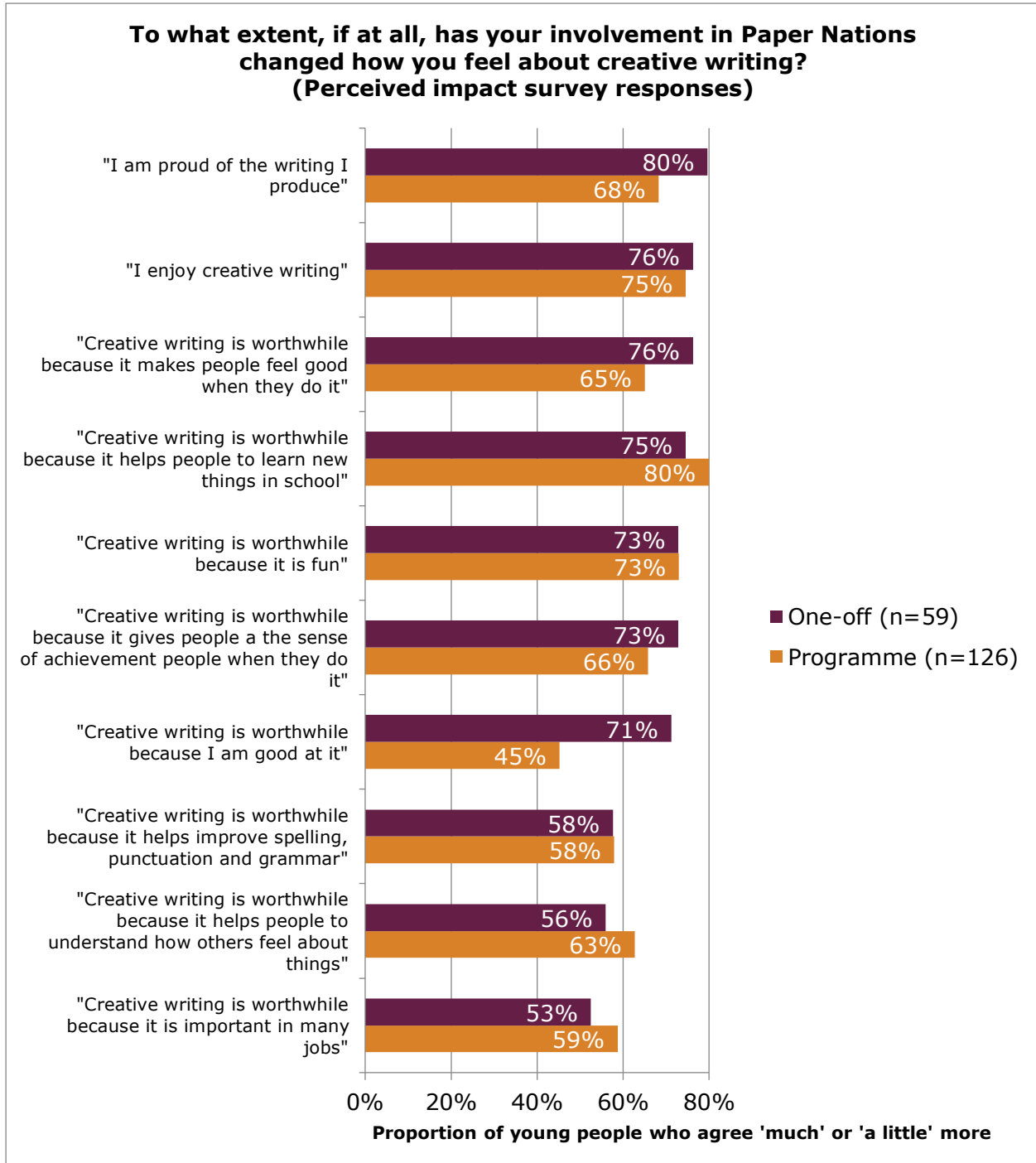
There was a small increase in the proportion of young people saying they felt proud of their writing in their endpoint responses, in comparison with baseline responses. The largest difference between young people's baseline and endpoint responses was a 10-percentage-point decrease in the proportion saying they feel creative writing is worthwhile because it gives people a sense of achievement.

Young people's attitudes towards creative writing at baseline was generally positive, and this was largely maintained throughout their involvement in Paper Nations, with high proportions in both sets of surveys reporting positive attitudes towards creative writing. Young people's responses to the perceived impact surveys (see below) showed increases in their positivity towards creative writing.





Young people's responses in the perceived impact surveys were also very positive, with a high proportion of young people agreeing more that creative writing is fun, helps them learn new things, and makes people feel good. Young people also reported increased enjoyment and pride in their creative writing.





### 6.3 How do pupils view different types of writing practitioners?

*Young people have very positive views of writers as intellectual and (sometimes) eccentric. Young people believe writers can earn a lot of money, and see them as distinct from other adults in their lives including teachers.*

Pupils at the three schools we visited to conduct focus groups for the Paper Nations' Writer Identities intensive study worked on their creative writing with:

- **Writing Explorers**, who develop and lead the writing workshop programme and work with the pupils on an ongoing basis. This role is equivalent to that of the arts advisor (Arts Award) or 'Peripatetic Writing Tutor'.
- **Writing Champions**, who go into schools for one to two sessions to create a 'buzz' around writing. They usually work with the Writing Explorer to develop and design the programme.
- **Regular class teachers.**

We first asked pupils to draw their idea of a writer (which the pictures in this section reflect), before then talking about their views of creative writers in general, and about specific differences between writers they work with. Asked to share how they perceive creative writers, the most prominent themes were:



- **Writers enjoy what they do.** This came through prominently whether the pupils discussed creative writers in the abstract,<sup>10</sup> or the writers they knew in real life. One pupil said:

*"I think they enjoy writing because when they talk about it they're not just all like sad about it, they like smile whilst they talk about it."*

Young person during a focus group

For pupils, one reason writers like writing is because they do it regularly. One group suggested teachers find creative writing harder – and less enjoyable – because they do not practice it as often.

- **Writers are good people.** Children used a range of highly positive words to describe writers during the focus groups, such as "amazing", "beautiful", "sunny", and "friendly". While it is not possible to tell whether these same pupils felt this positively before their involvement in Paper Nations, the wordle results presented above suggest that in general young people already held writers in high regard.
- **Writers are intelligent and eccentric.** The young people in our focus groups said they saw writers as imaginative and intelligent, with several pupils describing writers' imaginations as "mind-blowing". However, the children also associated this creativity and intelligence with a particular sort of eccentricity. In one focus group, many children used words such as "crazy", "bonkers" and "weird" to describe writers, with one pupil suggesting:

<sup>10</sup> We asked pupils to draw pictures of creative writers, and then talk about these drawings. The drawings were not of people they knew, but combined characteristics they associated with creative writers.

*"Crazy people have better ideas. ...Because if you're serious you don't really have good ideas because you don't have as many creative ideas, and you have more serious ideas."*

Young person during a focus group

This aligns with some young people's responses about writers in First Story's Writer-in-Residence programme, where they said writers' quirkiness was part of what made working with them enjoyable. These findings are outlined in section 7.

- **Writers are rich.** Children in one focus group believed money is a motivation for writers to publish work. One pupil said writing could turn people into "billionaires".
- **Teachers and writers are distinct from one another.** Pupils see writers who come in from outside their school, and their teachers, as different 'sorts' of adult. They see writers as experienced creative practitioners; teachers, on the other hand, may be skilled writers but also have "a lot of other lessons to teach us." Consequently, some young people felt that teachers may be less inclined than writers to believe creative writing is important.

## 6.4 What shapes how pupils view themselves as writers?

*Writers working with schools as part of Paper Nations said they shape how young people see themselves as writers by focusing on the process of writing creatively, including encouraging pupils' self-expression, helping pupils overcome their fears of writing, and responding to pupils' needs and interests. They also think producing tangible outcomes is important, although this needs to be balanced with a focus on the writing process.*

During the Writer Identities intensive study, writers spoke about four key ways in which they shape how pupils see themselves as writers. These were:

1. **Encouraging pupils' self-expression.** Nearly all the writers talked about the value of encouraging young people to write 'authentically', that is, encouraging them to focus on developing their authorial voice without getting bogged down in the technicalities of spelling, grammar and punctuation:

*"It's not about being right or wrong, it's just about picking up a pen and enjoying the experience and engaging with the experience. That's what I'm aiming for."*

Writing Champion

This process can be supported by starting small and building up, "picking the scab of the idea for long enough [until] it becomes something new." Brainstorming ideas in groups can help with this, as can finding something positive to say about pupils' work and encouraging them to continue developing drafts:

*"I'd say things like, 'Oh my God, that is such an amazing thing, you just said,' and they'd look at me in amazement, as if, 'What?' I said, 'Yes. It really was, yes. Write it down. Let's get that'."*

Writing Champion

2. **Helping pupils overcome their fears.** Writers talked about their role in helping pupils overcome their trepidation. Acknowledging that creative writing can be intimidating can help with this, with one writer saying "as much as writing is powerful and fun and enjoyable, it can also be quite... a distressing process." Writers said that helping pupils read the styles of writing they will then mimic can help demystify the writing process and break it into parts. Equally, it is important for schools to keep up momentum as pupils enter secondary education; writers said that sometimes pupils' confidence can take a knock during this transition:

*"I think those first few years of high school where you're suddenly put into this great machine are incredibly important to keep that level of writing going because otherwise I think kids and young people suffer this huge blow to their confidence about writing, what it is, and that's really problematic."*

Writing Explorer

3. **Producing tangible outcomes.** Four writers talked about the value of producing a tangible outcome, as this can provide an incentive to engage in sessions and produce an object they can feel proud of. This might be something more formalised, such as an anthology, or simply writing up a 'neat' version.
4. **Responding to contexts, needs, and interests.** Tapping into young people's interests can help writers connect with pupils, and link the sessions to pupils' experiences. Related

to this, writers discussed the importance of running carefully structured workshops that scaffold tasks appropriately for young people.

We also asked pupils how writers have influenced how they see themselves and the process of writing. Pupils' responses centred around writers being enthusiastic (as communicated by writers' passion, sense of humour, body language and facial expressions). They also talked about writers helping them overcome their fears by:

1. **Breaking tasks into smaller chunks.** For example, one pupil was relieved when a visiting writer said a story could be "as long as you want or as short as you want". Another's confidence had grown since the writer helped the group produce more ideas together.
2. **Seeing teachers grapple with the challenges of creative writing in the workshops or in regular lessons.** One group said that, "if they (teachers) can do it, then you feel that you can do it as well." This perhaps highlights a benefit in teachers sharing the challenges of creative writing with their pupils.

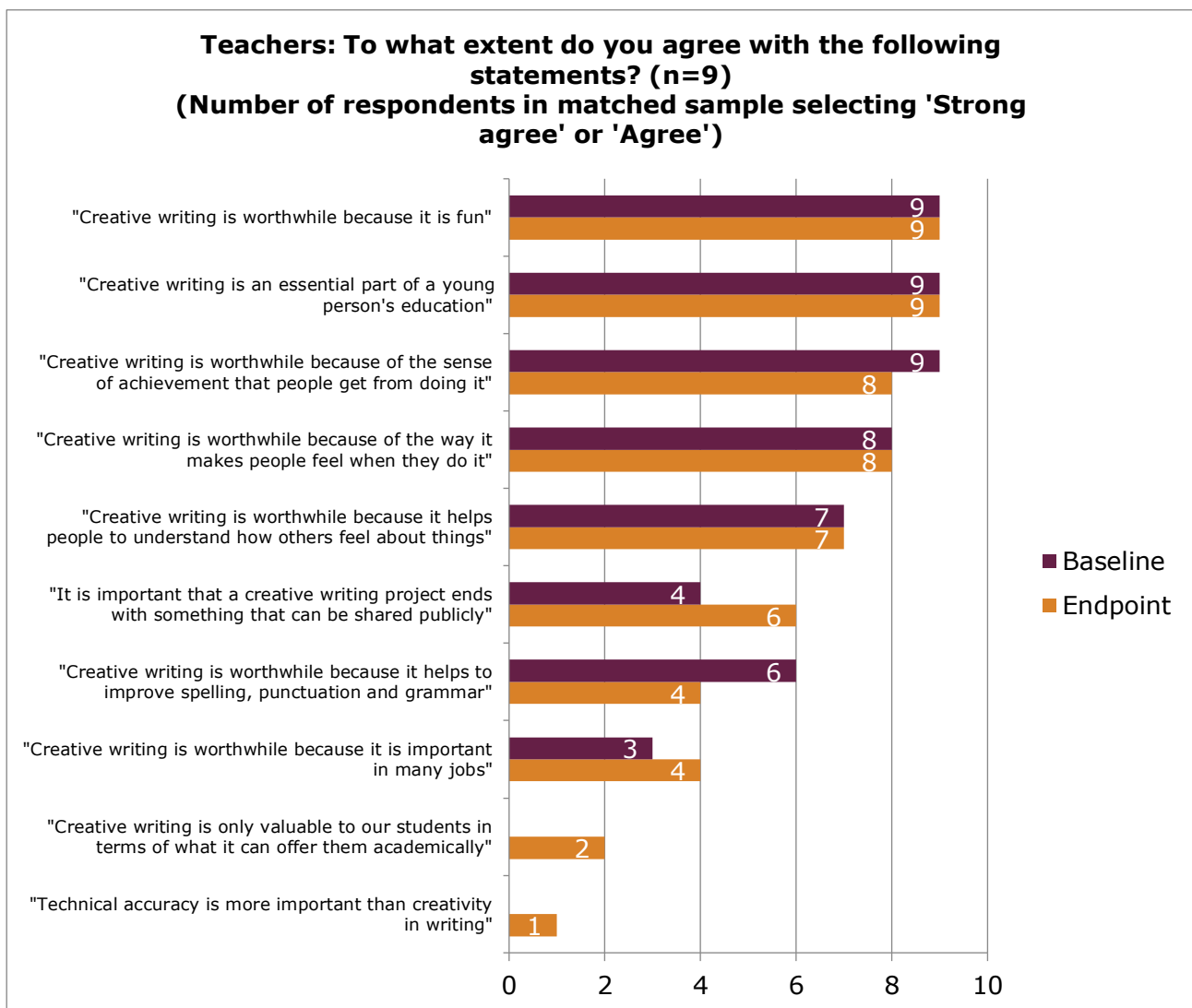
The ideas presented here align closely with key messages that emerge from our intensive study of the Writer-in-Residence workshops, outlined in section 7.




## 6.5 How do teachers feel about creative writing?

***Teachers feel that creative writing is an intrinsically important part of young people's education, though they also emphasise its benefits in terms of how it makes people feel when they do it. Teachers felt like this before their involvement in Paper Nations, although involvement in the programme encouraged teachers to place greater value on creative writing's intrinsic benefits. Teachers were less likely to talk about the mechanics of writing being important throughout their involvement.***

All teachers for whom we have matched survey data agreed throughout their involvement in Paper Nations that creative writing is worthwhile, essential to young people's education, and that it is fun. Teachers also emphasise creative writing's importance because of how it makes people feel when they do it. Acknowledging that the sample size is small (n=9), teachers reduced their emphasis on the links between creative writing, and its impact on pupils' academic and job prospects, although these were also the categories where there was most growth in agreement.



