FIGHTING WORDS NI

Write Here. Write Now.



Executive Director

Information Pack

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Introduction

Dear Candidate

At Fighting Words Northern Ireland, we work to create an environment where every child has the courage and creativity to tell their own story. Through free creative writing programmes, mentoring and publishing opportunities, we help children and young people discover their voice, build confidence and unleash their imagination.

Children and young people arrive with us uncertain if they have a story worth telling. They leave as published writers, having discovered something powerful about themselves and their own potential.

Our workshops don't just support children to write but strive to build connection, coping and resilience.

We are now seeking an exceptional leader to become our Executive Director and guide Fighting Words NI through the next stage of the charity's development.

You will lead an organisation that changes lives through creativity. You will inherit strong foundations, work with passionate colleagues and volunteers, and help shape a future where every child has the confidence, creativity and opportunity to tell their own story.

You can find out a lot about our organisation and the Executive Director role from this information pack, and there's lots more information at our website too at fightingwords.co.uk. Initial queries can be fielded by our recruitment partners, Engage Executive Talent.

If this seems like a compelling proposition, we hope you will consider joining us to help to write our next chapter.

Tony Gallagher
Chair



Who we are

Fighting Words NI is a Northern Ireland-based youth charity and company (limited by guarantee) dedicated to empowering children and young people aged 6-18 through the transformative power of creative writing. We believe that every young person has a unique story to tell, and our mission is to provide them with the tools, support, and inspiration to express themselves confidently and creatively.

The charity was established in 2015 with support from Glenn Patterson, Ali Fitzgibbon and Glenn Jordan. It grew from the wider Fighting Words movement, founded in Dublin in 2009 by author Roddy Doyle and Seán Love, adapting its free, volunteer-supported creative-writing model for children and young people across Northern Ireland.

In 2020, growing online activity, partnerships and reach led Fighting Words NI to appoint its first Director. Over its first decade, it developed school, community, publishing and cross-border programmes, delivering more than 20,000 free creative-writing experiences and training over 350 volunteer mentors. Today, it continues to help young people discover their voice, confidence and imagination through storytelling.



Why Creativity Matters for Northern Ireland

In a society facing challenges of educational inequality and low levels of enjoyment of reading and writing among young people, our work helps address some of the pressing social and educational challenges we face in Northern Ireland.

- **Confidence & Self-Expression:** Empowering young people from all backgrounds to share their unique perspectives.
- **Literacy & Communication:** Using creative practice to boost engagement and collaboration in the classroom and beyond.
- **Resilience & Innovation:** Encouraging the original, imaginative thinking that drives Northern Ireland's society.
- **Empathy & Understanding:** at the heart of our work lies a deep commitment to fostering understanding, empathy, and reconciliation amongst young people from diverse backgrounds through shared creative writing projects.

What we do

Because creative education helps the most marginalised students thrive, Fighting Words NI operates across the whole of Northern Ireland to help children and young people find joy through writing. Our innovative workshops and programmes seek to provide a level playing field for all young people to develop communication and literacy skills, to grow in confidence and courage so that they can tell their own story, both on the page and out in the world.

Creative-writing workshops

Young writers are encouraged to express their ideas in their own words, with completed work shared through publications and the charity's online story library.



Writing Our Selves

This is a three year residency programme in five Belfast primary schools working with P5 classes in each successive year. Through sustained creative-writing activity, pupils build confidence and enjoyment in writing, while teachers work alongside the programme team. Research partners assess its effects on literacy and wellbeing, helping the charity understand the value of longer-term creative engagement.

Belfast Chronicles

This programme builds on Writing Ourselves by working with P6 classes in four of the schools over a three year period. The classes will work in partnership groups involving controlled and maintained schools.

Word Warriors

This initiative offers intensive workshop programmes during school holidays. Participants explore different creative forms, including fiction, poetry, biography, scriptwriting, songwriting, arts and crafts. The programme is designed and delivered by Fighting Words NI's schools team with support from volunteers.

