

<p><b>Institution: Kingston University</b></p>
<p><b>Unit of Assessment: 29, English Language and Literature</b></p>
<p><b>Title of case study: The Military Writing Network: Creative Writing, Life Writing and Trauma</b></p>
<p><b>1. Summary of the impact</b> (indicative maximum 100 words)</p> <p>The Military Writing Network (MWN) was founded in 2009 by Siobhan Campbell, Principal Lecturer in the Department of English Literature and Creative Writing, Kingston University London. Drawing on research by Professor Rachel Cusk, Dr. Meg Jensen and Professor Vesna Goldsworthy into the interface between testimony, trauma literature, autobiographical fiction and recovery from trauma and related disorders, the MWN created and sustains partnerships with organisations working with veteran soldiers, sailors and airmen and their families toward investigating how creative writing practice can help them cope with issues relating to combat stress, both inside and outside mental health environments.</p> <p><b>2. Underpinning research</b> (indicative maximum 500 words)</p> <p>The underpinning research has been undertaken at Kingston University, London, by Vesna Goldsworthy (Professor of English Literature and Creative Writing), Rachel Cusk (Professor of Creative Writing) and Dr. Meg Jensen (Principal Lecturer in English Literature and Creative Writing) and the results have been amplified and exploited by Siobhan Campbell (Principal Lecturer in Creative Writing) for use in work with post-combat writers.</p> <p>Creative writing at Kingston University has a strong focus on life writing and testimony. Since 2005, researchers within the unit have investigated and analysed these genres, and produced significant works of personal testimonial literature and autobiographical writing. The impact described in this case study draws on several strands of research at Kingston University into personal testimony in creative writing, involving the work of four key researchers.</p> <p><b>Professor Vesna Goldsworthy</b> has published widely in the uses of testimony and life narratives in medical humanities, human rights, democracy and identity-building processes. Her memoir, <i>Chernobyl Strawberries</i> (2005), is a key text in life writing studies related to post-trauma situations. Her expertise in life writing pedagogy and experience in developing and leading life writing workshops for both academic and non-academic constituencies in the UK, USA and Europe have informed the theoretical framework and practical steps undertaken in this project. Its focus benefits from her investigations into causes of conflict and intervention, both through her past work as journalist and through her academic research in identity politics. Goldsworthy has worked with refugee writers through NGOs and charities such as Exiled Ink, the Refugee Week, the international PEN (Chapter 1), City of Refuge Network, John Smith Memorial Trust and Notre Europe (France).</p> <p><b>Professor Rachel Cusk</b> has charged the debate about life writing and testimony of the ‘self’ in the UK since the publication of her two memoirs, <i>A Life’s Work</i> (Harper Collins, 2001) and <i>Aftermath: On Marriage and Separation</i> (Faber 2012). The ability to speak about controversial ideas from within the protection and discipline of a literary form drives these works. By opening up a literary space for memoir, Cusk’s research demonstrates the importance of self-reflection to the act and art of testimony. The debates embodied by these research outputs have been deployed and re-imagined in working with the traumatic memories of combat soldiers during the Combat Stress UK project.</p> <p><b>Dr. Meg Jensen</b> has published research concerned with genres of testimony with reference to trauma literature, autobiographical fiction and recovery from trauma. Jensen’s research develops the debate around the implementation of creative writing practice in post-combat, post-conflict or post-trauma situations. In collaboration with the University of Minnesota and Amnesty International, Jensen directed an international conference, Life Writing and Human Rights: Genres of Testimony, July 11-13, 2011, at which the role of this work in helping military veterans in the UK was first established.</p> <p><b>Dr. Siobhan Campbell</b> has published in the areas of post-conflict poetry, the ethics of post-trauma</p>

## Impact case study (REF3b)

writing and the pedagogy of creative writing interventions in PTSD situations. She has also worked with ex-combatants as part of completing a Diploma in Conflict Studies with DPC Northern Ireland.