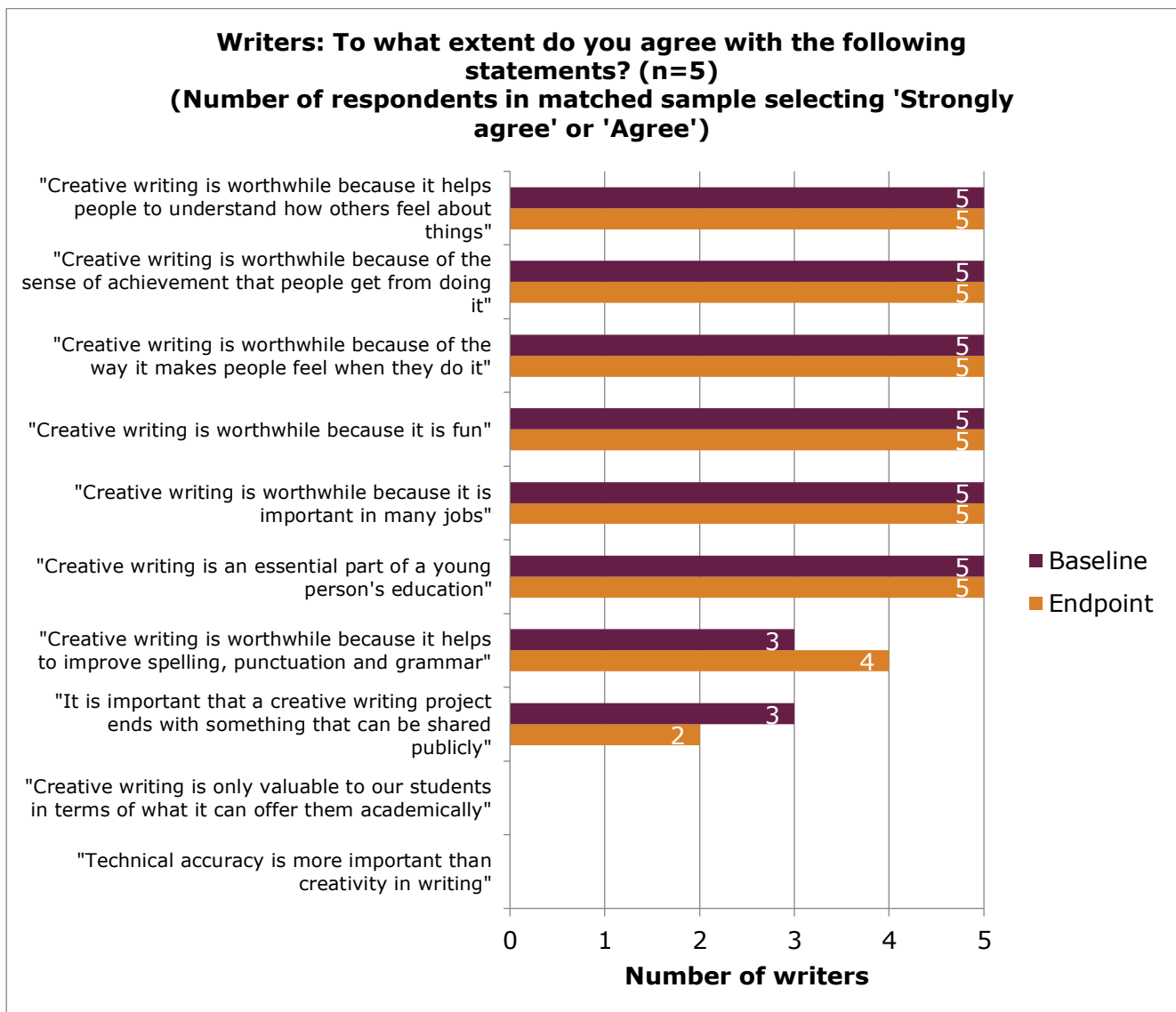
Change observed		Number of teachers	Statement
Increase in the number of teachers who agree		+10	"Creative writing is worthwhile because it is fun"
		+8	"Creative writing is worthwhile because of the way it makes people feel when they do it"
		+7	"Creative writing is an essential part of a young person's education"
		+7	"Creative writing is worthwhile because of the sense of achievement that people get from doing it"
		+7	"Creative writing is worthwhile because it helps people to understand how others feel about things"
		+5	"It is important that a creative writing project ends with something that can be shared publicly"
		+3	"Creative writing is worthwhile because it helps improve spelling, punctuation and grammar"
Increase in the number of teachers who disagree		+2	"Creative writing is worthwhile because it is important in many jobs"
		-4	"Creative writing is only valuable to our students in terms of what it can offer academically"
		-6	"Technical accuracy is more important than creativity in writing"

Involvement in Paper Nations encouraged teachers to view creative writing as worthwhile because it is fun, and because of how it can make people feel when they do it. Teachers' responses to the programme-long perceived impact surveys (n=11) show a 'swing' away from instrumental benefits (including links with academics, jobs and technical accuracy) towards more rounded benefits, including giving young people a sense of achievement and empathy.

## 6.6 How do writers feel about creative writing?

***Like teachers, writers emphasise the intrinsic benefits of creative writing and see it as an essential part of young people's education. Writers write for a range of reasons, but often to satisfy an inner drive and to connect with others. Generating income is a perpetual challenge.***

Writers stress the intrinsic value of creative writing, seeing it as an essential part of young people's education. They stress how fun it can be, while also serving an important emotional function: helping young people to feel good, and to empathise with others. Overall, how writers feel about creative writing did not change substantially over the course of their involvement in Paper Nations.



### 6.6.1 What do different types of writing practitioners working with Paper Nations think it is to be a writer, and what shapes this identity?

As part of Paper Nations' Writer Identities intensive study, we asked writers what 'being a writer' means, and the factors that shape this identity. We asked writers to talk about their work in general, and not exclusively about the work they do with schools and young people.

Writers told us:

- **It is difficult to define what being a writer is.** Being a creative writer is a combination of many different things. One writer told us that a "whole constellation of factors" affects their sense of being a writer. The term 'writing' itself has also taken on a broader meaning in recent years, as one Writing Explorer explained:

*"I think that all kinds of writing can be creative writing and that doesn't... just mean poetry, it can be blogging and all these other kinds of platforms these days."*

Writing Explorer

- **Writers have an 'inner calling'.** All categories of writer working with Paper Nations – Writing Ambassadors, Writing Champions, and Writing Explorers – talked about their inner drive to write, with one Writing Explorer saying writing is "very addictive."
- **Writing and confidence are interrelated.** One of the most widely discussed factors affecting how writers view themselves and the process of creative writing was confidence, with all the writers we interviewed talking about this. Confidence is a necessary condition for them producing quality work, but also something that results from finishing a piece of writing. It varies at different stages of the writing process and at different points in a project, and can often be lowest just after starting a new piece of writing, when the magnitude of the task ahead seems most daunting:

*"Not that I can't write, it's knowing that those 60,000, 70,000, 80,000 words lie ahead of me freaks me out. I break out in a cold sweat every time, at the beginning of the experience."*

Writing Champion

Confidence also suffers when writers hit a 'dry spot', and either cannot find the words they want, or cannot think of original ideas. They also worry deeply about the quality of what they have written. This challenge never seems to go away, and writers talked about how winning awards can lead them to feel like imposters, or feel as though they will not sustain such quality.

Relatedly, confidence is very sensitive to external feedback, whether from other writers or from readers. This can be valuable, though, as it guards against complacency and increases the quality of a writer's work:

*"You know, you can become deluded and you can lose perspective and, actually, you can be confident when you shouldn't be confident."*

Writing Champion

- **Writing is about connecting with others.** One of the most commonly cited reasons for engaging in creative writing was the connection it creates with others. This was seen as both a motivation and a happy by-product. Writers said they felt driven to share their work with wider audiences because of a sense of having something valuable to share; because they think audiences might enjoy or benefit from it; or, because they seek validation:



*"I'm driven by some internal force to do it and I can't help myself and because I want to share stuff with other people, with a wider audience, and to validate myself to work with others."*

Writing Ambassador

Connecting with others also provides a means for writers to explore their own thoughts and feelings, as well as providing support and feedback. One Writing Ambassador said the programme had enabled her to share her experiences with other writers and that doing so with a small group made the process less "daunting". Networks are also important for counteracting loneliness, and making writing financially sustainable, something we explore in greater detail in section 6.

- **Writing is about discipline and perseverance.** Writers explained that in the face of an irregular working routine, self-discipline and perseverance are extremely important. This applies not only to physically sitting down and forcing oneself to write, but also reflecting on one's work and improving it, as one Writing Champion explained:

*"They don't settle for the first thing they do. They pick at it. You know, they're interested in what other people are doing, but they're more interested in how can they get something fresh or real out of their own pen and they don't settle."*

Writing Champion

- **Writing is about enjoyment and self-expression.** Enjoyment, like confidence, is something that enables writers to sit down and work as well as being something that stems from the work itself. Almost universally, writers said they felt a real sense of achievement and pride when they have finished a piece of work, but that the journey there can be difficult:

*"Most of the writers I know wouldn't say that they really like the act of smashing those words down on the page. ...It's a struggle. It's very hard. I'm definitely one of those writers who love having written, but genuinely hate writing. ...Sometimes, it can just be a painful, painful endeavour, like pulling teeth."*

Writing Champion

One writer argued that "rewarding" is a better word than "enjoyable" for describing writing.

Writing as part of a group, whether with other writers or with pupils, can spark interest in creative writing. One Writing Champion talked about the energy he takes from sessions in school:

*"It was such a beautifully collaborative experience where everybody understood what we were trying to make. Yes, the bounce back and forth was really good and you'd get to find new levels of your own energy and that can be really, really great."*

Writing Champion

Closely related to writers' enjoyment of creative writing is the ability it gives them to express themselves. A corollary of this is the impact writing can have on adults' wellbeing, and several more experienced writers said they found writing therapeutic.

- **Making ends meet is difficult.** Finding enough work, and work that pays fairly, is challenging. We explore the issue of financial sustainability in detail in section 6, but the issue of funding also arose during this intensive study, with one interviewee saying “the money is problematic.” External funding offers a lifeline, but can be extremely competitive, with “an awful lot of people trying to share a very small pot.” Writers also talked about the challenges of working with publishers, both in terms of losing artistic influence over their work, and in terms of securing fair pay. Again, this is something we return to in the discussion about financial sustainability in section 6.
- **Life gets in the way.** Earning a living, family life, and relationships all impose constraints on writers. Alongside making it difficult to find the time to write, life events can affect creativity when writers do sit down to write. One Writing Ambassador explained:

*“When I was a student, obviously being in a creative headspace a lot of the time was fine, like I found it quite easy to be in that space, but since becoming a mummy and having all of that stuff floating around in the forefront, sort of trying to drag myself into the creative mindset was quite a challenge.”*

Writing Ambassador

### 6.6.2 What motivates writing practitioners to work with young people on creative writing?

We also talked to writers working with Paper Nations about what motivates them to work with young people and four key factors emerged.

- **Developing young people’s self-expression and wellbeing.** This was the most commonly cited reason for wanting to work with young people among Paper Nations’ Writing Champions, Explorers and Ambassadors. This can result from a feeling that creativity is “both under attack and undervalued” in schools, and that pupils may not otherwise have access to creative writing activities. Relatedly, a couple of writers felt creative writing is something only on offer to more affluent pupils, and work in schools to counteract this:

*“[Pupils think] they have to be at least middle class and probably pretty well educated, have a huge vocabulary and that they need to use long sentences and flowery concepts and flowery words.”*

Writing Explorer

Writers also said that creative writing brings with it a host of other beneficial skills for young people, including confidence, self-reflection, empathy and teamwork. One said:

*“But on a wider scale it’s important for anything that requires communication, that requires being able to think clearly and being able to change things and to see a process and to be able to work independently, but also to be able to work as part of a collaborative situation. So yes, so many transferable skills really.”*

Writing Champion

- **Connecting with others, and helping others connect.** Another common motivation for wanting to work with young people is to connect with other people. Writers said the activities developed their and young people’s empathy, as well as mutual regard for other people’s thoughts, feelings and work:

*"Good creative writing in fiction helps us empathise. It helps us see the view from people who... look at the same events or things that we might go through but from a completely different perspective."*

Writing Explorer

- **Seeking self-development.** Alongside wanting to work with young people and develop their skills and life chances, writers talked about the personal benefits they would gain from doing so. For some, working with young people feeds into a broader career path. As one Writing Explorer said:

*"It's only in my early 30s now that I feel like I'm bringing all (aspects of my professional life) together into something that's going to turn into a career that I want. Part of that is absolutely about sharing working practice with young people."*

Writing Explorer

- **Generating income.** In some cases, the pressure to earn money incentivises writers to work with young people because it provides a source of income. Equally, the pressure to earn money can draw writers away from work with young people if other, better paid, opportunities are available elsewhere:

*"If I've got lots of deadlines and lots of pressure from elsewhere, then I think sometimes there's a tendency to not be as motivated to want to work with young people in a creative way. It's not maybe a deliberate choice, but it's more an issue of other things that have to be [prioritised]."*

Writing Ambassador

## 6.7 Conclusions and implications

Young people, teachers and writers all emphasise the importance of creative writing in terms of the fun it provides, and space to explore one's own and others' feelings. While teachers and writers see creative writing as an essential part of young people's education, this is less in terms of links with academic achievement, and more in terms of the wider personal, social and emotional benefits it offers.

Writers involved in Paper Nations highlight the benefits of having space and structure to generate ideas, reflect on one another's writing, and engage in the process (rather than focusing purely on output).

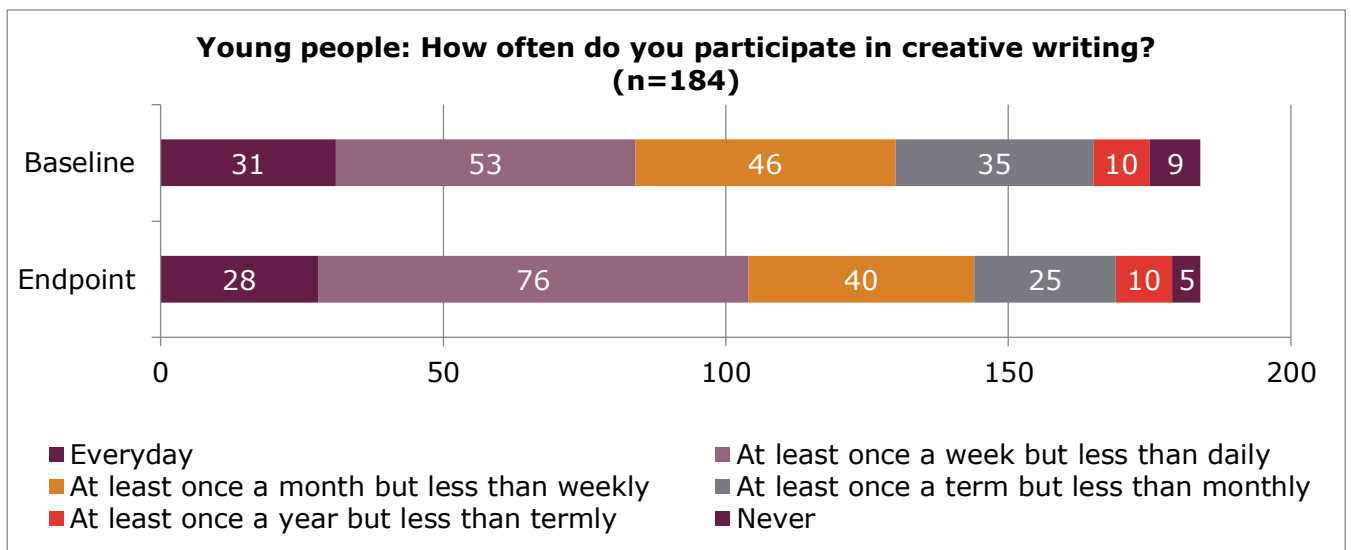
Paper Nations should therefore maintain its focus on process and ideas generation, while also ensuring participants who want to have the opportunity to work towards sharing their writing publicly.

## 7 How engaged are young people and their teachers in creative writing?

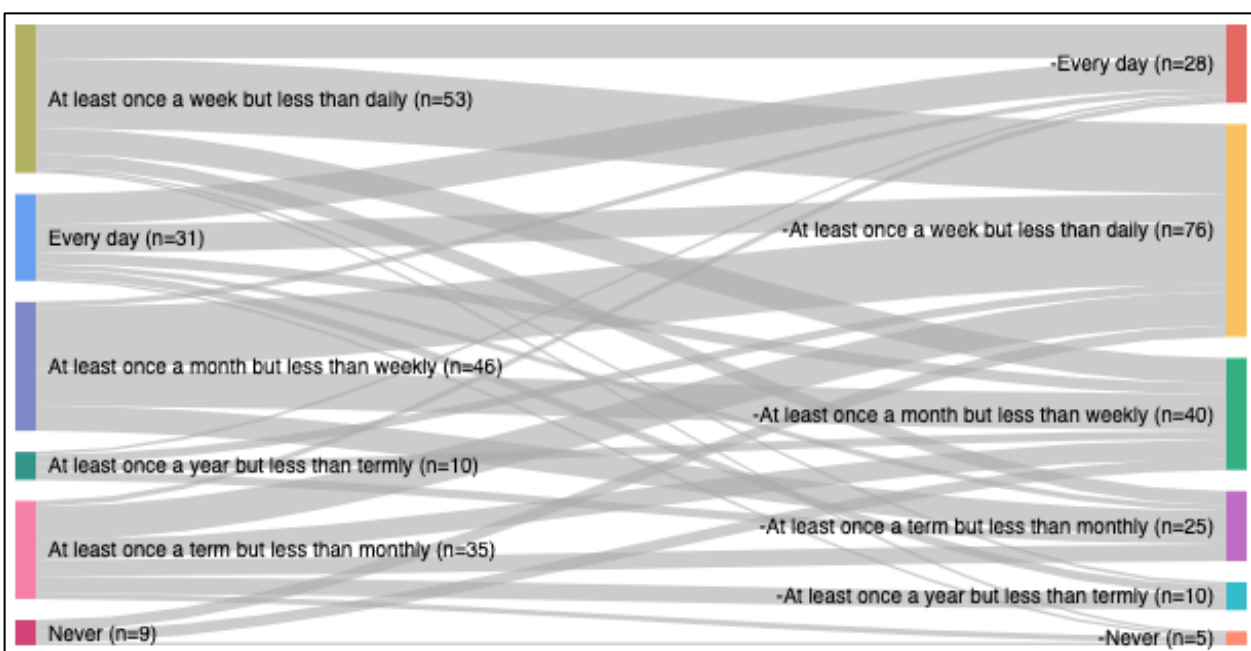
### 7.1 Engagement among young people

*Young people reported writing more frequently by the end of their involvement in Paper Nations (or expressed their intention to write more frequently). Paper Nations encouraged pupils initially writing less frequently to write more regularly.*

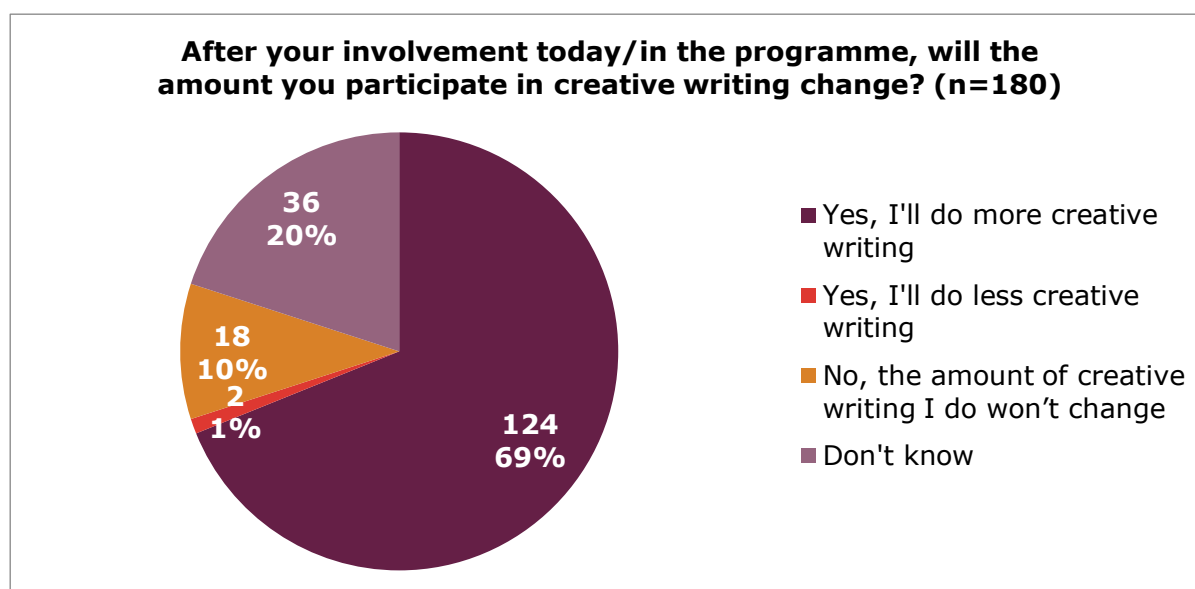
Since getting involved in Paper Nations, young people report writing more frequently. Over half of young people in their endpoint responses reported writing at least once a week, in comparison with less than half at the beginning of the programme:



The Sankey diagram, below, shows that this is because young people who were writing less frequently at the beginning of their involvement were writing more often by the end:



Over two thirds of young people who responded to the programme and one-off perceived impact surveys believed that they would do more creative writing after their involvement in Paper Nations:



## 7.2 Engagement among teachers

All teacher respondents to perceived impact surveys expressed their intention to write creatively more often, following involvement in Paper Nations (n=13).<sup>11</sup>

<sup>11</sup> There were only two matched responses in the baseline and endpoint surveys, and not enough responses in the overall baseline and endpoint surveys to allow for a meaningful comparison.