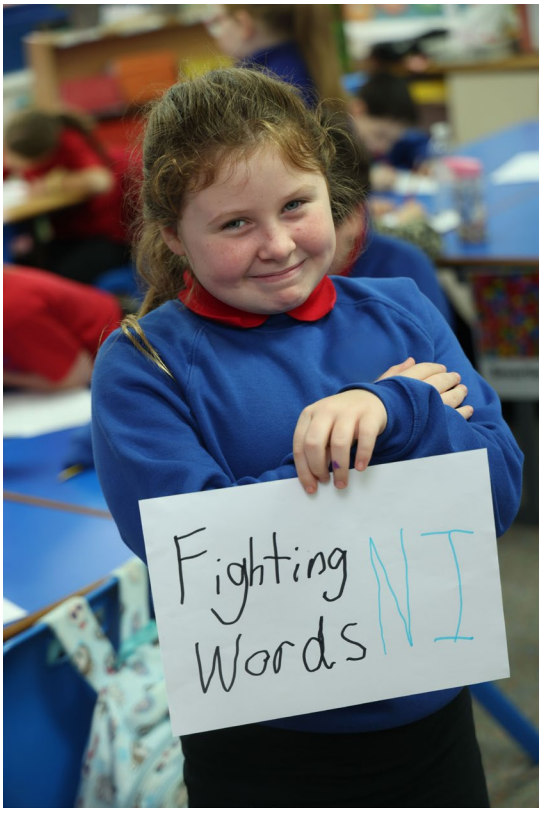
Write Club

We have a year-round online writing group for young people aged 13–18. Members meet fortnightly to develop their writing with the support of experienced writers. They also have opportunities to contribute to showcases and publications, giving them an audience for their work and helping them grow as writers.



Schools Workshops at the Seamus Heaney Centre

The charity delivers workshops for primary-school pupils at the Seamus Heaney Centre at Queen's University Belfast. The programme gives priority to schools serving communities with higher levels of need and introduces children to an inspiring university and literary setting in which they can develop and share their stories.



Creative Youth on a Shared Island

This is an all-island youth project involving Fighting Words NI, Fighting Words in Dublin and Graffiti Theatre Company in Cork. Running during 2026–28, it extends the charity's cross-border work and creates opportunities for young people to connect through shared creative activity.

Guthanna Óga – Young Voices

With the help our partners we developed this all-island youth advisory panel which brought together young people aged 15–18 for online and in-person meetings. We are believe it is important that young people's perspectives help inform the wider work. Following evaluation a refreshed version of the panel is being developed.

Teacher Training and Online Resources

Fighting Words NI works with teacher-training institutions to demonstrate and discuss its creative-writing approach with prospective primary and post-primary teachers. It also provides schools with video workshops, writing prompts and other online materials, alongside selected Zoom sessions, including workshops delivered in Irish with Fighting Words Gaeilge.

Volunteering and Mentoring

Volunteer mentors support the charity's workshops and encourage children and young people to develop their ideas. Volunteers do not need to be experienced writers: the emphasis is on listening, supporting creativity and helping young participants gain confidence. Their contribution enables Fighting Words NI to keep its activities free for schools and families.



Strategy

Our Vision

A society where every child has the courage and creativity to tell their own story.

Our Mission

To unlock the joy and power of creative writing for every child and young person. We provide the freedom to imagine and the safety to share their stories, building vibrant communities of young people who write their own futures.

Our Impact

Through creativity, young people develop confidence, empathy, literacy skills and a stronger belief in their own potential. In a society still facing educational inequality and social division, we create opportunities for young people to discover their voice and connect with others through storytelling.

Our Values

Our workplace culture reflects the same creative and collaborative principles that underpin our programmes.

Bring Curiosity

We listen, ask questions and remain open to new ideas.

All Ideas Welcome

We encourage creativity, experimentation and constructive dialogue.

Positive and Encouraging

We support each other and celebrate achievements together.

Imaginative and Ambitious

We combine creativity with a determination to achieve meaningful impact.

Reflective Learning

We learn continuously from our experiences, challenges and successes.

