

CAL Cultural Fund Editors and Writers Development Project Stage 2 (mentoring program for editors)

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Introduction

The presentation was a follow up to the session at the Adelaide conference in October 2009 and covers Stage 2 of the project, which concluded in September 2010. This paper should be read in conjunction with the Adelaide paper, which should be available on the IPEd website.

Stage 2

Several aspects of the project were modified for Stage 2, based on the experience and feedback from Stage 1. For example, it was decided to cut the number of rounds from five to four, but increase the number of hours worked on each manuscript on a pro rata basis. The paperwork, most of which had been devised originally by an external consultant, was simplified and made less onerous to complete, while still capturing the vital information needed to assess the success of the project.

One of the mentors, Michael Kuter, was not able to continue with the project, owing to study commitments and a possible placement overseas. The Management Committee appointed Susan Addison—another very experienced editor—as a very able replacement.

Interviews

Applicants for Stage 1 of the project were selected based on written applications only. For Stage 2, the Management Committee of the Society decided that a short list of applicants would be drawn up and 30-minute interviews would be held. These took place at the Queensland State Library. The interviewers comprised two members of the Management Committee—Robin Bennett and Kim Manning—and the project moderator, Peter Storer. Of the 12 applicants, 11 were interviewed but only six were felt to be suitable for inclusion in the project. The successful applicants were asked to sign an agreement (see Appendix 1). Unsuccessful applicants were directed to appropriate training courses to develop their basic skills to a level where they might be candidates for mentoring at a later date. The Management Committee then had a difficult to decision to make: four mentors had already been appointed, so if we stuck with the structure for Stage 1 (where each mentor worked with two mentees) then the services of one mentor would not be required. The Committee decided that two of the successful applicants—Jenny Nunn and Eve Witney—had sufficient experience that

they would benefit from the more traditional one-on-one mentoring, so the services of all four mentors were retained.

Briefing workshop stage 2

The briefing workshop was held in a meeting room at the offices of John Wiley & Sons on 19 October 2009. To provide continuity, the moderator presented the briefing workshop, but modified the format significantly to take into account the feedback received on the Stage 1 workshop. Participants in the original workshop felt that less time should be spent on the theory of mentoring and more on the practical aspects of the project. Some of the issues that arose during Stage 1 were also discussed, such as placing too much emphasis on editing the manuscripts and preparing reports for the writers and not enough on developing the mentees' skills. Unlike Stage 1, the mentors were present for the whole day. The presenter first carried out a skills audit with the mentees to determine their current skill levels and their goals for the following 12 months. In the afternoon, the editing teams for round 1 were established and the mentors and mentees established the priorities for the partnerships and drew up mentoring agreements (so that all participants were aware of each other's expectations and responsibilities) and an action plan.

Based on the feedback received from the evaluation forms, the workshop was highly successful and productive.

Rounds 1 to 4

The call for manuscripts for the opening round of Stage 2 elicited just six manuscripts. It was becoming clear that members of the Queensland Writer's Centre were not going to submit enough manuscripts, particularly non-fiction, to keep the project going (the initial flood had reduced to a trickle). We sought and received approval from CAL to broaden the scope for submissions. The preference was to keep the Queensland focus, so we approached local commercial publishers UQP and John Wiley & Sons, both of which agreed to send out details of the project to writers of rejected unsolicited manuscripts in suitable genres (fiction: short stories and novels; non-fiction: short story, essay, memoir, biography, history, family history, education, and health and lifestyle). It is not clear how thoroughly the request was implemented, but neither publisher generated any manuscript submissions over the balance of the project. After seeking CAL's approval again, other avenues were investigated and information about the project was posted on the websites of the Fellowship of Australian Writers and the Australian Society of Authors. Again, surprisingly, these generated little interest from writers.

As mentioned in the key points from the evaluation workshop for Stage 1, the quality of the manuscripts submitted has a significant effect on the skills that could be taught effectively. In a couple of rounds in Stage 2, more than one team worked on the same manuscript, which created a new level of complexity.

Stage 2 evaluation workshop

The evaluation workshop was held in a meeting room at the offices of John Wiley & Sons on 10 September 2010. As with Stage 1, the workshop was facilitated by the

moderator. One of the mentees (Linden George) was unable to attend owing to illness, but all other participants contributed to a valuable and wide-ranging discussion.