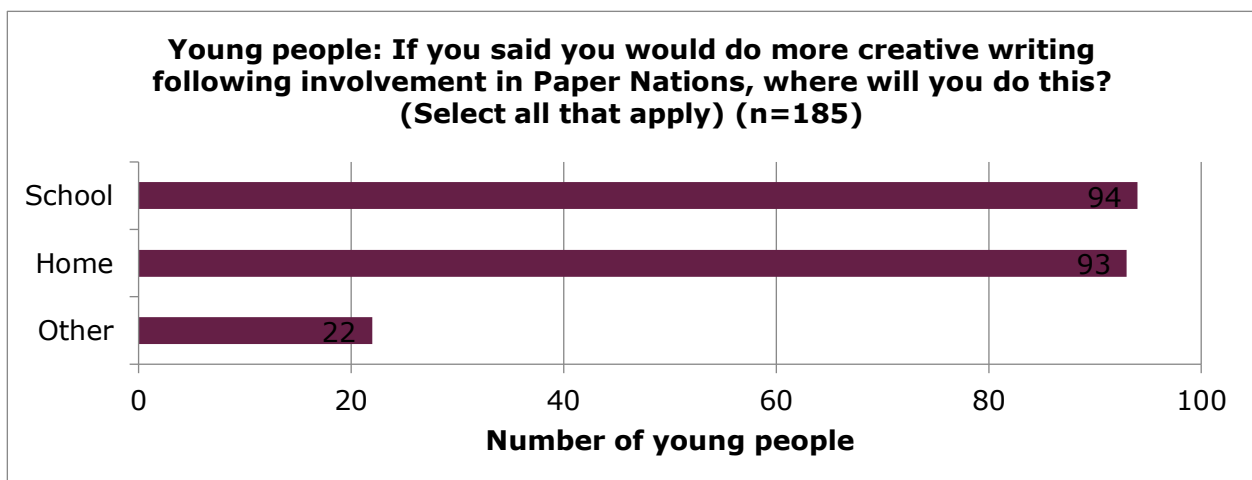
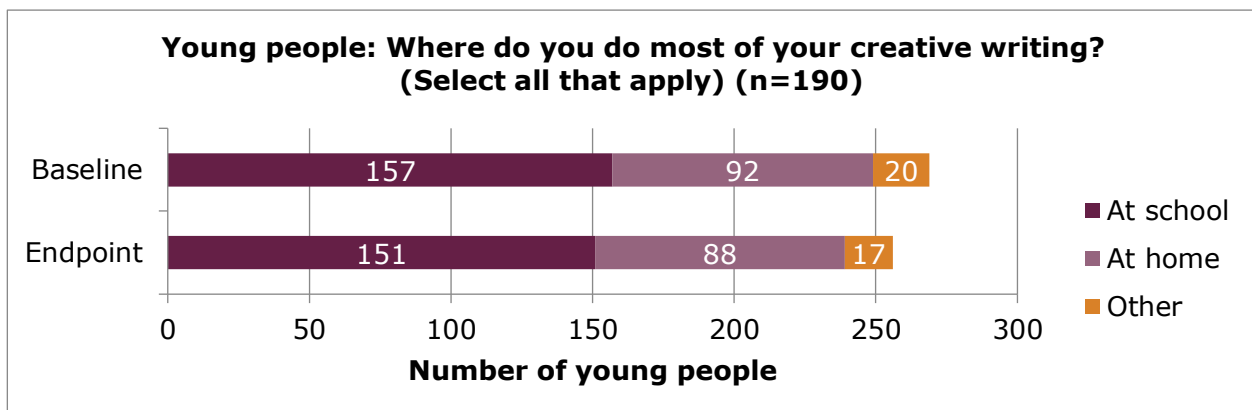
## 7.3 Where do young people do their creative writing?

***Involvement in Paper Nations has encouraged young people and their teachers to participate more regularly in creative writing (or to commit to doing so). Less engaged young people were writing more frequently by the end of their involvement. Young people say they will do this at school and at home, suggesting Paper Nations may have helped them see creative writing as something they can do in their free time.***

### 7.3.1 Young people

Young people do most of their creative writing in school, although a sizeable minority also write at home.

We asked young people who said they would do more writing after their involvement where they would do this. Virtually equal numbers of young people said at school and at home, perhaps indicating that involvement in Paper Nations encourages young people to see creative writing as something to engage in during their free time. This is reinforced by the answers that young people who replied 'other' gave; these young people talked about writing in the garden or outside, on holiday, or somewhere quiet.



### **7.3.3 Teachers**

In their responses to the perceived impact surveys, all teachers (n=13) said they would do more creative writing after their involvement in Paper Nations. Of these, twelve said they would do this at school.

## **7.4 Conclusions and implications**

Young people, teachers and writers all emphasise the importance of creative writing in terms of the fun it provides, and space to explore one's own and others' feelings. While teachers and writers see creative writing as an essential part of young people's educations, this is less in terms of links with academic achievement, and more in terms of the wider personal, social and emotional benefits it offers.

Writers involved in Paper Nations highlight the benefits of having space and structure to generate ideas, reflect on one another's writing, and engage in the process (rather than focusing purely on outputs).

Paper Nations should therefore maintain its focus on process and ideas generation, while also ensuring participants who want to have the opportunity to work towards sharing their writing publicly.

## 8 Of what networks are teachers and writers a part?

### 8.1 Are teachers and writers in writing networks?

***The teachers surveyed said they are not part of creative writing networks beyond Paper Nations but in contrast, writers are. Writers' networks are 'sticky', with writers saying they work across multiple networks simultaneously.***

Teachers were not part of creative writing networks, with eight of nine teachers in the matched survey sample saying they did not work with any other creative writing partners during their involvement in Paper Nations. This was mirrored in the responses to the perceived impact surveys (n=13).

All five writers for whom matched survey data was available said they had worked as part of other networks during Paper Nations. The number who said they were still working in these networks at the end of their involvement in Paper Nations increased from 2 to 4.<sup>12</sup>

Asked what networks these were, writers gave examples including:

- Projects with other schools;
- Literary and writing festivals;
- Youth groups, including the Scouts;
- Museums, theatres and other cultural centres;
- National networks and associations, including NAWA.

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<sup>12</sup> There was only one relevant writer response in the perceived impact surveys.

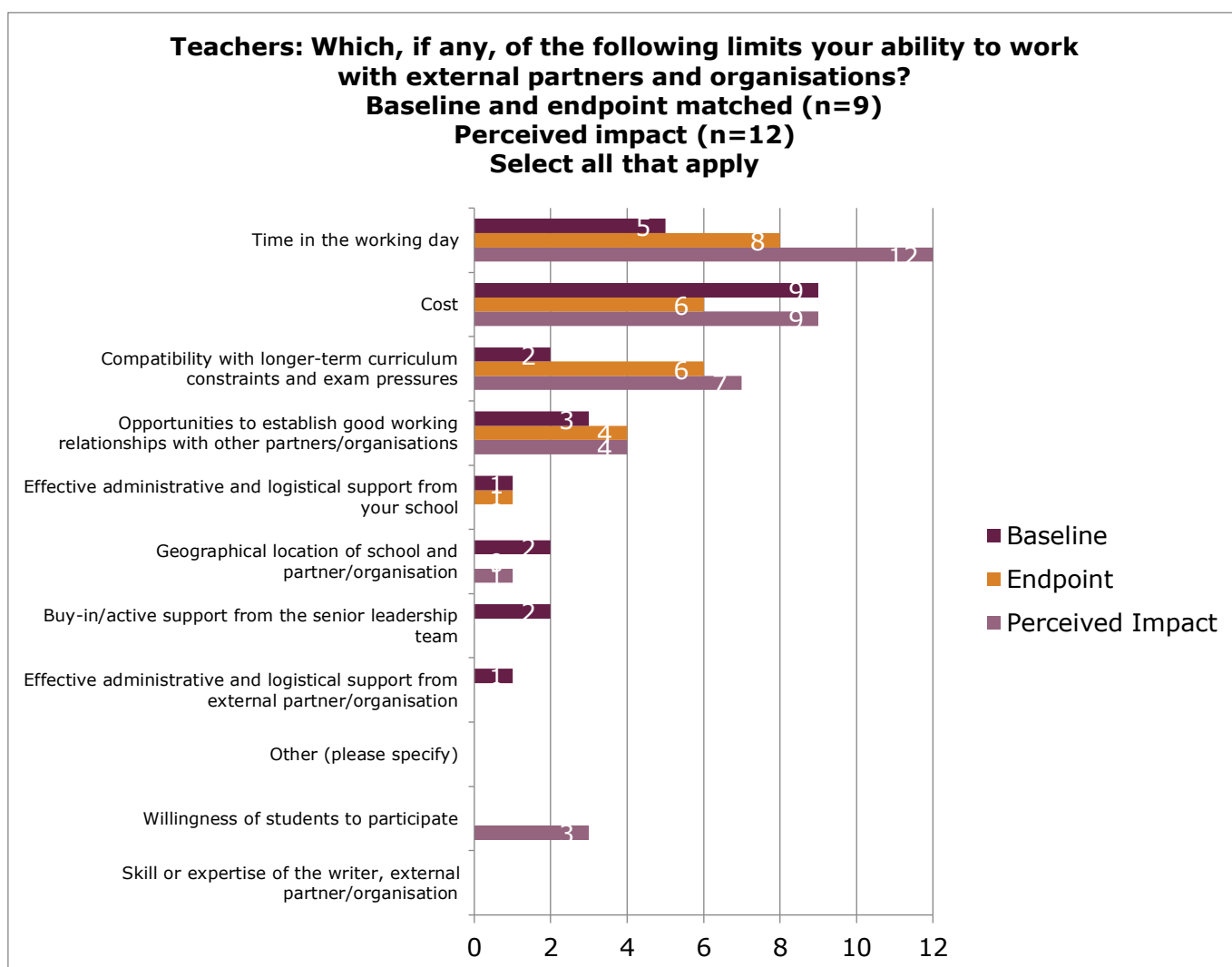


## 8.2 What limits teachers' and writers' abilities to work in creative writing networks?

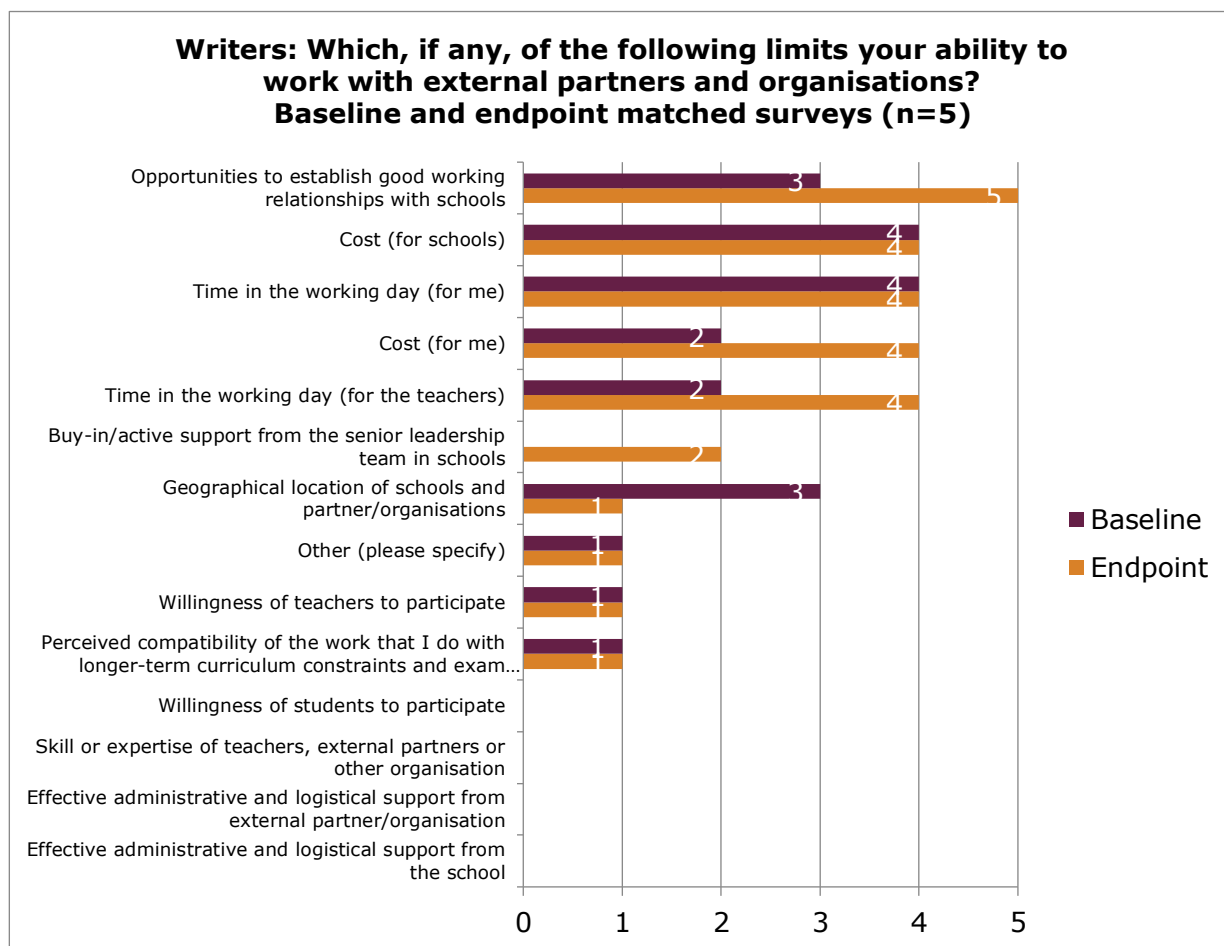
***Cost and time are the biggest barriers to creative writing partnerships. Perceptions of these barriers stayed the same or worsened during Paper Nations. This may reflect teachers' and writers' increased exposure to and understanding of these pressures.***

Cost and time were the most commonly cited barriers to teachers working with external partners and organisations on creative writing. Comparing teachers' baseline and endpoint responses, the perceived barriers imposed by cost diminished during participants' involvement in Paper Nations, although perceptions of the barrier imposed by time in the working day worsened. This may be because teachers were directly affected by time pressures during their involvement in Paper Nations, for example needing to support additional activities in school. As section 11 shows, teachers felt the activities supported through Paper Nations were valuable.

A greater number of teachers cited compatibility with the curriculum as a barrier in their endpoint responses. Taking into account teachers' attitudes towards creative writing (outlined in section 4.5, above), this could reflect a disconnect between what teachers want creative writing to do and be, versus what is imposed upon them through the National Curriculum. Teachers did not feel that administrative capacity or writers' expertise were barriers to effective networks.