Strategic Focus to 2028

FWNI's priorities to 2028 focus on increasing the impact, reach and sustainability of its work with children and young people.

It aims to deepen participation through extended programmes and communities of practice, prioritising young people from seldom-heard and disadvantaged communities.

We will create more opportunities for participants to share and publish their stories. We will also strengthen evaluation of our programmes and the evidence of their impact.

Fighting Words NI will support teachers, mentors and youth leaders to use creative writing to nurture children's creativity and confidence.

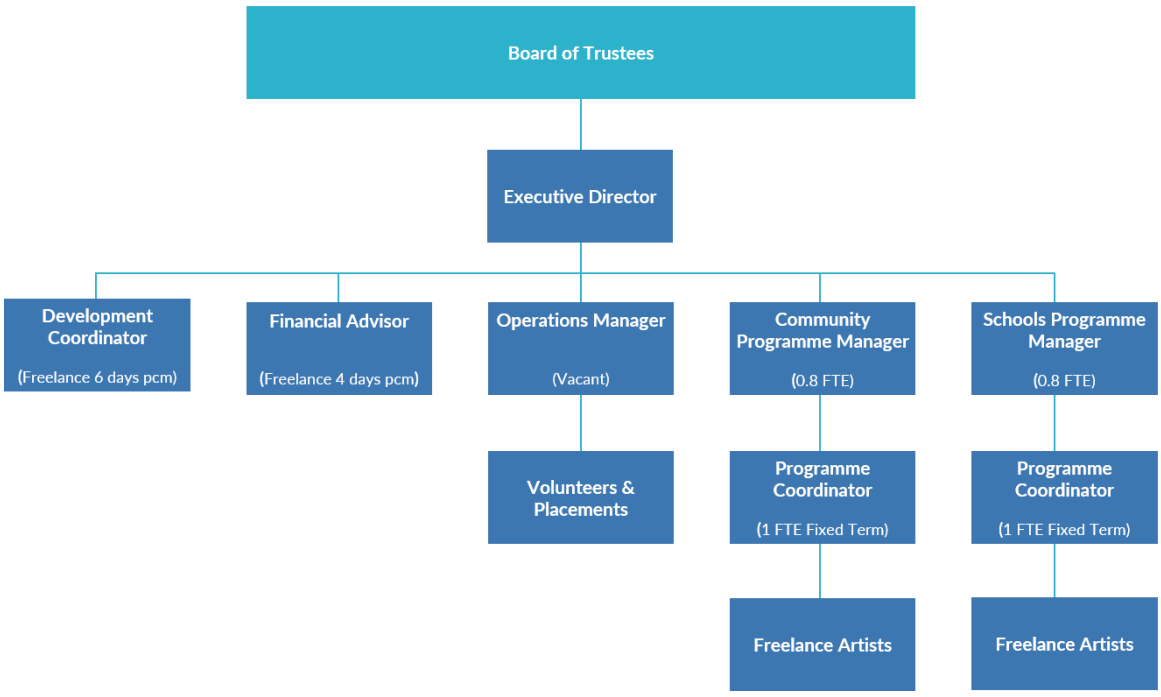
It will strengthen strategic partnerships, involve young people more directly in planning and evaluation, advocate for greater creative opportunities, and build financial resilience through diversified funding.

We will assess progress by looking at who takes part, whether we are reaching priority groups, the difference programmes make to participants, and opportunities for young people to share and publish their work. We will also track funding secured over several years and unrestricted funding available to support the charity's overall work. The Board and incoming Executive Director will monitor progress using an Outcomes Based Accountability (OBA) approach.





How we're organised



Financials

Below is our last annual income and expenditure report for the year ending March 2025, with a comparison for the year ending 2024. If you are reading online, you can click on the links below to access the last three years' annual accounts for more detailed information.

