



Cultureword Press Release

Nii Ayikwei Parkes, FRSL appointed Chief Executive of Cultureword

Nii Ayikwei Parkes joins us with over 25 years of experience working in publishing, creative writing, executive training, event management, and cultural production.

Cultureword is delighted to announce the appointment of Nii Ayikwei Parkes as Chief Executive.

Nii Ayikwei Parkes brings over 25 years of experience working in publishing, creative writing, executive training, event management, and cultural production. He founded the widely acclaimed small publisher flipped eye publishing in 2001 and was the founding director of the Ama Ata Aidoo Centre for Creative Writing in Accra, before joining Brighton Festival in 2018 as the Producer of Literature and Talks, followed by a two-year research fellowship at the Hutchins Center at Harvard University. He serves on the boards of the Caine Prize, World Literature Today and the African Books Collective and leads creative writing lectures for the London Library Emerging Writers Programme.

Incoming CEO, Nii Ayikwei Parkes, said: “It is a deeply felt privilege for me to take the helm at Cultureword, an appointment that marks a 30-year milestone in my connection with the organisation. Cultureword is a legacy organisation. Working class folk and persons of colour have been central to its work from its origins as Commonword in 1977. Now an ACE National Portfolio Organisation, there is no question about the value and impact of Cultureword. The next chapter, which I am honoured to be a part of, is to walk in that legacy and make Cultureword more pivotal for writer development on a national scale by expanding our partnerships and adapting to the shifting realities of Manchester, the North West and the world.”

Starting his career in management with Unilever in the late 1990s, Nii Ayikwei moved to work in diplomacy roles before transitioning to a portfolio career with writing at its centre. In this period, he inhabited a number of roles including consulting for the National Theatre’s Art of Regeneration project to help revive the Albany Theatre in Deptford; training managers and executives for public-speaking engagements; and serving as a member of the Finance

Committee at Arvon responsible for coordinating fundraising of £2.3 million to renovate John Osbourne's house (The Hurst) to run writing residencies.

In March this year, we held a leaving party for Dr Peter Kalu who for over a quarter of a century worked to make Cultureword the pivotal institution it has become and served as our Chief Executive. In preparation, the Cultureword Board led a recruitment process from February 2026, completing the search in May 2026.

Outgoing CEO, Dr Peter Kalu, said: “The role I leave has many dimensions and requires a certain level of versatility: vision, determination and creativity are prerequisites for the job. Nii Ayikwei Parkes is not just an acclaimed writer, activist and publisher with an international profile and a bulging CV; he was a beneficiary of Cultureword's initiatives himself in the 1900s and I believe he really ‘gets’ what Cultureword is about. I am confident that I am handing the controls to a skilled and creative set of hands and he will build well on the solid foundations that he inherits. This is a superb appointment that augurs well for literature in the Northwest and beyond.”

On behalf of the Cultureword Board, Dr Muli Amaye said: “The experience and expertise Nii Ayikwei Parkes brings with him gives us confidence that Cultureword is going to expand and move into a new era whilst building on the strong foundation that it sits on. Nii has a calm way about him that encourages collaboration and growth. His dedication to the craft of writing, his strong ethical stance and activism sits well within Cultureword's ethos and will serve us well.”

Nii Ayikwei Parkes is already in post at Cultureword, taking guidance from Peter Kalu to help ensure a seamless transition in leadership.

ENDS

EDITORIAL NOTES:

Cultureword is a writing development organisation based in Manchester, providing opportunities for new and aspiring writers to develop their talent and potential. An Arts Council NPO, Cultureword has been pivotal in developing the careers of writers as well as creating unique cultural experiences for audiences in Manchester and beyond.

www.cultureword.org.uk

Full Statement by Nii Ayikwei Parkes, FRSL

It is an honour and deeply felt privilege for me to take the helm at Cultureword, an appointment that marks a 30-year milestone in my connection with the organisation. My first encounter with Commonword was a Valentine's Day poetry slam in February 1996, where I read a poem at the instigation of my friends Hélène and Shelley (from France and Scotland, respectively). I don't remember winning the slam, but a man called Pete Kalu came up to me and recommended I join a weekly writers' workshop which many of the competitors had just come from. I was a student of Food Technology at the Manchester Metropolitan University at the time and writing was just a hobby, but those Wednesday workshops on Mount Street brought me so much joy and ignited my career in writer development.

