

FORMER MP ED BALLS RETURNS TO JUDGING PANEL FOR **WICKED YOUNG WRITER AWARDS**

- Awards support National Literacy Trust
- Nicky Cox MBE, First News editor-in-chief and Young People's Laureate for London
Caleb Femi to join the judging team
 - Deadline for entries 12 March 2018
 - First News confirmed as 2018 Media Partner
- To submit entries, visit: www.WickedYoungWriterAwards.com



The acclaimed **WICKED YOUNG WRITER AWARDS** (www.wickedyoungwriterawards.com), created and sponsored by the award-winning musical WICKED in association with the **National Literacy Trust** (www.literacytrust.org.uk), are delighted to announce that author, award-winning journalist and former Labour MP **Ed Balls** is returning to join on the judging panel, alongside acclaimed Young People's Laureate for London, **Caleb Femi** and Editor-in-Chief of *First News*, **Nicky Cox MBE**. Author and illustrator of the *How to Train Your Dragon* books, **Cressida Cowell**, returns as Head Judge for the fourth consecutive year, together with long-standing judges **Jonathan Douglas**, Director of the **National Literacy Trust** and **Michael McCabe**, Executive Producer of WICKED.

Launched in 2010, the free-to-enter, annual creative writing competition for 5-25 year olds raises money for, and awareness of, the **National Literacy Trust** who campaign to improve public understanding of the vital importance of literacy.

Ed Balls said *"I am really pleased to be re-joining the judging panel for the second time. I loved reading last year's entries and discussing them with my fellow judges. There was so much talent and creativity on show and we found it so hard to choose the winners. Awards like Wicked Young Writers are a brilliant way to unlock new talents and help children and young people to give their thoughts, ideas and passions a voice."*

Jonathan Douglas, Director of the National Literacy Trust, said, *"Writing can open up a whole new world of possibilities for children and young people. It can inspire creativity, fuel imaginations and give them the freedom to explore their thoughts and feelings. What's more, being able to write well can help children succeed at school, get a good job, and have a brighter future. This year's Wicked Young Writer Awards will give children and young people a unique opportunity to bring their ideas to life in a fictional story, poem or song lyric. I can't wait to read all the wonderful entries – good luck!"*

The Awards are also pleased to announce a new media partner for 2018, *First News*. *First News* will also sponsor the Award prize for the 'FOR GOOD' category - a work-experience placement at the magazine for a young writer of 15-25 years. Editor **Nicky Cox MBE** will also be a guest judge for the category.

Nicky Cox MBE, editor of *First News* comments, *"I am such a fan of Wicked and have seen it nine times in the West End. So, it is an absolute honour to be one of the judges this year for the Wicked Young Writer Awards. I know what a talented bunch our young people are, so I am excited immensely to read the entries."*

Michael McCabe, Executive Producer of WICKED said, *“It is with great pleasure that we welcome Ed Balls again to the judging panel as well as Caleb Femi, Young People’s Laureate for London. We’d also like to offer a very big thank you to First News for agreeing to become our Media Partner. We are all extremely proud of these creative writing awards and absolutely delighted to have so much incredible support”*.

Her Royal Highness The Duchess of Cornwall is Patron of the Awards, set up to encourage and recognise excellence in writing, and creativity, and help develop literacy and writing talent in young people. Since launching, over 25,000 young people have entered original and thought-provoking pieces of writing that consistently reflect the interests, concerns and deepest thoughts of young people, providing a first-look at the emerging voices of a new generation.

Deadline for entries is 12 March 2018.

Entrants can submit their writing by visiting www.WickedYoungWriterAwards.com, where they will also find writing tips and resources from the Award judges.

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Notes to editors:

WICKED YOUNG WRITER AWARDS

The WICKED YOUNG WRITER AWARDS are separated into six categories, for entrants between the ages of 5-25. They allow young people from across the UK and Ireland to enter a piece of writing on a theme or subject of their choice. Young people are free to submit entries written at home or at school, and teachers are encouraged to enter writing on behalf of their pupils. Exclusive teachers’ resources can be found online including tips for inspiring and encouraging writing in the classroom. Schools and individuals can download entry forms and find tips and videos about the award at www.WickedYoungWriterAwards.com

The 2018 Awards sees the second year of the FOR GOOD AWARD for Non-Fiction, encouraging 15-25 year olds to write essays or articles that recognise the positive impact that people can have on each other, their communities and the world we live in. This category celebrates the WICKED: FOR GOOD philanthropic programme, which supports the work of multiple charities.