	2025			2024
	Unrestricted funds £	Restricted funds £	**Total funds £**	Total funds £
Income and endowments				
Donations and legacies	3,559	500	4,059	42,083
Charitable activities	28,210	216,484	244,694	257,163
Other trading activities	746	–	746	–
Investment income	–	–	–	139
Other income	11,074	–	11,074	4,449
Total income	43,589	216,984	260,573	303,834
Expenditure				
Expenditure on charitable activities	35,424	261,644	297,068	357,212
Total expenditure	35,424	261,644	297,068	357,212
Net expenditure	8,165	(44,660)	(36,495)	(53,378
Transfers between funds	(775)	775	–	–
Net movement in funds	7,390	(43,885)	(36,495)	(53,378
Reconciliation of funds				
Total funds brought forward	146,378	58,955	205,333	258,711
Total funds carried forward	153,768	15,070	168,838	205,333

Annual Accounts March 2025

Annual Accounts March 2024

Annual Accounts March 2023

Meet the Board



Professor Tony Gallagher Chair

Nominally retired, Tony is Queen's University Belfast Honorary Chair of Education. He has experience of education from an academic and research perspective: his research interests focus on the role of education in divided societies and the civic and democratic role of higher education.



Elizabeth Barron

Experienced leader and manager with 15+ years' experience driving strategy, scale and impact in media, education, and non-profit sectors. Former long-term foster parent to marginalised, minority teenagers.



Paul Connolly

Paul is a freelance writer, musician and Nerve Centre lecturer in Events Management. A songwriter and lyricist with NI alternative rock band, The Wood Burning Savages he is also a commentator and broadcaster on BBC Radio Ulster and Foyle as an Arts & Cultural correspondent, Sunday Show panellist and recently a poet on BBC Radio 3 in collaboration with the Ulster Orchestra.



Josh Graham

Employment solicitor and Arts & Business NI Leaders on Boards programme graduate. Josh is a solicitor in the Employment Law team at Millar McCall Wylie, where he advises employers and employees on a broad range of workplace and employment matters. Josh is passionate about supporting young people to develop confidence, creativity and strong communication skills, and brings his legal expertise and governance perspective to his role on the Board.



Michelle Holt

Michelle is Head of Production Operations at ClickView, bringing broad experience as a production executive across production, development, operations and start-ups.



Eavan King

Seasoned professional in creative industries with a decade of arts board experience, specialising in cross-border partnerships and the intersection of storytelling with digital and screen technology.



Clare McGinn Gow

Clare is a creative consultant and leadership coach, business founder and former senior leader in BBC network audio. She also brings experience of serving on charity boards.



Michelle Morris

Entrepreneur and business leader with 20 years of private & third sector experience, complemented by a specialised academic background in Children's Rights from QUB.



Nóra Nic Con Ultaigh

Nóra is Education Director with Fighting Words in Dublin and contributes to teacher training education at Dublin City University. With over twenty years of experience working in the arts in education sector, she is a founding member of Cups and Crowns Education Theatre Company and established the Ard- Dioplóma sa Drámaíocht for Acadamh nahOllscolaíochta Gaeilge, Ollscoil na Gaillimhe. Nóra spent ten years teaching English and French in Coláiste Mhuire in Cabra, Dublin 7 and is also a Creative Associate with the Creative Schools programme.

Our next chapter

Fighting Words Northern Ireland is entering its next stage of development.

After a decade of growth, we are a stable and respected charity with a talented staff team, an extraordinary volunteer network, strong partnerships and a growing record of impact. We have established creative writing as a powerful vehicle for confidence-building, literacy development and youth voice, reaching thousands of children and young people across Northern Ireland.

As we enter our second decade, we are looking for a leader who can build on these foundations and help shape an ambitious future.

Working closely with the Board of Trustees, staff, volunteers, funders and partners, the next Executive Director will be responsible for ensuring the long-term sustainability, impact and influence of the organisation.

Our priorities over the coming years include:

- Expanding access to high-quality creative writing opportunities across Northern Ireland.
- Strengthening long-term financial sustainability through a resilient and diversified income model.
- Deepening our impact on confidence, creativity, literacy and educational engagement.
- Growing and supporting our volunteer community.
- Developing strategic partnerships across education, youth, cultural and community sectors.
- Increasing our visibility and influence as a champion of young people's creativity and voice.