Key points from the evaluation workshop

1. What was soon very clear was how much more smoothly Stage 2 had run compared with Stage 1. This is probably because systems and processes were often devised on the run in the previous year.
2. Reflections on the initial briefing workshop indicated that most topics were covered satisfactorily. Some participants felt that a little more explanation of the paperwork may have been beneficial.
3. A major topic of discussion was, once again, the different approaches taken by the various mentors. These approaches partly reflect the significant differences between fiction and non-fiction editing, but also the quality of the manuscripts selected and the personal style of the mentors. The mentors suggested that a preliminary meeting be held before any future program to discuss the different approaches.
4. The format of the paperwork associated with the program (mentoring agreements and evaluation forms) was also debated at some length. Overall, the participants didn't find the revised format to be particularly onerous.
5. In terms of mentee skills development, Stage 2 was a great success. The mentors were impressed by the level of commitment shown by the mentees and the extent to which they were willing to take on the challenges they were set. Many latent skills emerged and were further developed over the course of the year. The mentees gained great confidence over the course of the year and thoroughly enjoyed the mentoring experience.
6. The main skills that were developed over the course of the program included time management, language skills, organisational skills, teamwork, tact, reading critically, attention to detail and report writing. Interestingly, copy-editing was developed as an 'aside' rather than the main focus.
7. Time management was a significant issue for both mentors and mentees—just as it was in Stage 1—but the delays in eliciting suitable manuscripts exacerbated the problem, especially for the non-fiction teams.
8. The ability to work as part of a team was felt to be a very important component of the program, which helped to build mentee confidence. The departure from the traditional one-to-one mentor-mentee relationship seemed to have worked very well (and enabled the Society to offer more mentee places than would otherwise have been the case).
9. Teamwork skills were tested even further during two rounds when two teams ended up working on the same manuscripts. Careful collaboration was needed between the teams to ensure that the writers did not receive mixed messages or, worse, conflicting recommendations.
10. In terms of who directed the mentoring relationships, strong collaboration between the mentors and the mentees was a noted feature of the program (the phrase 'collaborative guidance' was coined). There was generally a good balance between mentee-driven processes and guidance from the mentor.

Budget

The grant provided by CAL was used to fund a major part of this project and a small income was generated by charging a nominal fee to the writers (\$200 per manuscript).

The balance of the expenditure was provided by the Qld Society of Editors. The main expenses for Stage 2 were payments to mentors (~\$25,000), payments to the moderator and administrative assistant (~ \$16,500), workshop costs (~\$2000) and postage, telecommunication and photocopying (~\$700).

Key recommendations from the program

1. Charge mentees a fee for taking part in the program. If the existing format were followed, this would probably be in the range \$600 to \$990 (although paying a smaller fee for each round is another option).
2. Draw up agreements between the Society and the mentors, covering the expectations of the program and issues such as confidentiality.
3. Draw up agreements between the Society and those writers whose manuscripts are selected, covering the scope of the program and issues such as confidentiality (i.e. parts of the manuscript reports should not be posted on writers' blogs).
4. The issue of confidentiality, and how it applies to the program, should be discussed in detail during the briefing process. The manuscripts and reports to writers should remain confidential, but the evaluations of the mentees must be made available to all mentors so that they can build on the previous rounds and be made aware of mentee strengths and weaknesses.
5. The mentors should meet separately at the start of the program to discuss the differing approaches they may take.
6. The mentees should be advised that every manuscript is different and that different approaches may be taken in each round (e.g. joint reports or separate reports).
7. If the mentees are to be charged, then sufficient suitable manuscripts should be in hand before the program commences. Obtaining sufficient submissions would be a major challenge for any future mentoring project.
8. The mentors should ensure that they have the latest version of the manuscripts before getting them printed.
9. The usual manuscript submission guidelines regarding margins, double spacing, folios, word count, etc., should be strictly adhered to.
10. Mentees should keep very detailed timesheets to help with time management (a proforma could be drawn up).
11. If the program is time-limited, the focus should be on the short story genre.

APPENDIX 1

AGREEMENT

I, <insert name>, acknowledge the following requirements of the CAL mentoring program:

1. I understand that the primary purpose of program is to develop mentees' skills by working with other very experienced editors; the program is not a substitute for a training course.
2. I understand the limited nature of the editing service and report to the author and that there is insufficient time to copy edit a whole manuscript.
3. I understand that the level of skills development is partly determined by the quality of the manuscripts received by the Queensland Writers Centre and that this is outside the control of the program.
4. I understand that attendance at the briefing workshop on 19 October 2009 and the evaluation workshop in September 2010 is mandatory.
5. I am able to commit to four 15-hour rounds of editing plus a minimum of 2.5 hours of face-to-face meetings per round (although there will usually be more meetings than this).
6. I am able to take time out from my regular commitments to attend those meetings (which may be on weekdays or at weekends).
7. I understand that, in addition to the above, I will be expected to prepare a mentoring agreement, a mentoring assessment and a report for the writer for each round.
8. I understand that I must have access to a copy of the *Style Manual*, 6th edn, for reference throughout the course and that *The Australian Editing Handbook* (Flann and Hill) and *The Editor's Companion* (Mackenzie) would also prove very useful.

Signed _____