120 finalists from across the UK will see their work published in the WICKED YOUNG WRITER AWARDS Anthology, which will be published in association with Young Writers (www.youngwriters.co.uk). The 120 finalists are also invited to an exclusive ceremony at London’s Apollo Victoria, home to the musical WICKED since 2006, where judges and members of the WICKED cast announce who has won in each category.

The Awards close for entries on 12 March 2018. Pieces of original writing can be submitted individually, or by a teacher, parent, carer or guardian on behalf of an entrant. Prizes include:

- The overall winners from each category will win £50 book/eBook tokens, and the 5-14 year old winners will receive £100 worth of books for their school library kindly donated by **Hachette Children’s Group**.
- Winners in the 15-17, 18-25 and FOR GOOD categories will also win an exclusive writing experience with one of the Awards’ literacy partners.

- The three schools that submit the most entries will also win a Creative Writing Workshop for their school for up to thirty students delivered by WICKED's education team.
- Winners in all categories receive a VIP family experience at the West End production of WICKED, including tickets, an exclusive backstage tour and a meet-and-greet with members of the cast.

NATIONAL LITERACY TRUST

One person in six in the UK lives with poor literacy. This holds them back at every stage of their life. As a child they won't be able to succeed at school, as a young adult they will be locked out of the job market, and on becoming a parent they won't be able to support their child's learning. Lacking these vital skills undermines their wellbeing and stops them making a full contribution to the economic and cultural life of our nation.

The **National Literacy Trust** is a national charity dedicated to raising literacy levels in the UK. It works to improve the reading, writing, speaking and listening skills in the UK's most disadvantaged communities, where up to 40 per cent of people have literacy problems. Its research and analysis make it the leading authority on literacy. Because low literacy is intergenerational, the **National Literacy Trust** focuses its work on families, young people and children.

For more information visit: www.literacytrust.org.uk

FIRST NEWS

First News is the UK's only newspaper for young people. It was founded in 2006 by Sarah and Steve Thomson with editor **Nicky Cox**. It has always been independently owned and have no political affiliations. It is published both print and digital editions every Friday. Ten years on, over 2 million young people nationwide read **First News** each week with over half of all UK schools subscribing to the paper.

For more information visit: www.firstnews.co.uk

PARTNERSHIPS

The books platform **Love Reading** will also join the Awards as a partner for 2018. **Love Reading** is a unique family of websites including Lovereadng.co.uk, Lovereadng4Kids.co.uk and Lovereadng4schools, and media channels which helps to connect writers, readers, publishers and organisations with an active and enthusiastic audience of book lovers.

The Literacy Shed www.literacyshed.com is a unique online resource for teachers, home to a wealth of visual resources collected by primary school teacher **Rob Smith** over 10 years as a teacher. The Literacy Shed has over 24k followers on Twitter.

Primary Times has also joined the awards with over 18 million copies of Primary Times magazines distributed every year through primary schools in 59 regions across the UK and Ireland.

ED BALLS

Ed Balls recently served as a Senior Fellow at Harvard's John F. Kennedy School of Government (2015/16) and as Visiting Professor to the Policy Institute at King's College, London. He was Shadow Chancellor of the Exchequer (2011-15) and served in the Cabinet as Secretary of State for Children, Schools and Families. He was Minister for Financial Services (2006-07) and the Chief Economic Advisor to the Treasury (1997-2004), during which time he was Chair of the IMFC Deputies and G20 Deputy. While Shadow Chancellor he was co-Chair with Larry Summers of the Center for American Progress Inclusive Prosperity Commission. He was a Teaching Fellow in the Department of Economics at Harvard University (1989-90) and a leader writer and columnist at the Financial Times (1990-94). Ed studied economics at Keble College, Oxford and at Harvard Kennedy School. He is Chairman of Norwich City Football Club and, in 2016, was a contestant on the BBC's *Strictly Come Dancing* and travelled the UK with *Strictly Come Dancing The Live Tour*.