This is a rare opportunity to lead an organisation with strong foundations while shaping its future direction. We are looking for someone who combines strategic vision with practical leadership, entrepreneurial thinking with strong values, and ambition with collaboration.

What Success Looks Like

Within three years, the successful candidate for Executive Director will have:

- Successfully implemented the organisation's strategic priorities.
- Strengthened financial resilience through sustainable funding relationships.
- Expanded the reach and impact of our programmes.
- Built a thriving culture for staff and volunteers.
- Increased organisational profile and influence.
- More children and young people to discover the joy of writing and storytelling.

Job Description

Job Title:	Executive Director
Reports to:	Reports to the Chair to agree and monitor objectives, and through the Chair to the Board.
Responsible for:	Staff team and contracted personnel
Location:	Belfast with flexible and hybrid working arrangements agreed with the Chair
Hours:	37.5 hours per week
Contract:	Permanent
Salary & pension:	£45,000-£50,000 dependent on experience, plus 4% employer pension contribution
Annual Leave:	28 days leave plus public holidays

About the Role

The Executive Director is the chief executive of Fighting Words Northern Ireland and is responsible for leading the organisation's strategy, sustainability, impact and external profile. Reporting to the Board of Trustees through the Chair, the Executive Director will lead a small and ambitious team while working closely with volunteers, partners, funders and supporters.

The Executive Director will champion the mission, support effective governance, lead operational management and secure sustainable funding.

Main Purpose

To provide strategic, operational and inspirational leadership for Fighting Words Northern Ireland, ensuring that the organisation achieves its mission, delivers meaningful impact for children and young people, operates sustainably and effectively, and fulfils its governance and compliance responsibilities.

Key Responsibilities

1. Strategic Leadership

- Lead the development, implementation and review of organisational strategy.
- Work closely with the Board to identify opportunities, risks and future priorities.
- Ensure resources are aligned with strategic objectives.
- Drive innovation, growth and organisational development.
- Champion the values and ethos of Fighting Words NI.
- Maintain a close working relationship with the Executive Director at our sister organisation, Fighting Words in the Republic of Ireland.

2. Programme Impact and Quality

- Ensure the successful delivery of high-quality programmes and services.
- Maintain a strong focus on participant experience and outcomes.
- Support innovation and programme development.
- Ensure robust monitoring, evaluation and learning systems.
- Promote meaningful youth participation and voice.

3. People and Culture

- Lead, motivate and develop a high-performing team.
- Foster an inclusive, collaborative and values-led culture.
- Ensure effective recruitment, supervision and professional development.
- Promote staff wellbeing and organisational learning.
- Support and value the contribution of volunteers.

4. Fundraising and Income Generation

- Lead organisational fundraising and business development.
- Develop and maintain a diverse and sustainable income base.
- Build strong relationships with statutory funders, trusts, foundations, corporate and individual supporters.
- Lead major funding applications and strategic donor relationships.
- Identify and develop new income opportunities.

5. Financial Leadership

- Lead organisational budgeting, forecasting and financial planning.
- Ensure effective financial controls and risk management.
- Present financial information to the Board.
- Oversee annual accounts, audit and regulatory reporting.
- Build organisational resilience through effective financial stewardship.

6. Governance and Compliance

- Support the Board in meeting its legal and governance responsibilities.
- Ensure compliance with charity, company, employment, safeguarding and data protection requirements.
- Maintain effective policies, procedures and risk management systems.
- Support board effectiveness, development and succession planning.

7. External Relations and Advocacy

- Act as principal ambassador and spokesperson for the organisation.
- Develop strategic relationships across government, education, culture, youth and community sectors.
- Represent Fighting Words NI at meetings, events and conferences.
- Strengthen relationships across the wider Fighting Words network.
- Advocate for creativity, literacy and youth voice.

Safeguarding, Equality and Access

Fighting Words Northern Ireland is committed to safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children and young people. The successful candidate will be required to undertake an Enhanced AccessNI check.