Writers' responses were consistent with teachers', insofar as the costs of creative writing for schools and time in the working day were both the most prominent barriers to working with schools and other organisations. Perceptions of these barriers either stayed the same, or worsened. As sections 4.6 and 7 explore, cost is a perennial concern and because Paper Nations works with a wide range of writers at different phases in their careers, writers 'starting out' may have been encountering these barriers for the first time. Like teachers, writers do not feel administration or teachers' expertise are barriers.



### 8.3 Conclusions and implications

Paper Nations provided an important network for teachers and writers, and especially teachers, who otherwise would not likely be involved in external creative writing partnerships. Teachers and writers flag cost and time as the biggest hurdles to working in creative writing networks and partnerships, and perceptions of these barriers remained similar or worsened during their involvement in Paper Nations. However, this may be because awareness and experience of these barriers became more immediate through involvement in the programme.

Paper Nations should continue its work supporting networks for teachers and writers, and help mitigate the barriers to partnership through sharing guidance on saving time with teachers (for example, sharing resources teachers can use to plan and set up creative writing activities), and inviting teachers and their pupils to externally arranged local events (reducing administrative and organisational burdens).

Paper Nations can support writers 'starting out' by providing access through partnerships to paid opportunities and providing guidance on negotiating fair pay.

## 9 How financially sustainable is the delivery of creative writing?

We asked writers and representatives from writing organisations in Paper Nations' network how financially sustainable they find creative writing (both when working for themselves, and when working with young people). During this intensive study, we spoke to ten individuals with a wide range of experience in and with creative writing, including:

- Freelance writers, whose income in part comes from working with young people, both inside and outside schools;
- Writers working in other, related jobs such as teaching and tutoring, and;
- Employees of creative writing organisations that run or coordinate creative writing activities with young people and adults. These might include creative writing workshops, events, residencies, and training programmes.

### 9.1 What does it mean for creative writing to be 'financially sustainable'?

*As part of an intensive study with Paper Nations, we explored how writers and organisations coordinating creative activities with young people feel about financial sustainability, and what factors help and hinder the financial sustainability of creative writing activities. Writers and writing organisations talk about 'financial sustainability' in terms of a predictable and reliable income, although they caveat this by setting frugal expectations about the sort of living they can make through creative writing. Some writers disagree that the term is useful or relevant.*

#### Predictable, reliable income

Interviewees talked about financial sustainability in terms of access to a predictable, reliable income as they pursue creative writing activities. While generally, interviewees felt sustainability implied this income would be across the medium- or longer-term, many emphasised that shorter-term activities (such as one-off workshops) make an important contribution to their incomes. One freelance creative writing facilitator said that she would not expect her work to be sustainable in the longer-term:

*"I wouldn't expect the help to be long term, if you see what I mean. I think that kind of goes with the territory .... I can't imagine how it could be long-term sustainable."*

Freelance writer

#### Managing expectations

There was an acknowledgement amongst all interviewees that achieving financial sustainability in creative writing is not analogous to becoming financially wealthy. Rather, it is about generating enough income to sustain fulfilling activities, whether personal or collaborative:

*"If you're looking at, 'have I got a 5-bedroom house and a fast car?', well, no. But I'm not interested in those things anyway because I would measure wealth on the quality of life and what it is that a person is able to do in their everyday life that brings them joy. And I think wealth comes from having time to be able to say, 'Okay, I'm going to spend a whole morning writing'."*

Freelance writer

## 'Financial sustainability' is an unhelpful term

Several interviewees questioned the value of 'financial sustainability' as a term. Their main objection – explored in more detail, shortly – is that it misrepresents the purpose of creative writing. One interviewee – the director of a creative writing training programme and network for young people – explained many creative writing projects would never achieve financial sustainability:

*"The project work we do is partly to earn income but it will never make us financially sustainable. It's just a complete red herring."*

Representative from a writing organisation

## 9.2 What factors support financial sustainability in creative writing?

*Writers and writing organisations say that accessing funding from grant providers is crucially important, and that particular types of funding (which take into account the realities of the writing process) are especially important. Developing multiple different revenue streams can help make writing financially sustainable, reducing reliance on any one type of work. Writers say living frugally is important, as is joining professional networks that provide access to support and employment opportunities.*

### 9.2.1 Accessing funding and generating a sustainable income

#### Types of funding

Funding can be difficult to obtain, a point we return to in section 7.3.1. However, writers find the following sorts of funding valuable:

- **Funding providers that are open-minded about the impact a particular piece of work or project might have.** This is especially important with creative writing, the value of which may not be easily measurable or visible for years. For example, one writer explained that:

*"[Often writing does not] give an immediate return [nor] a direct return. The return is often societal and the return might take decades...to release itself, as it were. So if you judge the investment in creative writing and the arts as you do any other investment then you're going to be sorely disappointed. But if you look at it in the bigger picture then actually the time you spend with writers can give an enormous value back."*

Representative from a writing organisation

- **Funding that does not require a writer to obtain match funding as part of their proposal, as the artistic process and output does not necessarily lend itself to this.** For example, one writer said that if "you're wanting to finish a book of poetry, you're not going to find anybody who's going to match fund you to do that."
- **Funding that does not require a writer to immediately engage with a specific audience** (at least during the early stages of the work). Again, the creative 'endeavour' can make it difficult to specify in advance the audiences that might benefit from a piece of work, making it – as one writer put it – "quite difficult to predict whether you're going to engage with an audience until you've finished the work."

## Accessing multiple funding streams

Writers and organisations invariably require multiple strands of funding. This is because any one source of funding is likely to be insufficient to fund everything an individual or organisation wants to achieve. It also spreads the load so that, as one representative from a writing organisation explained, “if any one should fail, the group would hopefully not disappear, it could carry on.”

Asked about the availability of funding, our interviewees’ responses were mixed. For example, while “there are lots of opportunities out there” to secure funding both for individuals and organisations, these opportunities are not necessarily available to everyone, a point we return to shortly.

## Sources of funding and income

Representatives from writing organisations explained that valuable sources of funding include:

- **Funding organisations such as the Arts Council;**
- **Individual donors**, with one interviewee explaining her organisation’s “dream situation” is “somebody who is interested in what we do [saying] ‘Here’s a cheque’”;
- **Schools**, which provide many writers with paid opportunities. However, as we explore shortly, the income available from schools is limited;
- **Partners, including venues**. This support may be in-kind, perhaps involving the donation of a space. This can be achieved on a quid pro quo basis, if a creative writing event will bring an audience to a venue, and;
- **Parents**, although this raises questions about equity of access for young people whose parents cannot afford to provide funding.

Whether or not programmes should charge participants (or their parents) was a contentious issue. Charging inevitably means that not everyone who might benefit from a creative writing service can access it, without some form of subsidy. Yet one interviewee explained that it is not possible to sustain creative writing services without charging for them (contrasting with another interviewee’s suggestion that the whole idea of financially sustainability is a flawed one). Furthermore, he said charging can be beneficial, as it ensures participants’ commitment:

*“There is a thought that everything should be available at no cost and, while I appreciate that’s a nice sentiment, we know from experience that a small modest cost means people feel committed to what you’re doing. And that little bit of money actually, once you add it up with x hundreds of other people, becomes a reasonable sum of money which can help sustain what you do. If we didn’t charge for our groups, we would be running maybe six groups less than we are, 14 groups instead of 20, and that would be a great shame.”*

Representative from a writing organisation

Later in section 7.4 we explore the implications of charging for creative writing activities on young people’s access to these activities.

An important source of income for freelance writers can be their partner’s income. One interviewee said “I have got friends who... have relationships where their partner is the main income earner and they rely on that.”

### 9.2.2 Living frugally

In addition to generating income, how writers live affects their ability to write. Factors that writers we interviewed discussed included:

- Renting rather than buying accommodation, and;
- Keeping tight budgets in both their personal and professional lives.

Writing is a “precarious career to follow”, and necessitates accepting a certain degree of risk and low pay:

*“People who I know who work in the creative industries, whether that's writing or more broadly, [are] not in it for the money. They live more frugally than they might do if they had...a higher paying job.”*

Representative from a writing organisation

### 9.2.3 Joining writers’ networks

Interviewees all talked about the critical role that networks and collaboration play in supporting financial sustainability. This is because networks can allow writers to:

- **Gain efficiencies through sharing ideas, practices and resources** relating to creative writing and teaching;
- **Link with employment opportunities**, and;
- **Discuss the ‘business’ of writing**, including appropriate levels of pay, and “how to pitch and where to pitch”, as one freelance writer put it.

One interviewee said most of the conversations he observes taking place within a writing programme he coordinates “are about opportunities:”

*“I think emerging writers are more likely to realise that fees are payable and you should talk to people about the appropriate level and so on.”*

Representative from a writing organisation

One interviewee said that attending network meetings with teachers was valuable, in terms of helping to hone her practice, and forging links with potential clients.

### 9.2.4 Building a profile

To build their or their organisation’s profile and gain work, our interviewees said it is important to:

- **Attend writing and creative arts events**, which help writers forge new professional relationships;
- **Persevere**, and ‘plug away’ in the face of setbacks, and;
- **Seek out opportunities**, for example by approaching schools rather than waiting to be contacted. For example, two writers said they approached their children’s schools about running workshops, which led to work. One said:

*“Most writers...are out and they’re hustling...they’re negotiating and they’re planning and they’re producing and they’re doing a whole range of other things in order to be able to do the writing that they want to do. ...[They are] more accepting that they can’t just sit and wait for it to happen. They need to go out there and talk to people about what they do.”*

Representative from a writing organisation

Another important dimension to building a profile is communicating with funders and the public. This was only discussed by a couple of interviewees however, suggesting it is not something that all writers are thinking about:



*"We spend a lot of time communicating with the Arts Council and making sure they see the value of what we do. ...So I think if we can convince people that being able to write, tell stories and be articulate is valuable across a whole range of human endeavours, including engineering and health and pharmaceuticals and the automotive industry, then that would help."*

Representative from a writing organisation

### 9.2.5 Training and development

Writers explained that access to training and development supports higher quality work (both in terms of their own writing, and teaching), and consequently higher rates of 'customer' retention. The director of a writers' network said his organisation invests in training writers "in how to work with young people":

*"We expect them to stay with us for quite a few years, and they expect to do that as well. So that helps sustainability because we've got a very stable workforce. ...The people who are participating get exactly what they paid for every month regularly."*

Representative from a writing organisation

### 9.2.6 Working with schools

Working with schools can support the financial sustainability of creative writing by:

- **Providing writers with valuable professional experience.** As one writer put it, "it's a privilege for me to go into schools and work with kids and work out what works", and;
- **Responding to a genuine need.** One representative from a writing organisation explained that creative writing "just doesn't exist in the curriculum any more really." This can mean schools are more willing to work with writers, or that young people actively seek opportunities to join creative writing workshops.

'Success factors' for working with schools include:

- **Schools 'having skin in the game'.** One representative from a writing organisation said that charging schools even a nominal fee for creative writing services (even if they are not covering the full cost) means schools are more likely to take a programme seriously.
- **Working with schools to access other sources of funding.** Many schools cannot afford to pay for creative writing, or they prioritise other work. Therefore writers and organisations said they spend time helping schools cover these costs, either through providing bursaries or through applying for external funding (something the writer or organisation normally needs to coordinate).
- **Goodwill,** from writers, writing organisations, and teachers. This includes writers undertaking projects free of charge or at a loss, and teachers going 'above and beyond' to support creative writing activities in their free time. For reasons we explore in section 7.3.2, while goodwill means activities take place that otherwise would not, it also has downsides as it can put downward pressure on writers' wages.

### 9.2.7 Diversifying projects

All interviewees spoke about the importance of diversifying their work. This can take different forms, including:

- **Undertaking other writing** including magazine articles and educational resources alongside personal writing projects;



- **Teaching and tutoring**, including working on a freelance, part-time or permanent basis in schools and universities, or with writing networks, and;
- **Working in a variety of creative art forms**. One freelance writer explained that, often as part of her writing workshops, she performs oral storytelling.

Diversifying projects can allow for cross-subsidy. For example, two writing organisations said they use popular courses to subsidise less popular (but equally important) work.

### 9.2.8 Efficiency

In order to secure financial sustainability, interviewees talked about the importance of achieving efficiency in their work, relating to:

- **Administration and processes**, including using technology (including websites) to streamline administrative processes such as bookings and payments;
- **Communication with clients**, which in practice can mean having a single point of contact within a school or institution, and;
- **The creative process**, which one writer said is relatively simple to achieve as, other than a laptop, “it’s not like you need to have special equipment.”

### 9.3 What factors inhibit financial sustainability?

*Funding from grant providers is an important income stream for writers and writing organisations, but can be difficult to secure. Furthermore, a lack of coordination among writers means some writers are not sure what their 'value' is, and work for nothing or cheaply, putting downward pressure on many writers' wages. Societal attitudes to the importance of creative writing can reduce demand for writing programmes.*

#### 9.3.1 Difficulty generating sufficient income

Making enough money as a writer or as an organisation running creative writing projects is difficult. Everyone we interviewed said it is difficult to make writing (whether personal, or running programmes) financially viable. Some even said, overall, their work costs them money. Fundamentally, a lot of the work is "very unpredictable", and one writer said "it's nowhere near a proper income."

##### Applying for funding

Applying for funding was a common challenge described by interviewees. Key issues include:

- **Understanding what funding is available and from whom**, including from individual donors and grant providers. This is a particular challenge for writers newer to the profession, but is also something that larger and more established organisations struggle with.
- **Knowledge and confidence to apply for funding**. Again, this is particularly prevalent among less experienced writers, with one freelance writer saying "I haven't really had the confidence to apply for them (grants), because I don't know if I've got enough of a track record publication-wise to make it."
- **The reliability of funding streams;**
- **Finding capacity to apply for funding**. This was something that representatives from creative writing organisations flagged in particular, with one saying her organisation has "to spend a lot of time and effort filling in endless bids":

*"We are always looking for funding, ...and we can spend a lot of our office resource, which should be spent really on delivering fantastic creative writing projects for children, [on] having to chase the money to pay for them."*

Representative from a writing organisation

Another, related challenge is that the skills required to be a good writer, teacher or facilitator are different to those needed to write strong funding applications. One interviewee said:

*"Delivering great workshops for children and young people or creating brilliant work [does not] necessarily correlate to filling in funding applications... I think a lot of people who work in the arts struggle with the frustration of spending time writing funding applications when really what you want to do is be delivering the work."*

Representative from a writing organisation

- **Demonstrating (and predicting) value and impact**. Interviewees from writing organisations problematised the idea of 'impact'. In particular, they said that the impact of creative writing is far-reaching but often diffuse and difficult to assess. They felt that this could make demonstrating the impact of their work difficult. They also worried about

making spurious claims in funding applications (which in extreme cases can put organisations off applying for funding):

*"If I were to promise ... that my work was going to take children and young people off the street, I could get funding, but with the best will in the world I can't promise that my creative writing workshops are going to do that. ...I'm just not prepared to write an application form which is largely going to be fictional in order to persuade [funders]."*

Representative from a writing organisation

A related concern was that the 'impact' some funders seek is financial sustainability. This creates a situation whereby newer or smaller organisations who are further from achieving financial sustainability are less likely to attract funding, in turn making them less likely to achieve sustainability.

- **Shrinking funding pots.** This is straining writers' and organisations' ability to deliver their services.
- **Geography.** Freelance writers in particular said that where they live can limit their access to particular sources of funding. One highlighted bursaries that are available to Welsh writers, but not to writers living in England.

### Working with publishers

Freelance writers talked about the difficulties they experienced working with publishers, because advances and payments are unpredictable and often too low.

### Offering projects to families

Offering projects to families presents opportunities and challenges for writers and writing organisations. Writers said that, frustratingly, the issue is not about demand. Rather it is about:

- Families' desire to commit to creative writing programmes over and above other opportunities (such as holidays or other within- or out-of-school clubs), and;
- Families' abilities to afford the projects (with some asking to pay for them in instalments).

### Working with schools

Schools offer an important potential source of income for writers and writing organisations, although they can be challenging to work with for writers and writing organisations. Schools' shrinking budgets were a prominent concern for interviewees. Writers felt that schools were either less likely to finance creative writing programmes or more likely to prioritise other sorts of programme over and above creative writing. Writers were concerned that schools might prioritise other programmes partly due to a perceived need to prepare pupils for tests in line with a National Curriculum, which they felt does not value creative writing.

Other specific challenges about working with schools that interviewees said affect the financial sustainability of their work included:

- **Working in unsuitable environments, such as small or noisy school spaces.** This could, in turn affect the quality of pupils' experiences;
- **Funders being reluctant to fund work with schools;**
- **Demand from pupils,** who – even when keen on the idea of creative writing – may be siphoned off into other activities or choose other activities (such as football);
- **Schools setting the price parents pay.** One writing organisation found schools cap the amount parents are asked to pay for a writing programme.

- **Maintaining contacts.** Freelance writers and representatives from organisations explained that it is challenging to establish and sustain good working relationships with schools, especially amidst staffing changes.
- **Teachers' capacity.** Writers acknowledged that teachers are often overworked and under-resourced, making them – as one interviewee put it – “much less likely to go ‘Hey, I think we’re going to spend half term in the middle of nowhere in rural Devon, trying to inspire young children to write’.”
- **Demonstrating immediate or narrow impact.** While some writers said schools give them lots of freedom, others explained schools will only commission work where they believe there will be an immediate impact on pupils’ academic outcomes. This curtails what the writer can focus on during the sessions, and reduces a workshop’s wider impact.
- **Schools knowing who to contact.** Several writers said that even if schools want to commission work, they do not always know where to look for writers, leading to missed opportunities.