CALEB FEMI

Caleb Femi is the Young People's Laureate for London. He is also an English teacher, filmmaker and photographer. Caleb is featured in the Dazed 100 list of the next generation shaping youth culture. His commissions include the Tate Modern, The Royal Society for Literature, St Paul's Cathedral and the Guardian. Caleb has graced major stages such as the Roundhouse mainstage, Barbican, British Library, Royal Festival Hall. He has also opened up for Lianne La Havas and has performed at many festivals. Caleb has also won the Roundhouse Poetry Slam and Genesis Poetry Slam and is currently working on a debut pamphlet.

As a filmmaker, Caleb has released two documentaries 'What Did Love Taste Like In The 70s?' and 'Heartbreak & Grime', to good international reception, which has led him to give talks and panel discussions on the topic of Grime music, Road culture and masculinity.

NICKY COX MBE

Nicky Cox is editor in chief of First News, the UK's number one publication for children with more than two million readers a week. Nearly half of schools nationwide subscribe to First News. Nicky is also CEO of Fresh Start Media, a production company making broadcast films for, and about, children around the world.

Nicky was made an MBE for services to children in the Queen's Birthday Honours 2009, and in 2013, was given a Patron's award from the NSPCC and ChildLine for dedication to children. She is passionate about giving kids a voice and a fair deal. In 2014 Nicky was one of the Women of Achievement in the Women of the Year Awards. She is often called upon to be a judge herself and has been on the panels for BAFTA, the Global Teacher Prize and the Mum of the Year Awards, as well as being a trustee of British Plaque Trust. She is also a special adviser to UNICEF and patron of the British Citizen Youth Awards.

Nicky appears often on television and radio to talk about children's issues and is a regular columnist in several national newspapers.

CRESSIDA COWELL

Cressida Cowell is the author and the illustrator of the bestselling *How to Train Your Dragon* book series. *How to Train Your Dragon* has sold over 8 million books worldwide in 38 languages; it is also an award-winning DreamWorks film series, and a TV series shown on Netflix and CBBC. The first book in Cressida's new series, *The Wizards of Once* (also signed by DreamWorks), is a number one bestseller. Cressida is an ambassador for the National Literacy Trust and the Reading Agency and a founder patron of the Children's Media Foundation. She has won numerous prizes for her books, including the Gold Award in the Nestle Children's Book Prize, the Hay Festival Medal for Fiction, and Philosophy Now magazine's 2015 Award for Contributions in the Fight Against Stupidity. She grew up in London and on a small, uninhabited island off the west coast of Scotland and she now lives in Hammersmith with her husband, three children and a dog called Pigeon.

ABOUT WICKED

Based on the acclaimed novel by **Gregory Maguire** that ingeniously re-imagines the stories and characters created by **L. Frank Baum** in 'The Wonderful Wizard of Oz', **WICKED** tells the incredible untold story of an unlikely but profound friendship between two sorcery students. Their extraordinary adventures in Oz will ultimately see them fulfil their destinies as *Glinda The Good* and the *Wicked Witch of the West*.

Now in its 12th year in London and acclaimed as "**one of the West End's true modern classics**" (Metro), **WICKED** has already been seen by over 8.5 million people in London alone and is the recipient of over 100 major awards worldwide, including ten theatregoer-voted **WhatsOnStage Awards** (winning 'Best West End Show' on three occasions) and two **Olivier Audience Awards** in the UK.

For more information visit: [**www.WickedTheMusical.co.uk**](http://www.WickedTheMusical.co.uk)

ABOUT WICKED: FOR GOOD

Through its **FOR GOOD** programme and other charitable endeavours, WICKED is proud to support the remarkable work of the following UK charities: **Anti-Bullying Alliance (ABA)**; the **Cybersmile Foundation**; the **Rainbow Trust Children's Charity**; **Stonewall's 'Education For All' campaign**; **The Woodland Trust** and the **National Literacy Trust**.

Further information can be found at www.WickedForGood.co.uk

