

Engaging, empowering and encouraging young people in the publishing industry: A sixth former's perspective

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On Wednesday, July 9th, 2025, six hopeful new young-adult-book writers, alongside their incredible editors, came together at the CLPE (Centre for Literacy Primary Education) to discover which writer/editor pair would be taking home the prestigious Branford Boase award. Three members of London Academy of Excellence Tottenham's Phoenix Magazine editorial team were invited to attend and support in interviewing these short-listed authors. I was so grateful to be one of those LAET students, helping out and meeting these inspiring people, as well as rubbing elbows with the people behind children's book publishing!

The Branford Boase Award Ceremony was an event I am truly grateful to have been able to not only attend, but help out with behind the scenes, and as a first year A-Level student at the time, I was taken away by the night. The environment was one that was truly magical, and filled with the child-like wonder of such phenomenal people and their stories.

Throughout the evening, I had the absolute pleasure of talking to, as well as interviewing, authors such as James Fox and Ashley Hickson-Lovence, who were incredibly inspiring, lovely, and a pleasure to interact with. I even managed to have 'Glasgow Boys' signed by the winning author, Margaret McDonald and her editors Alice Swan and Ama Badu, as well as 'Wild East' signed by Ashley Hickson-Lovence and his editor Katie Sinfield!

I left the night with nothing but a smile on my face, and inspiration whirring through my brain. Being in one place with such talented, kind, and genuine people, who have achieved everything I would love to and more, was an experience I will not forget, and will most likely be what I attribute credit to in the future, given I hope to end up in similar roles later on in my life. Before this event, I had an inkling of knowledge and desire to go into the world of literature professionally, and upon leaving and after reflection, I am one hundred percent certain that publishing or writing is what I want to do for the rest of my life.

The value of the experience, and events such as this one, is important to highlight. By attending the Branford Boase Award Ceremony, I witnessed the importance of the writer/editor relationship, and the inner workings of the publishing house as significant people came together to share in the success of all six short-listed writers. I know that this event, and its ground-level view into the publishing industry, will influence my future aspirations and goals.

Equally, as much as the evening provided for myself and my peers, I would love to also emphasise the impact that young people in general will have on the industry itself, especially if more opportunities like this are made available, and the voices of young people are continually sought out, projected, included, and published. It struck me as I watched my peers interact with the professionals at the event, just how important it is for the publishing industry to find ways to engage young people on the edge of their future.



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Within today's society, young people are faced with a multitude of challenges that can easily become overwhelming, leaving us feeling defeated and unable to contribute for the better in the face of adversity and power. However, literature has and always will be a medium through which these issues can be challenged. The diverse, empowered, and talented youth, through events such as this award ceremony and the publishing industry as a whole, are provided with the opportunity to have their voices heard and their opinions spotlighted.

Through engagement with the publishing industry, the voices and ideas of young people, as well as their inevitable frustration, courage, and resilience, can be truly taken into consideration and given a platform for change. The power of words is truly underestimated, and through the translation of our voices into tangible, emotional, and incredibly charged literature, from fantasy and magic to contemporary fiction, young people are empowered to make crucial changes, both within the industry and, subsequently, our society.

So, hold on to the ideas and the emotions that you have. Keep engaging with the publishing industry, challenging their suggestions and providing your own. Continue using your voice and changing people's mind, both within publishing and externally.

Stay loud, stay inspired, and stay committed, and keep loving literature and the world that makes it happen!