### 9.3.2 Lack of workforce coordination

A significant challenge facing the work, pay and financial sustainability of creative writers and organisations is a lack of coordination among the writing workforce. Several issues are at play here:

1. **Some writers are prepared to work either for free or a reduced fee. This puts downwards pressure on wages.** This may be because a writer feels that creative writing is valuable and they are therefore prepared to help a school at a reduced cost:

*“I’ve just been asked to go in to do some creative writing training with a couple of schools [and] they can’t afford it. So we’re just going to have to go and do it, but there’s no money in the process. We do it because we passionately believe in creative writing for kids.”*

Representative from a writing organisation

Writers may also do this to gain experience and contacts:

*“I’d say the majority of [writers] are actually doing things off their own bat or just giving up their time because I think they’re used to the mentality or the belief that people do things like this for free because it will lead to something positive.”*

Freelance writer

However, this can set a precedent for low wages or free work, which damages the longer-term earning prospects of writers:

*“A lot of writers I talk to are unaware of their influence on the macro side.... They think only of their situation..., unaware of the fact that if they do a workshop for nothing, eventually that reduces the likelihood of somebody else getting paid in the future, because people get used to the idea that writers do stuff for nothing.”*

Representative from a writing organisation

2. **Not all writers are sure what their rates should be, and can feel uncomfortable negotiating with schools (and other potential clients).** One interviewee reported that he has “lots of conversations with writers about what should they charge to do

[different activities], and we're starting from scratch in most cases." To compound this, people commissioning writers do not know how much to pay. An interviewee explained:

*"No one knows how much a writer is worth, you know. They really don't. They don't know whether it's worth £10 an hour or £100 an hour, and wildly differing payments are made."*

Representative from a writing organisation

Worryingly, the financial pressure writers face combined with a lack of knowledge about what it is reasonable to expect, further weakens writers' contractual negotiating positions:

*"I met a writer recently who had just signed a contract with publishers. It had never crossed her mind to stop and look at that contract and see if it was an effective contract. She just was so excited to have a contract, she just signed it. Now that wasn't her fault and the contract I'm sure is fine, but that's an illustration of the kind of vulnerability in which writers find themselves."*

Representative from a writing organisation

3. **Not all writers have access to networks, support or advice.** One freelance writer said "I feel like I'm trying to find it all out for myself", while another said that there were no easily accessible writers' networks where she lives, which can make her feel like a "lone ranger." With more writers entering the marketplace, several interviewees felt sharing information about fees has become more difficult, even though this is crucial for writers and writing organisations to receive fair payment.
4. **Writers and organisations compete rather than collaborate.** Because money for creative writing is relatively scarce, competition can build for funding. Several interviewees observed that this has bred competition where there used to be collaboration, with individuals and organisations tending to "draw resources into themselves rather than spread resources out."

Interviewees said potential solutions to this could include:

- Unionisation of the writing workforce, and adherence to minimum wages, and;
- The establishment of agencies or brokerage services that could negotiate on writers' behalf.

### 9.3.3 Lack of efficiency

Writers and organisations find the following can be inefficient:

- **Planning activities and making resources,** which can be very time consuming. In essence, "there's a lot of preparation for not enough return", as one freelance writer put it. This takes time away from other activities (such as communicating with schools and other potential customers), and securing the repeat business that would make the investment of time in such planning more worthwhile.
- **Writing and redrafting.** Like planning educational activities, writing itself can be time consuming, and involve substantial redrafting and editing. One freelance writer explained this can make undertaking paid writing commissions inefficient.
- **Responding to customers' needs and circumstances.** Working with clients (and in particular schools) can involve last minute changes to plans, which scupper a writer or organisation's work. One representative from a writing organisation recalled:

*"Cross-country club suddenly changed and half the kids wanted to go to that as well. That kind of thing you've got no control over, and the school don't*

*come and say, 'Oh, this might impact on you.' Or if there's a school trip, I'm never told that some of my group might not be there because they're all out."*

Representative from a writing organisation

### **9.3.4 Attitudes towards creative writing**

A factor inhibiting the sustainability of creative writing is societal assumptions about its value, which in turn reduce demand for creative writing programmes and activities:

*"I think there needs to be a change in mindset about the value of writing, not just in terms of writing novels and poetry but in terms of a society as a whole and the importance in writing for people who work in the engineering sector and so on."*

Representative from a writing organisation

## 9.4 What trade-offs are involved in working towards financial sustainability?

***Securing financial sustainability in creative writing involves trade-offs. Writers and organisations have to make decisions about how to balance finances against securing access for young people.***

Working towards making creative writing financially sustainable involves trade-offs:

***"Having to be financially sustainable means that it has an impact on... what you're trying to do and the integrity of the work. So there might need to be compromises along the way in the design of the project for example."***

Freelance writer

### 9.4.1 Financial sustainability versus addressing needs

Freelance writers and representatives from writing organisations explained that there are trade-offs between running financially viable programmes and addressing the greatest needs. Here, the key trade-offs are in terms of the length of programme or programmes, geographical coverage, and the extent to which everyone who wants to access these programmes can do so.

#### Breadth versus depth of coverage

An interviewee working for a writing organisation explained that they have to trade-off longer term, more targeted work versus more widely accessible but less intense projects:

***"I can spread our activities thinly across the whole of my region and sustain them for hopefully the long term. ...What that means is that there's whole groups of people, young people particularly, who miss out on engaging in creative writing because they aren't close enough to a group or because the group's the wrong age group, or because they just haven't heard about it. We've resisted the urge to go in and serve those young people, not because we don't think they need it, but because if you do that you tend to operate for a short period of time and then walk away again. And the mainstream arts world is full of projects being parachuted into communities, heavily invested, coming complete with press releases and photo opportunities, which last for a short period of time and then disappear."***

Representative from a writing organisation

#### Financial viability versus access

Representatives from other organisations explored the difficult balance between financial sustainability, and access. Both concluded that one invariably comes at the cost of the other:

***"As soon as children and young people have to pay for provision it just gets hard to make it accessible to young people who don't have access to that kind of money."***

Representative from a writing organisation



One interviewee said his organisation had explicitly decided to prioritise access over sustainability. Another reported that their organisation funds bursaries using cross-subsidies, although not all eligible parents use them:

*"We get very little take-up (of our bursaries), and I wonder if that isn't because people don't want to share that information or don't want to have to go through that registration process, so I wonder if we are perhaps losing some of those lower income writers that absolutely should be at the heart of what we're doing."*

Representative from a writing organisation

### **Paying writers well versus access**

Another concern was that efforts to increase access could negatively affect writers, as they make it more difficult to pay them a fair wage:

*"There's the practical thing isn't there of needing to pay artists to work with children and young people, ...and at the same time feeling like it should be completely free for everybody and I think that's the difficulty."*

Representative from a writing organisation

## **9.4.2 Income generation versus equity of access to creative writing**

Because of the difficulties in making a living from creative writing, there is inequity of opportunity in becoming a writer. Interviewees noted several emerging trends among creative writers:

- Older and retired people can more easily afford to write:

*"There is a rump of people who have got some economic stability and possibly some spare cash in the way they didn't have when they were in their twenties. ...It's probably less affordable for people who are in their twenties."*

Representative from a writing organisation

- There is increasing pressure to obtain qualifications including Masters degrees and doctorates. Because an increasing number of universities (and other providers) offer creative writing programmes and qualifications, several interviewees talked about creative writing 'qualification inflation'. That is, an expectation that creative writers will have a formal qualification.

*"Increasingly there is an expectation that writers will have gone through an MA programme, and then even more now a PhD programme. ...We are creating barriers to entry for the marketplace by demanding that people have gone through those.... I mean, in the long term that is a real barrier to entry. That will mean that the writing world would be populated exclusively by those who've been able to afford to professionalise themselves through the higher education sector."*

Representative from a writing organisation



Furthermore, this creates an expectation among potential clients such as schools that writers will (and should) have formal qualifications, inhibiting writers without such qualifications from finding paid work.

- We spoke to two writers with young families, who said they find the pressure of generating income and paying for childcare can inhibit their ability to work.

### 9.4.3 Authenticity versus conformity

Interviewees also talked about a trade-off between writing authentically (whether for themselves, or helping others to do so), and pressure to 'conform' with funders' or clients' requirements:

***"I might want to do a project in a school that is shaped entirely around a creative agenda but needs to be shaped differently in terms of what the school will pay for, for example, or what a funder might pay for."***

Representative from a writing organisation

Instances where this can arise can include pressure to:

- Write something 'saleable', versus writing that, as one freelance writer put it "you just think is worth writing for a different reason";
- Produce an end-product, versus focusing on the writing and creative process, and;
- Narrow the ambition or creative scope of a project in response to funding requirements:

***"I'm sure that the reality is that [funding does] affect which projects go ahead and which ones frankly don't because we can't find the funding or the match funding that we need in order to deliver it. So it is having an impact on creativity, definitely."***

Representative from a writing organisation

Narrowing the scope of a project can also occur when writers and organisations work with schools, where, as one freelance writer suggested, "everything has to hook into the National Curriculum". Consequently, "if they did want me to come in and they were going to pay then how would it tick all the boxes that they need ticked?" This can be frustrating if it detracts from the process of learning about the authentic process of creative writing, as opposed to writing more instrumentally.

For organisations, this can mean making tough decisions about which programmes to run. One interviewee explained that her organisation would like to run many more niche courses, but that it is constrained by the costs and low demand for something which is, by definition, niche.

### 9.4.4 Investment in one's own writing, versus other projects

This was widely discussed during the interviews. Generally, interviewees felt all their work had value, although some saw taking on additional work (such as running workshops with schools) as intrinsically valuable, while others saw it more as a means to an end so they can afford occasionally to pursue more personal creative projects.

Unfortunately, the need to generate income can detract from writers' freedom to pursue their own projects:

***"The two days at school are my bread and butter. I do 'write club' because I really enjoy it and I love working with other writers and that generates some income, but then I have to take on educational writing to fund time"***

*and space for creative writing, so the biggest challenge for me is finding time.”*

Freelance writer

However, other writers talked about the need to publish their own work before being able to access the jobs market, creating a situation whereby they felt locked into financially unstable work.

## 9.5 What are the implications for writers and writing organisations?

***Despite the financial pressures faced by writers and writing organisations, most people working as (or with) creative writers feel compelled to continue doing so, driven by a strong sense of purpose.***

### **Most writers want to stay, impelled by their passion and sense of purpose**

Around two thirds of interviewees said they would stay involved in creative writing, because of their passion for writing, and the enjoyment they get from working with young people:

***"I believe strongly in [creative writing's] transformative possibilities for young people."***

Representative from a writing organisation

However, around a third of the people we interviewed were less certain, in part because of precarious finances, and also because of the challenges of working with schools and parents. As one respondent put it "a smoother path would be nicer."

## 9.6 Conclusions and implications

Achieving financial sustainability is a huge challenge for writers and writing organisations, with a number of factors making this difficult. Writers' lack of certainty about their 'value' and abilities to negotiate are exacerbated by a lack of access to professional networks which could provide this information and support.

Organisations supporting writers should:

- Set guidelines for writers' fees;
- Raise awareness among writers about the existing networks available that can provide them with professional support, and;
- Discourage writers from working for free or too cheaply.

## 10 How confident do teachers and writers feel teaching creative writing?

### 10.1 Teachers' confidence

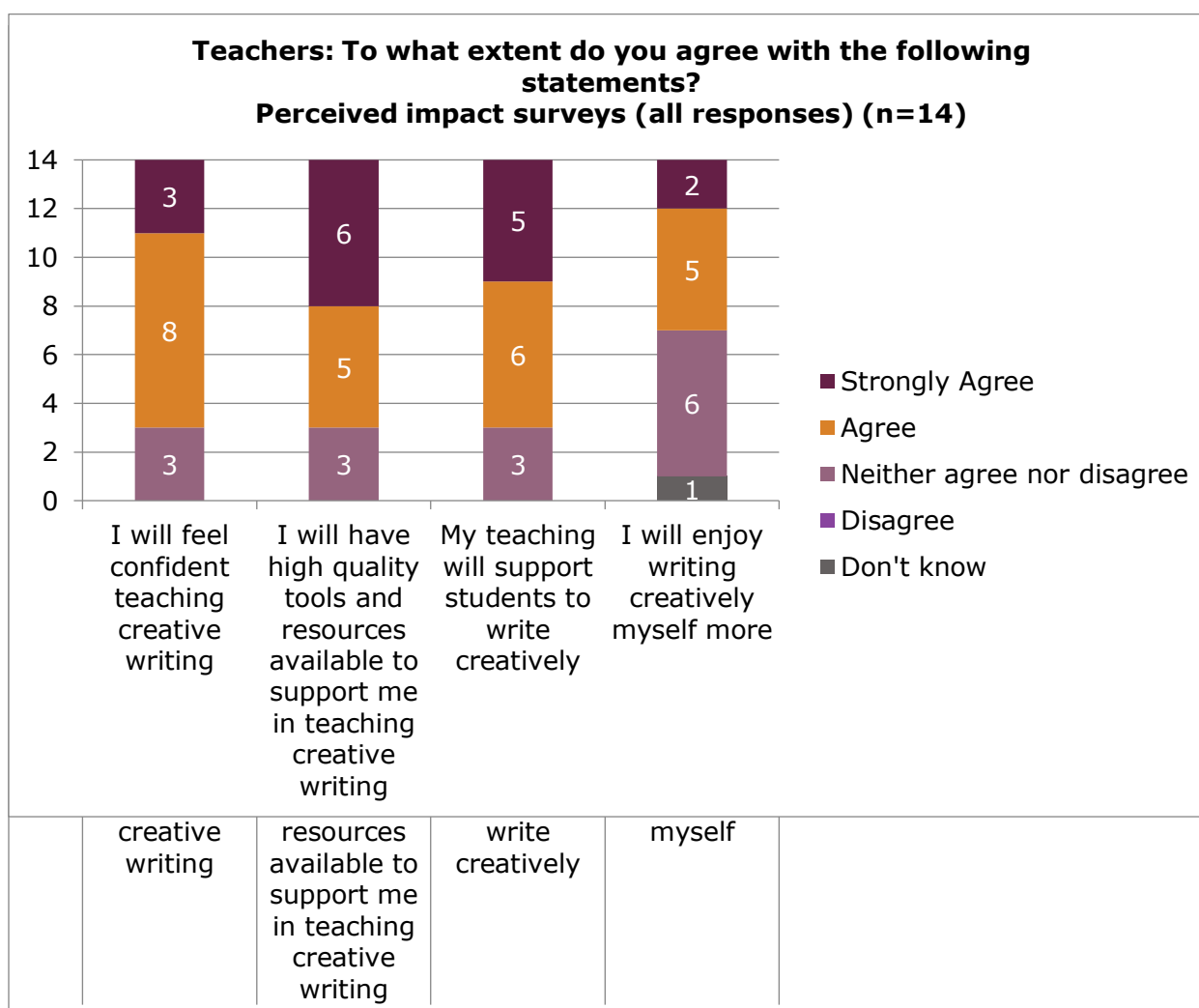
*Paper Nations appeared to enhance teachers' confidence in teaching creative writing and their access to quality tools and resources. It had less influence over teachers' enjoyment of creative writing, although this is based on a very small sample.*

In their endpoint survey responses following their involvement in Paper Nations, and in comparison with their baseline responses, a higher number of teachers reported feeling:

- Confident teaching creative writing;
- Assured that their teaching supports pupils' creative writing, and;
- That they had access to high quality tools and resources.

This is consistent with teachers' responses in the perceived impact surveys (see below), although both are based on very low numbers of respondents.

Paper Nations appeared to influence teachers' enjoyment of creative writing less, although teachers' enjoyment was high from the outset.