The work of these four researchers underpinned a two-year project with Combat Stress UK, led by Campbell, which began by giving workshops to enhance Cognitive Behavioural Therapy with combat survivors and culminated in the production of a pilot study of the effect of Creative Writing practice on those suffering from PTSS and PTSD.

## Key Researchers:

Goldsworthy: Professor of English Literature and Creative Writing, start date 01/09/2000

Cusk: Professor of Creative Writing, start date 02/01/2007

Jensen: Senior Lecturer in English Literature and Creative Writing, start date 01/09/1997

Campbell, Senior Lecturer in Creative Writing, start date 01/09/2005

**3. References to the research** (indicative maximum of six references)

Campbell, S. *Cross-talk* (Seren Books, 2010) (widely reviewed in *New York Times*, *PN Review* and elsewhere)

Cusk, Rachel. *Aftermath: On Marriage and Separation* (Faber and Faber, 2012) (widely reviewed internationally in *Guardian*, *New York Times*, *Telegraph*, *Independent*, *Slate* and elsewhere)

Goldsworthy, V. *Chernobyl Strawberries* (Atlantic Books, 2005) (reviewed internationally and widely translated)

Goldsworthy, V. "Invention and Intervention: The Rhetoric of Balkanisation" in: *Balkan as Metaphor: Between Globalization and Fragmentation*, (MIT Press: Cambridge, MA: 2002), pp.25—38.

Jensen, Meg. "Post-Traumatic Memory Projects: Autobiographical Fiction and Counter-monuments" *Textual Practice* 27:7 (November 2013) DOI: 10.1080/0950236x.2013.858068.

**4. Details of the impact** (indicative maximum 750 words)

Building on the underpinning research, Campbell established the Military Writing Network. This project focused on developing and recording appropriate workshop practice in post-trauma environments, especially in the mental health arena. It has demonstrated the value of creative writing as a tool in trauma recovery, and developed pedagogy and methods for practice-based research in the workshop environment.

In sum, the MWN project has achieved these key impacts, as detailed below:

- Stimulating, facilitating and honing creative expression by serving veteran members of the armed forces and demonstrating the value of such writing by publication and exhibition.
- Allowing members of families of armed forces to encounter the experiences of their loved ones in varied and exciting ways (award event, exhibition, publication) and underlining the importance of the record of such experience.
- Establishing a 'home' (in the early-stage archive) for the writing of veterans who submitted to the SSAFA-sponsored call for writing and/or who are or have been clients of Combat Stress UK or who have submitted their writing since these events.

Working initially with SSAFA (The Soldiers, Sailors and Airmen Family Association) in 2009/10, the MWN administered a writing competition, *Forces Stories and Poems*. The competition received 253 entries, of which the works of 11 prize-winning and commended authors were published in the chapbook, *Forces Stories and Poems* (KUP/SSAFA, 2011). The initial print run of 400 copies is now sold out. A launch event at Kingston University in May 2011 attracted an audience of 200 which included SSAFA veterans, prize winners, and serving members of the Armed Forces representing RAF, RE, RN, WRNS, and TA. Guest speaker General Sir Kevin O'Donoghue KCB CBE stated:

It is important to remember those who fell in previous conflicts, but to also not forget those

who are actively serving right now all over the world. We [at SSAFA] are delighted to be working with Kingston University on such a noteworthy initiative.

A former RAF serviceman who served as one of the judges for the competition, also wrote: '*The Forces Stories and Poems* chapbook . . . remains an effective tool with which to change perceptions and influence movers and shakers'. The chapbook was featured in the *Times* (Saturday, 21/5/2011):

Pity, expressed in both poetry and prose, is certainly among the human emotions expressed in the remarkable little Kingston University Press chapbook, *Forces Stories and Poems* . . . This is a striking short collection and the work . . . featured in the chapbook is, as one of the judges conceded, "only a fraction of what we would have wished to include." Profit from sales of *Forces Stories and Poems* and entry fees to the competition will go to SSAFA Forces Help, which supported more than 50,000 people last year.