Cultureword is an organisation that has been central to my growth. Those weekly workshops so many years ago gifted me a language of responsive and responsible critique that has been useful wherever I have worked – from management in corporate and government roles, to small scale business development, to event programming, to editorial and writer development, which has been my preoccupation for the last two decades. Working across industries and continents, a Wednesday-workshop seeded dedication to critique and growth has guided my journey, a commitment to my own development and the constant elevation of my peers and colleagues.

In literature especially, writer development holds even greater value to me because all my heroes Atukwei Okai of Ghana, Achebe of Nigeria, and Pete who I take over from, my mentor for those three pivotal years in Manchester, have been exemplary exponents of it. So too later guides such as Kwame Dawes and Jacob Ross.

Cultureword is a legacy organisation. Working class folk and persons of colour have been central to our work from its origins as Commonword in 1977; Cultureword is an initiative name coined by Lemn Sissay in 1986, which more explicitly catered for nascent writers of the global majority until the two constituencies inevitability overlapped, reflecting the intertwined struggles of class and race in this country, making it a logical step for us to adopt it as the working name for the entire organisation.

Now an ACE National Portfolio Organisation, there is no question about the value and impact of Cultureword. The next chapter is to walk in our legacy and make Cultureword more pivotal for writer development on a national scale by expanding our partnerships and adapting to the shifting realities of Manchester, the North West and the world. Mentioning Hélène and Shelley in my opening was not random; Cultureword has always had international relevance, with our writers winning and being shortlisted for awards such as the Walcott Prize, the Jhalak Prize, the Commonwealth Prize, the Women's Prize, and the Windham Campbell Prize – even rare awards, such as the Benson Medal given to Cultureword stalwart SuAndi – our next step is to truly inhabit the world we have helped shape, starting up North, of course.

Full Statement by Dr Peter Kalu, outgoing CEO

It was a great pleasure to lead the team at Cultureword providing a platform for new writers and a springboard for new writing for so many years. I'm proud of all we've achieved, of all the writers who have come through Cultureword and gone on to great success - in all the many ways that success can be defined. I look back too with a sense of achievement at the work we have done fostering community spirit and giving a voice to communities who often have not been heard.

In doing all this, we pioneered many things: from Poetry Slams to Listening Posts, to Mushaira shake-ups, to Cosplay-Meets-Literature Conferences – and we have the photos to prove it! We got the job done, and had fun doing it.

The role I leave has many dimensions and requires a certain level of versatility: vision, determination and creativity are prerequisites for the job. Nii Ayikwei Parkes is not just an acclaimed writer, activist and publisher with an international profile and a bulging CV; he was a beneficiary of Cultureword's initiatives himself in the 1900s and I believe he really 'gets' what Cultureword is about. He has worked in literature across the UK and beyond and returns to us with years of experience. I am confident that I am handing the controls to a skilled and creative set of hands and he will build well on the solid foundations that he inherits. This is a superb appointment that augurs well for literature in the Northwest and beyond.

Full Statement by Muli Amaye on behalf of Cultureword Board

It is an honour and a pleasure to welcome onboard our new CEO Nii Ayikwei Parkes. I have known Nii for a number of years and have complete confidence that Cultureword is moving into safe hands. Outgoing CEO Dr Peter Kalu has steered Cultureword with precision and vision over the past 30 years, and there is no doubt that he leaves a strong legacy.

We are excited to see the directions in which we will now go and grow with Nii at the helm. The experience and expertise he brings with him gives us confidence that Cultureword is going to expand and move into a new era whilst building on the strong foundation that it sits on. Nii has a calm way about him that encourages collaboration and growth. I have watched him champion writers and lead them forward to produce prizewinning novels.

His diplomacy will serve Cultureword as he leads us into this new phase of growth and we are fortunate to have access to his wealth of knowledge, care, encouragement and innovative thought processes. His dedication to the craft of writing, his strong ethical stance and activism sits well within Cultureword's ethos and will serve us well.

We are excited to see where we go from here.

CULTUREWORD