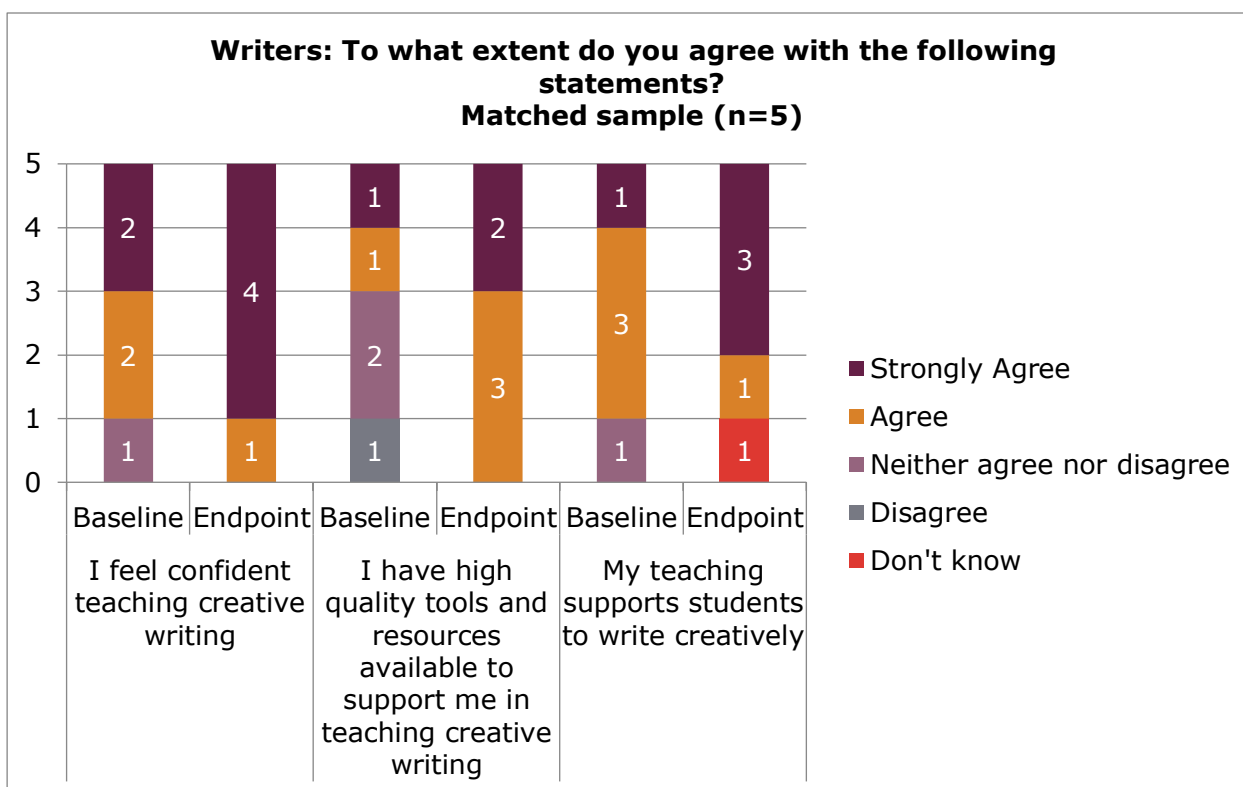




## 10.2 Writers' confidence

***Like teachers, writers were more likely to report feeling confident teaching creative writing following their involvement in Paper Nations, although this is based on a small sample size.***

Mirroring teachers' results, writers reported feeling more confident in relation to their teaching and ability to support students, having participated in Paper Nations (although this is also based on a very low number of respondents):



## 10.3 Conclusions and implications

Involvement in Paper Nations seemed beneficial in terms of teachers' and writers' confidence, although these conclusions are based on very small samples.

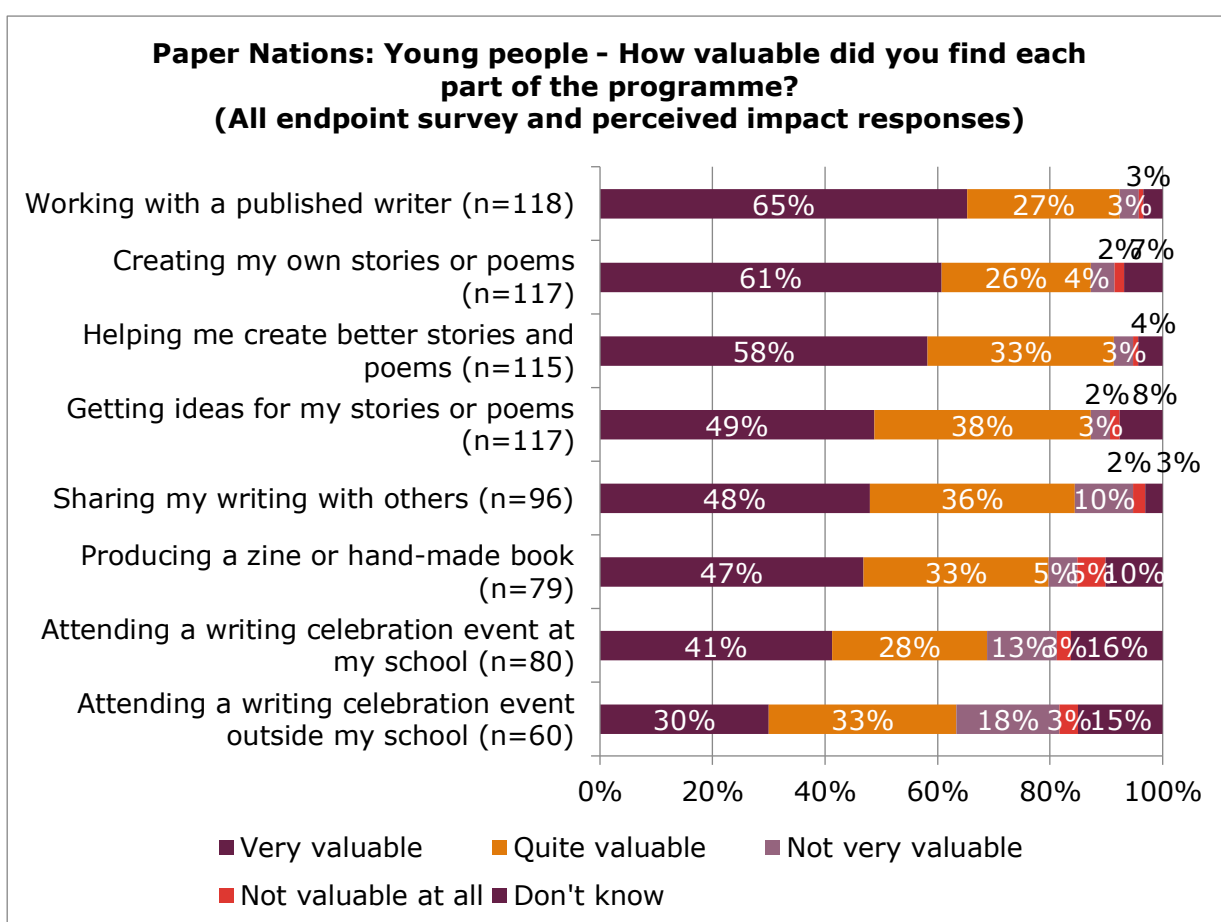
Paper Nations should continue to work with and support teachers and writers with different levels of prior experience in teaching creative writing.

## 11 What were young people's experiences of different Paper Nations activities?

### 11.1 How valuable did young people find different types of activities?

*Young people involved in Paper Nations' programmes and activities found working with published writers especially valuable. They found getting support on developing their writing – in terms of ideas generation, and the writing itself – useful.*

Young people found working with a published writer valuable, and had more mixed feelings about attending creative writing events:



Asked what the best thing about their involvement in Paper Nations was, pupils highlighted:

- **The freedom they experienced**, and how this helped them formulate ideas and boost their confidence when writing creatively:

*"It showed me that if I don't know what to write or I have ran out of ideas, it's okay to write something totally random and it will be even more fun!"*

Young person's survey response

- **Working with published writers, and co-creating work:**

*"[The best thing about Paper Nations was] getting to meet an experienced poet and work alongside him to create beautiful pieces of work."*

Young person's survey response

- **Participating in novel and unusual activities:**

*"[The best thing about Paper Nations was] I got to walk around the village and sketch."*

Young person's survey response

Many young people said their confidence (in writing and in general) had grown and provision of more activities was flagged as an area that would improve the programme further still.

## 11.2 Conclusions and implications

Young people find working with professional writers a particularly valuable part of their involvement with Paper Nations. Pupils find structured support in developing their ideas and writing important, and enjoy publishing their writing.

Young people involved in Paper Nations as part of CWiS talked about how these programmes and activities were valuable in terms of giving them freedom, and the opportunity to participate in novel and unusual activities.

Paper Nations should continue to provide opportunities for pupils to work with writers, and to participate in activities that might not be supported during school writing lessons (including those emphasising creative freedom).



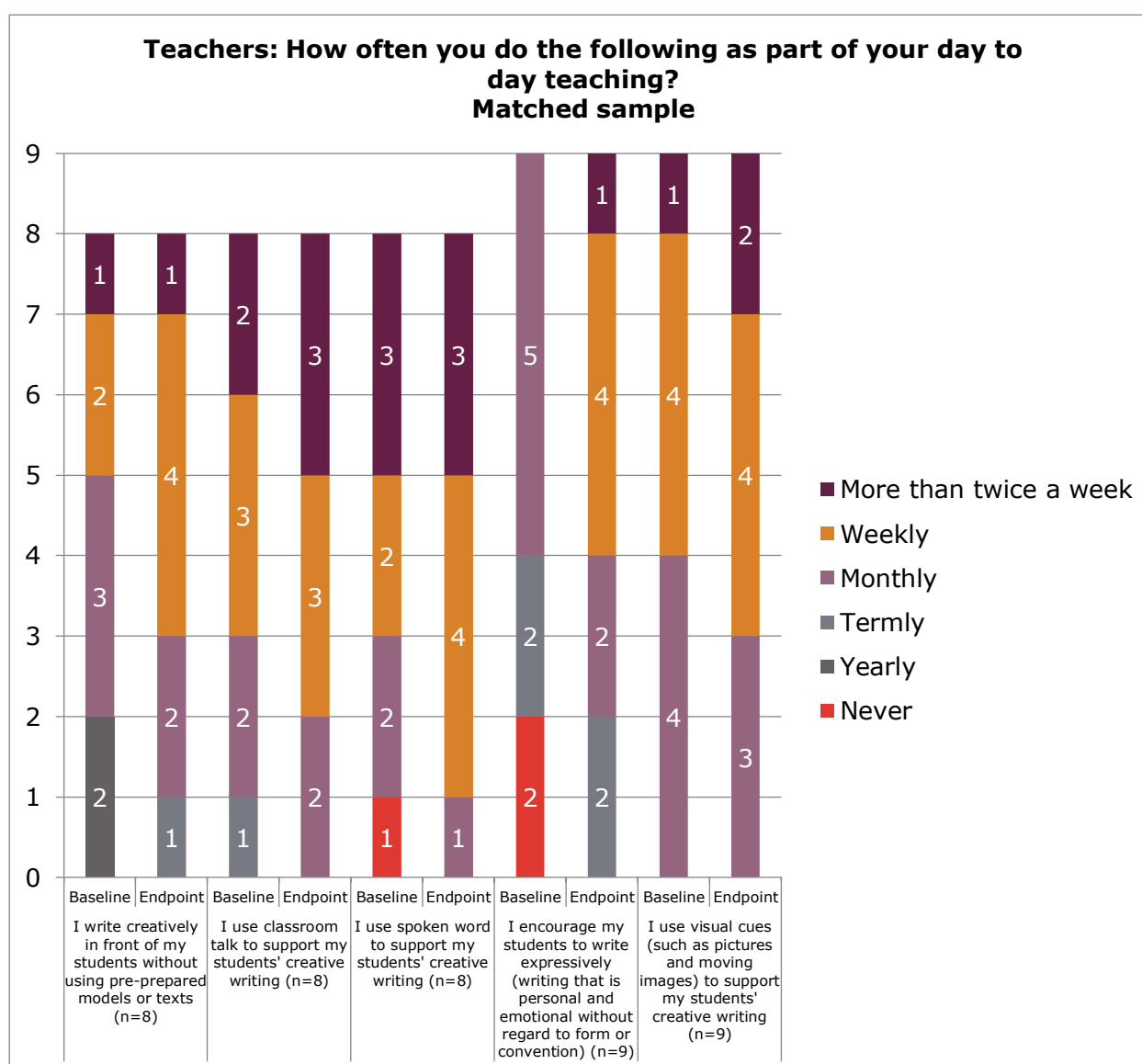
## 12 How do teachers and writers teach creative writing?

### 12.1 What strategies do teachers use when teaching creative writing?

***Paper Nations appeared to influence teachers' practice, with teachers reporting increased use of the strategies identified in the CWiS surveys.***

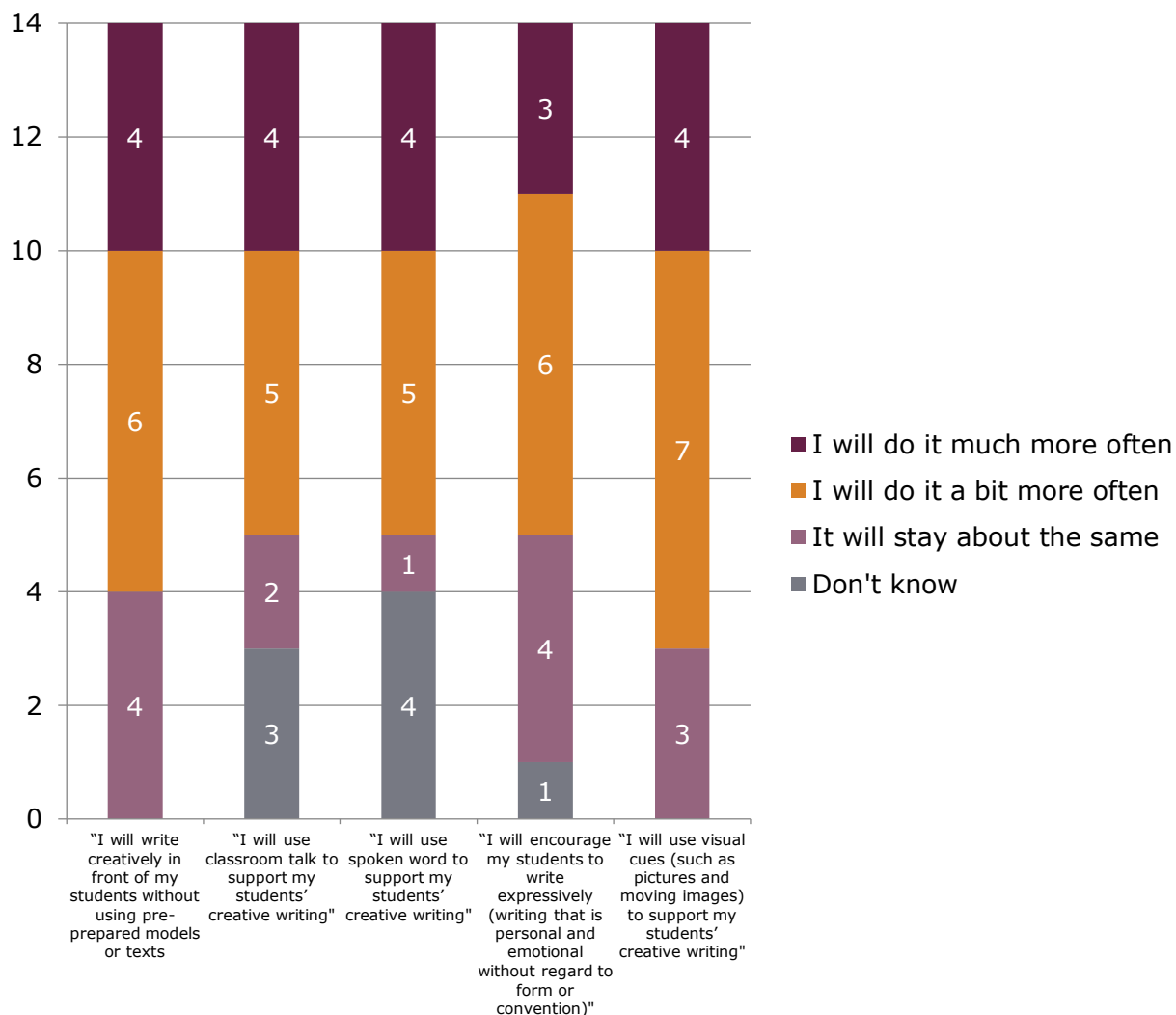
Paper Nations appeared to influence teachers' practice, with teachers saying they used the practices identified in the CWiS surveys more frequently by the end of their involvement in the programmes and activities. Teachers reported writing creatively in front of their students, using classroom talk to support students' writing, and encouraging students to write expressively more regularly, in contrast with the baseline responses. This is based on a very low number of responses.

This aligns with teachers' responses to the perceived impact surveys, in which they said they would adopt the practices more regularly during their teaching following their involvement in a Paper Nations programme or activity (see below).