We actively welcome applications from people from all backgrounds and communities. We are committed to equality of opportunity and building a diverse workforce that reflects the communities we serve.



Person Specification

Essential

Leadership and Strategy

- Senior leadership experience in a charity, education, cultural, youth or comparable organisation.
- Experience leading strategic planning and organisational development.
- Evidence of successful leadership through growth or change.
- Evidenced understanding of impact measurement and evaluation.

Financial and Governance

- Experience of budget management, financial oversight and organisational planning.
- Understanding of charity governance and trustee relationships.
- Experience of managing organisational risk and compliance.

Fundraising and Business Development

- Experience securing income from multiple funding sources.
- Proven success developing relationships with funders and supporters.
- Experience writing or overseeing significant funding applications and reports.

People Leadership

- Experience managing and developing teams.
- Ability to foster positive organisational culture.
- Commitment to equality, diversity and inclusion.

Communication and Partnerships

- Outstanding written and verbal communication skills.
- Experience building productive cross-sector partnerships.
- Confidence representing an organisation publicly.

Values

- Strong commitment to children and young people.
- Belief in the transformative power of creativity.
- Commitment to the mission and values of Fighting Words Northern Ireland.

Desirable

- Experience within arts, education, literacy, youth or cultural sectors.
- Knowledge of the Northern Ireland policy and funding landscape.
- Experience working with volunteers.
- Experience of peacebuilding, community relations or social inclusion initiatives.
- Experience of organisational growth, capital projects or major transitions.
- Understanding of specialist impact measurement and evaluation.

How to apply

Please email a CV of no more than three A4 pages and the completed MS Word **Supplementary Questions Form.** Include your preferred contact details and identify any dates in the recruitment timetable (page 20) when you would be unavailable. You will also be asked to submit a separate **Equal Opportunities Monitoring and Criminal Convictions Disclosure Form** (see below).

Completed applications must be received by 12 noon (UK time) on Thursday 3 December 2026 by email to: **apply@engageexec.co.uk**

Contact Patrick Minne on 07792 509003 if you have any queries about the role or the application process.

Equality Monitoring and Criminal Convictions Disclosure

Along with the CV and Supplementary Questions Form, you will be asked to complete and return the **Equal Opportunities Monitoring and Criminal Convictions Disclosure Form** in a separate document. This form will not be disclosed to anyone involved in shortlisting your application.

Disability

In accordance with the Disability Discrimination Act a person is disabled if they have, or have had, "a physical or mental impairment which has, or has had, a substantial and long-term adverse effect on your ability to carry out normal day to day activities".

If you need reasonable adjustments or an alternative format to apply or take part in the selection process, please contact Patrick Minne to discuss your requirements.

Equal Opportunities

Fighting Words NI is an Equal Opportunities Employer and all applications for employment are considered strictly on the basis of merit.

Please see our **recruitment privacy notice** for information about how Engage Executive Talent use and retain your personal information.

Timeline

CV, Supplementary Questions Form and Equality Monitoring and Criminal Convictions Forms to be submitted	Noon, Thursday 3 December 2026
First Round Interviews Shortlisted candidates will attend on one of these dates.	Thursday 10 and/or Friday 11 December 2026
Second Interviews The second interview may include a task provided in advance or an exercise completed on the day. Candidates will receive details of the format and any preparation required with their invitation.	Monday 21 December 2026 or Tuesday 22 December 2026 tbc
Final Stage Interviews if required	Wednesday 6 January 2027



Please address any enquiries relating to the advertised position to Fighting Words NI's recruitment partners:

Patrick Minne

ENGAGE
EXECUTIVE TALENT

Tel: 07792 509003
Email: patrick@co3.org.uk

FIGHTING WORDS NI
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Enquiries *unrelated* to this recruitment can be addressed to:

Fighting Words NI

Crescent Arts Centre, 2-4 University Road, Belfast, BT7 1NH.

Tel: 07711993277
Email: hello@fightingwords.co.uk

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