Subsequently, working with Combat Stress UK (the registered mental health charity for veterans), the MWN ran a series of four writing workshops over a period of three months in 2011/12 at Combat Stress Leatherhead, a therapeutic environment for veterans who are mainly PTSD survivors. Thirty clients signed up for the workshops, of which 23 attended, travelling an average of 89.5 miles to do so. The Head of Cognitive Behavioural Therapy at Combat Stress UK assessed the results of these workshops as follows:

Collaborative work with the Military Writing Network gave Combat Stress veterans the valuable opportunity of developing creative writing skills within a supportive and facilitating environment. Typically, the clinical presentation of Combat Stress veterans causes them to avoid unfamiliar situations and the loss of self-confidence can affect the ability to develop creative potential. By running workshops within the safety of our Surrey treatment centre and using their considerable knowledge and experience, the MWN leaders Siobhan Campbell and Joseph Ryan (MFA student of Siobhan) enabled veterans to have the confidence to experiment with new ideas and craft their writing skills whilst receiving sensitive validation of the pre-written pieces they brought to the meetings. Exercises were set which introduced fresh approaches, stimulating further growth. Veterans travelled long distances in order to make use of the workshops and there are regular enquiries from the veterans as to whether further workshops might be held in the future as they were so beneficial.

After years of writing poetry simply for pleasure or from the deep need to express themselves in this way, Combat Stress veterans received recognition from the MWN which resulted in the publication of an anthology of poems and short stories in 2012. It has given the veterans involved a huge sense of achievement and it would not have been possible without the expertise and encouragement of Siobhan and her team.

Growing out of the Combat Stress workshops, 324 written entries and 37 pieces of artwork for potential publication in a Combat Stress anthology, *Courage and Strength* (KUP/Combat Stress, 2012) were received through solicitation on an online workshop, Combat Stress clients, Combat Stress residential centres, and continuing writers in the Forces Stories and Poems project. Entries were judged by a panel including veterans, the Head of CBT at Combat Stress UK, and Campbell, and 103 pieces were chosen for publication. The Shards of Hope/Courage and Strength exhibition and book launch at Guildford Cathedral from October 31 to November 15, 2012 paired 24 pieces of artwork with 24 poems from the anthology. The launch (on October 31) was attended by 160 people and was addressed by the Dean of the Cathedral and by the Chief Executive of Combat Stress UK. As of January 31, 2013, 153 copies of *Courage and Strength* have been sold, with all profits going to Combat Stress UK, and 55 copies have been donated by Combat Stress UK. In the introduction to the anthology, the Chief of the General Staff (2006-2009), writes:

The contributors to this volume have shown the qualities of *Courage and Strength* throughout their military careers and never more so than in facing up to the lasting effects of their experiences. The work of Combat Stress with Veterans has been essential since Service men returned from the Great War. It is exciting, that creative writing can be added, as one veteran says as 'another tool to the therapeutic toolbox'.

**Impact case study (REF3b)****5. Sources to corroborate the impact** (indicative maximum of 10 references)

Testimonials (available on request) from:

1. Chief of the General Staff (2006-2009), British Army: Benefits of Military Writing Network project to combat veterans
2. Head of Cognitive Behavioural Therapy, Combat Stress UK: Benefits of Military Writing Network workshops to participants suffering from combat stress.

Personal corroboration available from:

3. Transpersonal Counsellor & Integrative Supervisor, Addiction Support and Care Agency (ASCA), Richmond: The "Courage and Stress" anthology
4. Chief Executive, Combat Stress UK: Impacts on Combat Stress UK: therapeutic workshops, publications, exhibitions
5. Freelance consultant (RAF retd.): The "Forces Stories and Poems" writing competition and chapbook

Guest list for Forces Stories and Poems Awards, May 10<sup>th</sup>, 2011 [Available on request]

Guest list for launch event, 31 October 2012 [Available on request]

Kingston University Press, Sales figures and total proceeds, *Courage and Strength* Anthology [Available on request]