**Teachers: As a result of your involvement in this session/programme, if at all do you think your use of each of the following teaching practices will change?**

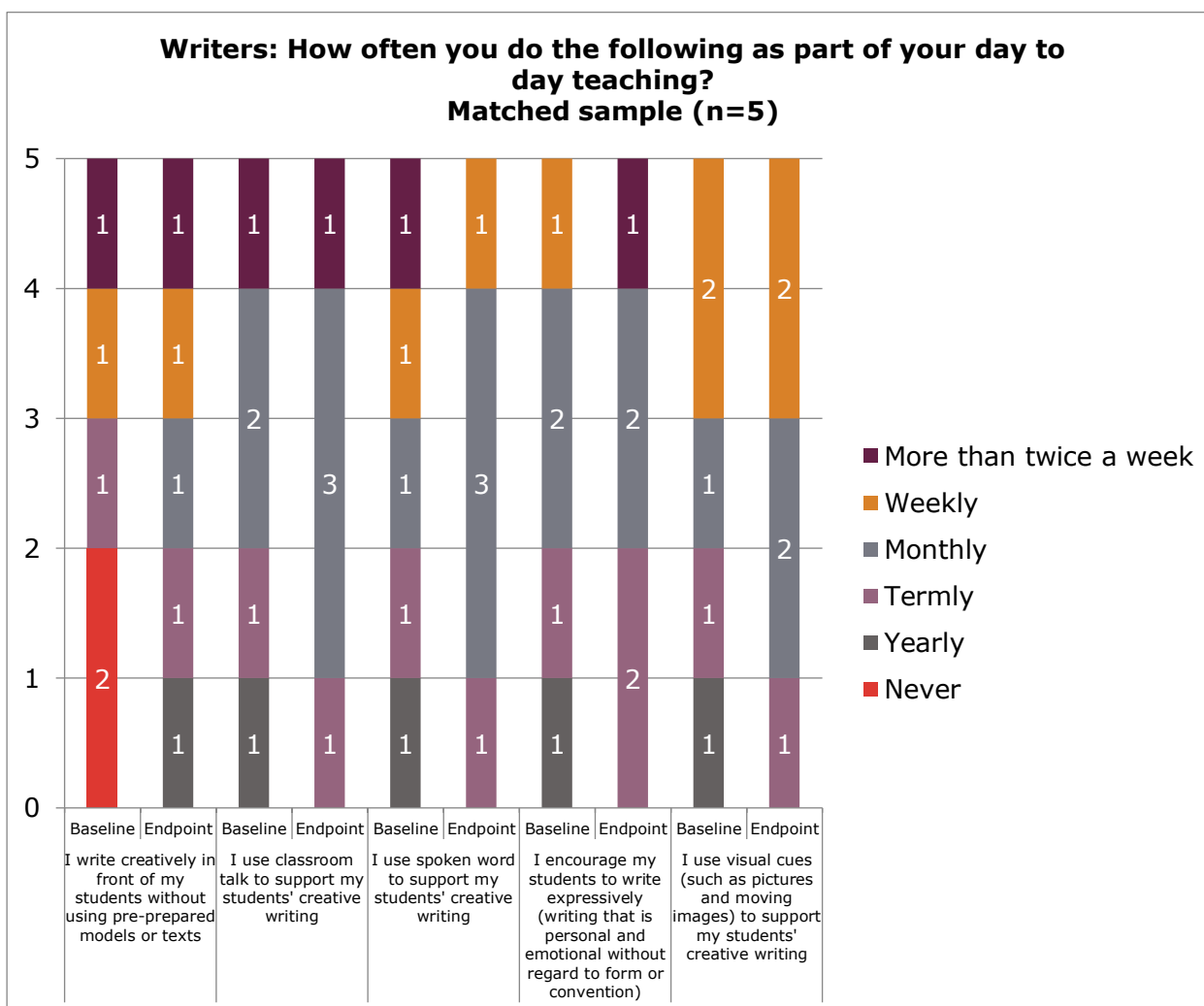
**Perceived impact surveys (n=14)**



## 12.2 What strategies do writers use when teaching creative writing?

*Paper Nations appeared to influence writers' practice less, although this may be because writers felt more confident in these techniques to begin with.*

In comparison with teachers, the influence Paper Nations appears to have had on writers' teaching practice was more muted. While this is based on a small sample size (n=5), it may reflect the fact writers felt more confident teaching creative writing to begin with.



## 12.3 Conclusions and implications

Paper Nations encouraged some of the teachers involved in its CWiS programmes and activities to adopt certain teaching strategies more frequently as part of their regular practice. This was less obvious with writers, although the sample sizes were small, and writers may have felt more confident in these approaches to begin with.

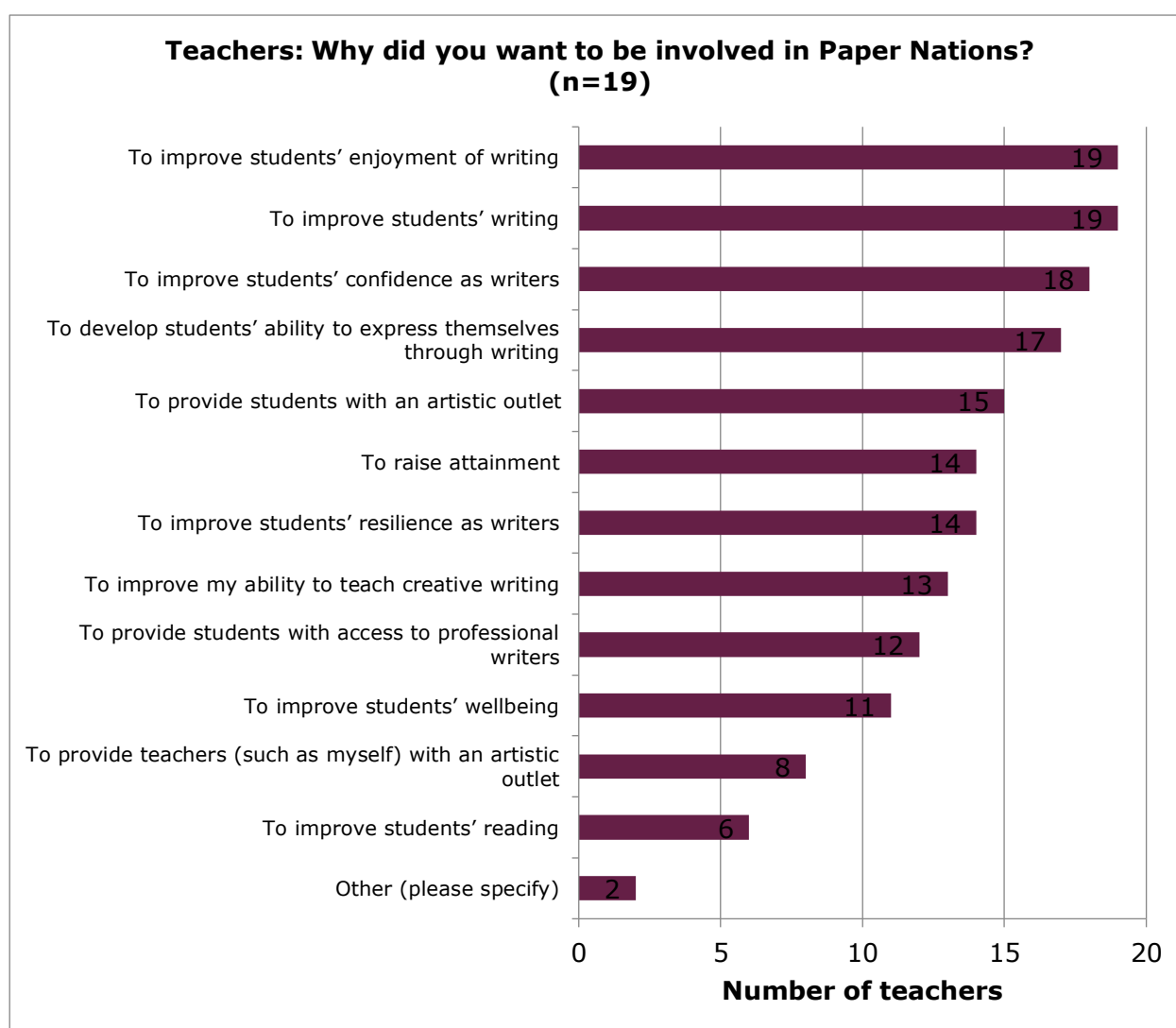
Paper Nations should continue to provide support – including by modelling creative writing teaching techniques, and sharing of tools and resources, to help teachers and writers grow their practice. This should happen regardless of teachers' previous levels of experience or confidence.

## 13 What were teachers' and writers' motivations for being involved in CWiS, and what impact did CWiS programmes and activities have?

### 13.1 Why did teachers want to be involved in Paper Nations?

*Teachers wanted to be involved in Paper Nations to boost pupils' enjoyment of creative writing and confidence as writers.*

The primary reason why teachers wanted to be involved in Paper Nations was to positively shape pupils' experiences of creative writing, in terms of pupils' enjoyment of writing, and confidence and capacity as writers. Teachers were relatively less motivated about gaining an artistic outlet themselves.<sup>13</sup>

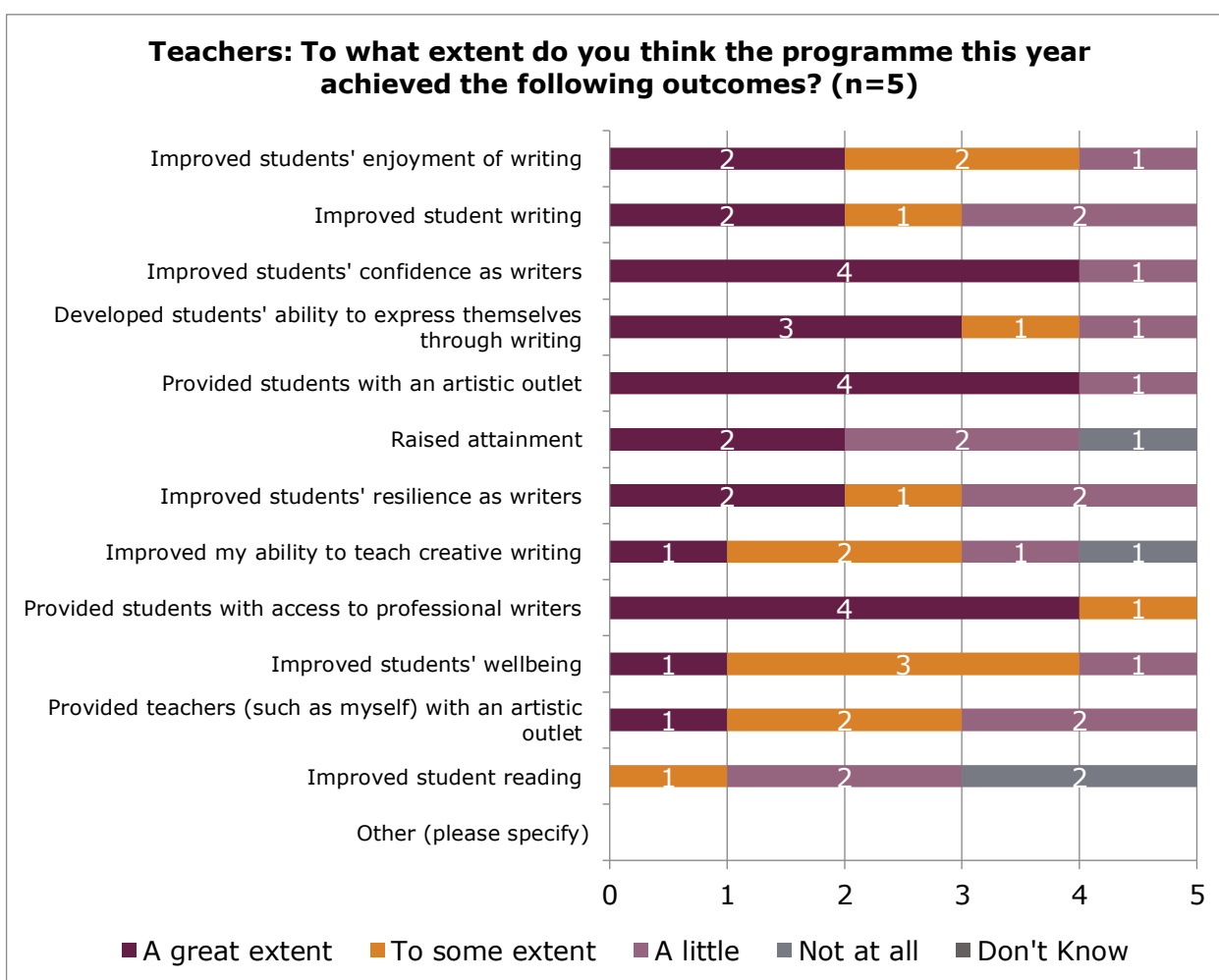


<sup>13</sup> The graph combines teachers' baseline (n=5), one-off (n=2) and programme (n=12) survey responses.

## 13.2 What impact do teachers feel Paper Nations had?

**Teachers felt Paper Nations was most effective in relation to its work boosting pupils' capacity and confidence as writers, as well as their enjoyment of creative writing. These were the areas that most mattered to teachers to begin with. There was therefore a good alignment between impact and desired goals.**

Teachers said they felt Paper Nations had been most successful in boosting pupils' confidence as writers, providing pupils with access to professional writers and giving them an artistic outlet. While a small sample size makes drawing conclusions challenging, generally teachers said Paper Nations had been effective in relation to the areas identified as reasons for becoming involved in the programme in the first place. This was the case specifically with regards to pupils' ability and experiences as writers.<sup>14</sup>



Teachers also provided qualitative feedback in their survey responses on their involvement with Paper Nations. These comments aligned with their quantitative responses, with teachers emphasising the role Paper Nations had played in providing an artistic outlet and building pupils' confidence as writers:

**"Children enjoyed working with someone different with more fluid creativity."**  
Teacher involved in Paper Nations

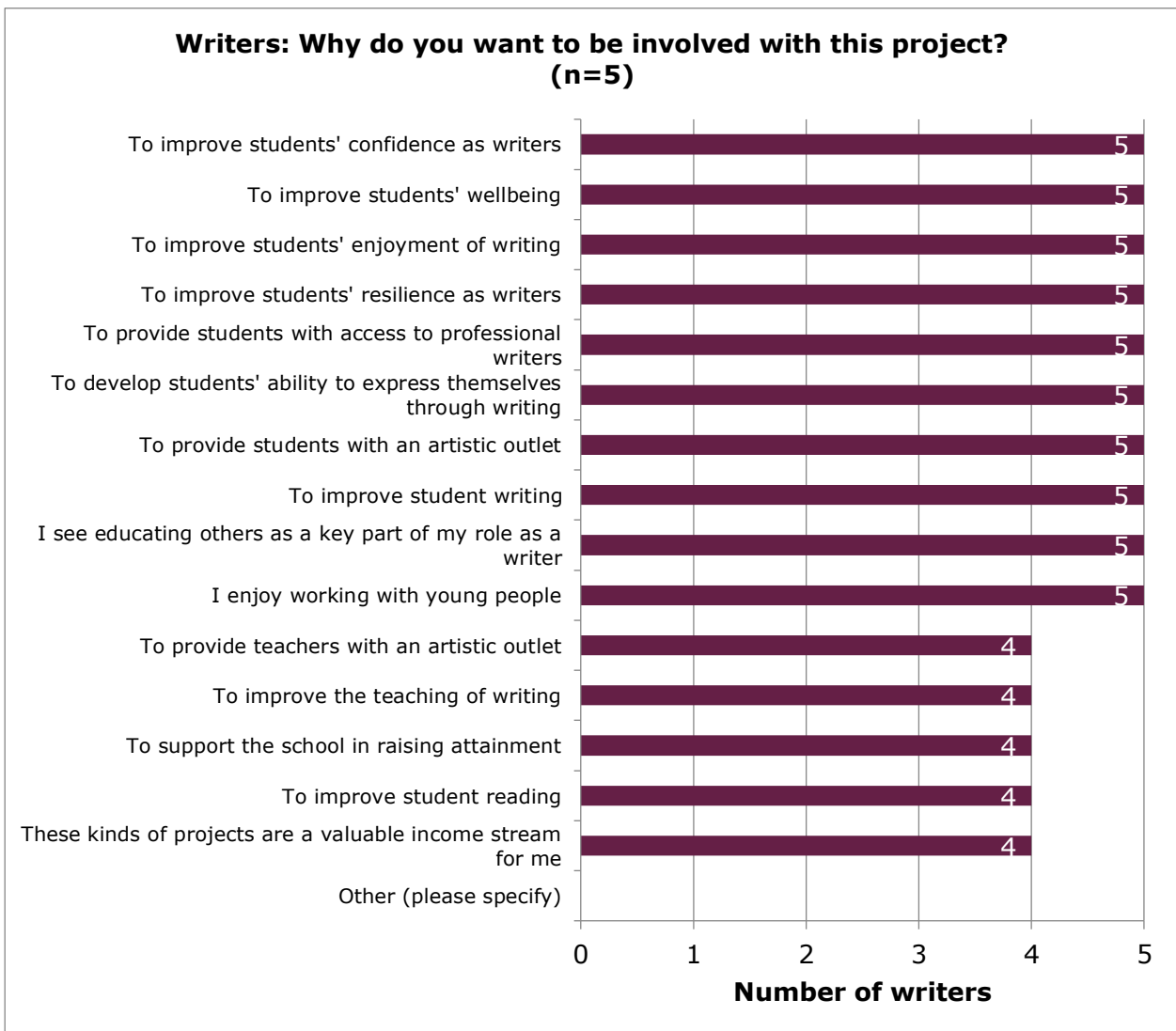
<sup>14</sup> There is no information from the perceived impact surveys about this.

### 13.3 Why did writers want to be involved?

***Writers primarily became involved in Paper Nations because they enjoy working with young people and want to develop young people's creative writing.***

A small sample size makes drawing conclusions about writers' motivations for working with Paper Nations challenging. However, taking into account findings from the Intensive Study (outlined in section 4.6, above) alongside the survey results (below), it is clear they have multiple motivations, including:

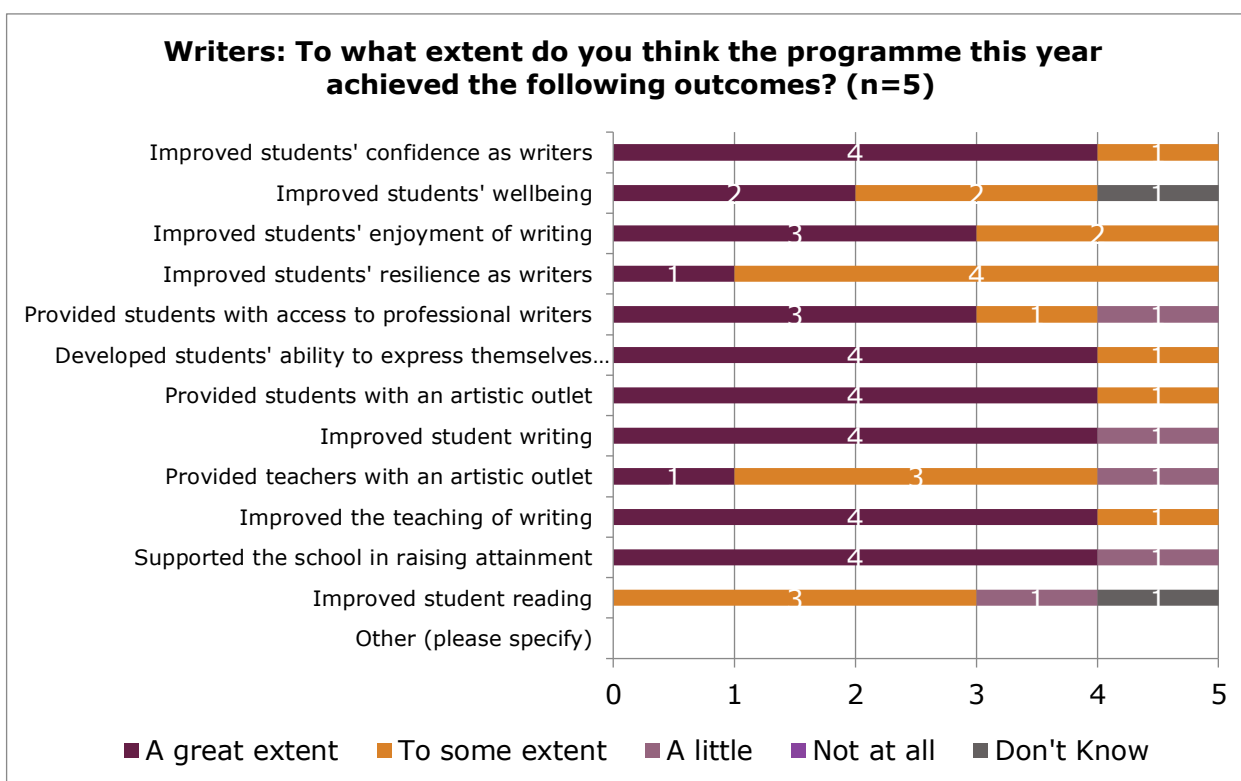
- Improving young people's experiences of creative writing and ability as writers;
- Supporting young people's wider development and wellbeing, and;
- Securing income.



## 13.4 What impact did writers feel Paper Nations had?

***Like teachers, writers felt Paper Nations had helped to develop pupils' confidence and ability as writers, their enjoyment of writing, and pupils' wider artistic and personal development.***

Like teachers, writers said that Paper Nations' work as part of the CWiS programme had supported improvements in pupils' confidence and capacity as writers, enjoyment of writing, and artistic development. A small sample size (n=5) means these findings should be treated as indicative only, although they do align with some of the benefits highlighted by writers in the Writer Identities Intensive Study in section 4.6, above.



When we asked what had been important about Paper Nations' programmes and activities, writers' responses were similar to teachers', highlighting the impact on pupils' access to artistic outlets, ability to express themselves, and confidence as writers:

***"Masses of great ideas and experience picked up from fellow students; increased confidence in the fact that what I'm offering is important to students and important in the sense of passing on the torch to others (e.g., scout leaders) in encouraging young people to write."***

Writer involved in Paper Nations

## 13.5 Conclusions and implications

Writers and teachers wanted to get involved with Paper Nations primarily in order to boost young people's confidence and skills as creative writers. Generally, practitioners felt this is where the programmes have had the most impact, and so this may be where we could expect Paper Nations generate most impact in the future.

## **14 Conclusions and implications**

### **14.1 Pupils and their characteristics**

Over a quarter of the pupils involved in Paper Nations' CWiS programmes and activities were eligible for pupil premium funding. Most pupils were selected to take part by teachers, and in future Paper Nations should encourage teachers to actively select disadvantaged pupils and those with little prior engagement in creative writing to participate.

### **14.2 How do young people, teachers and writers feel about creative writing?**

Young people, teachers and writers all emphasise the importance of creative writing in terms of the fun it provides, and space to explore one's own and others' feelings. While teachers and writers see creative writing as an essential part of young people's education, this is less in terms of links with academic achievement, and more in terms of the wider personal, social and emotional benefits it offers.

Writers involved in Paper Nations highlight the benefits of having space and structure to generate ideas, reflect on one another's writing, and engage in the process (rather than focusing purely on output).

Paper Nations should therefore maintain its focus on process and ideas generation, while also ensuring participants who want to have the opportunity to work towards sharing their writing publicly.

### **14.3 How engaged are young people and their teachers in creative writing?**

Young people report writing more frequently following their involvement in Paper Nations. Those who initially wrote less frequently participated more often by the end of the programme.

This may indicate that Paper Nations can engage young people who might not otherwise participate in creative writing, and should work with its partner schools to ensure all pupils – especially those who might not otherwise try creative writing in their free time – to participate in its activities.

### **14.4 Of what networks are teachers and writers a part?**

Paper Nations provided an important network for teachers and writers, and especially teachers, who otherwise would not likely be involved in external creative writing partnerships.

Teachers and writers flag cost and time as the biggest hurdles to working in creative writing networks and partnerships, and perceptions of these barriers remained similar or worsened during their involvement in Paper Nations. However, this may be because awareness and experience of these barriers became more immediate through involvement in the programme.

Paper Nations should continue its work supporting networks for teachers and writers, and help mitigate the barriers to partnership through sharing guidance on saving time with



teachers (for example, sharing resources teachers can use to plan and set up creative writing activities), and inviting teachers and their pupils to externally arranged local events (reducing administrative and organisational burdens).

Paper Nations can support writers 'starting out' by providing access through partnerships to paid opportunities and providing guidance on negotiating fair pay.

## 14.5 How financially sustainable is the delivery of creative writing?

Achieving financial sustainability is a huge challenge for writers and writing organisations, with a number of factors making this difficult. Writers' lack of certainty about their 'value' and abilities to negotiate are exacerbated by a lack of access to professional networks which could provide this information and support.

Organisations supporting writers should:

- Set guidelines for writers' fees;
- Raise awareness among writers about the existing networks available that can provide them with professional support, and;
- Discourage writers from working for free or too cheaply.

## 14.6 How confident do teachers and writers feel teaching creative writing?

Involvement in Paper Nations seemed beneficial in terms of teachers' and writers' confidence, although these conclusions are based on very small samples. Paper Nations should continue to work with and support teachers and writers with different levels of prior experience in teaching creative writing.

## 14.7 What were young people's experiences of different Paper Nations activities?

Young people find working with professional writers a particularly valuable part of their involvement with Paper Nations. Pupils find structured support in developing their ideas and writing important, and enjoy publishing their writing.

Young people involved in Paper Nations as part of CWiS talked about how these programmes and activities were valuable in terms of giving them freedom, and the opportunity to participate in novel and unusual activities.

Paper Nations should continue to provide opportunities for pupils to work with writers, and to participate in activities that might not be supported during school writing lessons (including those emphasising creative freedom).

## 14.8 How do teachers and writers teach creative writing?

Paper Nations encouraged some of the teachers involved in its CWiS programmes and activities to adopt certain teaching strategies more frequently as part of their regular practice. This was less obvious with writers, although the sample sizes were small, and writers may have felt more confident in these approaches to begin with.

Paper Nations should continue to provide support including by modelling creative writing teaching techniques, and sharing of tools and resources, to help teachers and writers grow their practice. This should happen regardless of teachers' previous levels of experience or confidence.

#### 14.9 What were teachers' and writers' motivations for being involved in CWiS, and what impact did CWiS programmes and activities have?

Writers and teachers wanted to get involved with Paper Nations primarily in order to boost young people's confidence and skills as creative writers. Generally, practitioners felt this is where the programmes have had the most impact, and so this may be where we could expect Paper Nations to generate most impact in the future.

## 15 Appendices

### 15.1 Overview of all survey responses

These figures represent survey responses with duplicate responses removed. Where an individual submitted two or more responses to one survey 'type', the earliest baseline and latest endpoint was kept for the purposes of calculating the totals, below.

What was the survey type?	Who was surveyed?	How many responses?	From how many schools?*	From which years?
Baseline survey	Young people	411	16	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 338 from 2016/17.</li> <li>• 73 from 2017/18.</li> </ul>
	Teachers	23	17	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 20 from 2016/17.</li> <li>• 3 from 2017/18.</li> </ul>
	Writers	16	~3 (some not given)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 15 from 2016/17.</li> <li>• 1 from 2017/18.</li> </ul>
Endpoint survey	Young people	214	7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 178 from 2016/17.</li> <li>• 36 from 2017/18.</li> </ul>
	Teachers	10	~8 (some not known)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 8 from 2016/17.</li> <li>• 2 from 2017/18.</li> </ul>
	Writers	6	Not given	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• All 6 from 2016/17.</li> </ul>
'One-off' perceived impact survey	Young people	59	~9 (some not known)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 26 from 2016/17.</li> <li>• 33 from 2017/18.</li> </ul>
	Teachers	2	2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Both from 2017/18.</li> </ul>
	Writers	1	Not given	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 1 from 2016/17.</li> </ul>
'Programme' perceived impact survey	Young people	126	7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 5 from 2016/17.</li> <li>• 121 from 2017/18.</li> </ul>
	Teachers	11	~5 (some not given)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• All 11 from 2017/18.</li> </ul>

\*This is the number of schools given by respondents. The true number is higher, as some respondents did not list the schools in which they work.

## 15.2 Overview of Paper Nations' partners<sup>15</sup>

Paper Nations' three key partners during the Creative Writing in Schools programme were:

### 15.2.1 The Bath Spa University Research Centre for Transnational Creativity and Education

The Research Centre for Transcultural Creativity and Education (TRACE) is a strategic research centre at Bath Spa University that investigates and maps creativity across cultural borders. Our mission is to research and support the formation of new knowledge across cultures of creativity and lifelong learning.

Working collaboratively, we do this by facilitating creation, fostering co-production, and creating channels for celebrating innovation across local, national and transnational arenas and between the university and the wider cultural sector.

Led by Professor Bambo Soyinka, TRACE activities build on our research into writing communities, engagement, and cycles, helping to incubate, grow, and connect a community of support for researchers as writers and storytellers more widely, with creative storytelling and cultural exchange at the heart of what we do.

TRACE recently launched the *StoryFoundry*, a sister initiative to Paper Nations. *StoryFoundry* is a creative research agency and consultancy unit with a mission to use narrative and data driven research methods to support its partners, clients and members to create and evaluate innovative and change making projects.

### 15.2.2 Bath Festivals

Bath Festivals is a charity that brings some of the finest international musicians, speakers and writers to entertain audiences in the beautiful venues and spaces of the World Heritage City of Bath. By creating innovative and diverse programmes, their festivals inspire and provide unique experiences for residents and visitors to Bath.

### 15.2.3 National Association of Writers in Education (NAWE)

NAWE's mission is to further knowledge, understanding and enjoyment of Creative Writing and to support good practice in its teaching and learning at all levels. NAWE was one of the central partners in Paper Nations' 2016-18 programme and is a source of continual support and expertise. In 2019-21, they will continue to feed into our research, enabling the production of resources and initiatives which are relevant to contemporary writers.

Over the last few years, we focused on increasing creative writing opportunities for children and young people. Building on our success and the partnerships we forged, we are now focusing on the themes of diversity and innovation, launching our Writing for All programme for people of all ages and backgrounds.

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<sup>15</sup> This section was written by Paper Nations.

## 15.3 About the Paper Nations Creative Writing in Schools Programme

The Creative Writing in Schools (CWIS) scheme sought to combat a lack of high-quality creative writing opportunities for pupils within school curriculums, with the aim of understanding and removing barriers to engagement with creative writing. Paper Nations' approach involved a creative programme of research in action, led by Professor Bambo Soyinka. The primary objective of Paper Nations' CWIS research was to create and establish adaptable and replicable models for sustaining a culture of writing for young people. This entailed a programme of action research led by Professor Soyinka that addressed the following questions:

**Phase One:** What are the best pedagogical approaches to help creative writing educators to increase inclusivity and engagement within schools? Can we create evidence-based resources that encapsulate best practice in inclusive culture for writing education?

**Phase Two:** Are these pedagogies transferable to lifelong community learning settings?

**Phase Three:** Can we adapt these pedagogies to online spaces? How can our pedagogies be used and adapted to support the most isolated or marginalized?

Soyinka and the Paper Nations team used a broad action research methodology. The process began with a series of interactive community workshops (including the *Writing Ambassadors* Scheme and action research programme) which introduced educators, facilitators, writers and curators to different models for writer development. Soyinka invited participants to experiment with these, subsequently embedding findings into collaborative works. Soyinka then shared findings with teachers/facilitators to co-develop new pedagogical approaches, highlighting the importance of writer-facilitators 'accompanying writers' on their journey.

In phase one of the research, Soyinka used a systematic process of grounded analysis and identified a pool of 'sensitising concepts'. These were later distilled into the *Dare to Write?* Model. Findings highlighted the importance of material practices and social actor networks for inclusive writer development. In phase two, Soyinka created *The Writer's Cycle* pedagogy, making intuitive writing 'modes' more explicit and accessible for adaptation across contexts. Challenging formal education's emphasis on individuals, she found that pedagogical approaches that emphasise connection and community result in more inclusive writing environments. In phase three, Soyinka adapted her pedagogy to virtual environments to facilitate greater inclusivity.

In addition to co-produced work with schools, writers and teachers at the local level, Professor Soyinka and the Paper Nations team also conducted a national 'Call for Evidence'. Gathering responses from over 700 writers and writer-facilitators, the result of this survey is *The Writer's Cycle*. The Cycle also draws from and distils the *Dare to Write?* model.

Dissemination was ongoing throughout. *The Writer's Cycle* is available via NAWÉ's website and reached wider audiences through a programme of creative interventions, including a series of new festivals, after school clubs, films and digital resources demonstrating how writing pedagogies can be adapted to specific community needs to increase participation in arts education, even when people are isolated.

Paper Nations also gathered and analysed evidence about the gaps and obstacles for educators and writers who want to support young people. As the CfEY report outlines, without resources and financial support, writers, teachers and organisations doing good work cannot continue. To tackle this challenge, Paper Nations will be producing a series of briefing papers which draw from our research into what helps and what obstructs the ability

of writers and educators to sustain support for young writers which is grounded in the values of exploration, play and inclusivity.

In short, the Paper Nations Creative Writing in Schools programme resulted in the production of several research-informed outputs, all of which emerged from co-created action research projects with writers, schools and communities. Each output is intended to have a value in its own right, and a life beyond the initial Creative Writing in Schools fund.

Evidence from the CfEY report and from our own evaluation indicates that our impact has been both deep and far reaching. Our hope is that these resources will support young people and adults to explore, experiment and benefit from sustained practice in the art of writing. Please visit the [Paper Nations](#) website for updates on our research and resources.

## 15.4 Paper Nations Now

In 2017, Paper Nations received funding to expand their research into projects to help adult writers as well as children. In 2018, they launched their 'Writing for All' programme, aiming to make the tools, benefits and fulfilment of writing accessible to people of all backgrounds. As part of this, Paper Nations launched a series of further research-informed initiatives to support diversity and innovation in writing. This included:

### *The Producer's Scheme*

In 2020, in collaboration with Paper Nations, as part of their ongoing quest to establish the South-West region as a place for writers, the Writing Producers' Scheme was launched in order to support writing producers in the creation and expansion of writing initiatives, and their development into sustainable writing enterprises. Ten talented writing producers were selected and mentored to develop their writing project ideas, create sustainable business plans, and write proposals for financing and grants.

The Producer's Scheme, which is the latest iteration of the Writing Ambassadors Scheme and employs the pedagogy of *The Writer's Cycle*, included tailored support in a nurturing and professional environment and regular mentoring sessions with Professor Bambo Soyinka. On its completion, the majority of participants achieved financial success and reported impressive results, ranging from a 25% increase in their existing writing income to the generation of completely new revenue streams.

### *The Great Margin*

This action research project addressed a lack of inclusive models for collaborative writing. It engaged with a growing body of research seeking to foster empathy and equality within the arts. The summative output, *The Great Margin*, is a curatorial project underpinned by two new pedagogical resources: *Dare to Write?* and *The Writer's Cycle*.

The research asked: *how does our understanding of writing from the margins, and of interpretive practices, shift through collaborative curation?* Over 20,000 writers participated. Despite differences, all were familiar with marginalisation, due to longstanding circumstances or the impacts of Covid-

Soyinka organised the project into six strands with sub-questions. Using an action research methodology, she developed an interactive transmedia framework and invited participants to experiment with different models of writing, phenomenology, and interpretation. The outputs meditate on isolation. More significantly, by drawing together voices, writing, field notes, and co-participatory video-making across platforms, 'writing from the margins' is revealed as a civic process of interpretation, reciprocity, and sense-making.

This report was written by the education and youth development 'think and action tank' The Centre for Education and Youth. The Centre for Education and Youth is a social enterprise- we believe that society has a duty to ensure children and young people receive the support they need in order to make a fulfilling transition to adulthood. We work towards this vision by helping education and youth organisations develop, evaluate and improve their work with young people. We then carry out academic and policy research and advocacy that is grounded in our experience.