

SOUTHBANK CENTRE

Job Description

Post: Head of Literature and Spoken Word

Department: Arts Programming

Reports To: Artistic Director

Contract: Permanent | Full time

Salary – up to £70k depending on experience

The Southbank Centre

Southbank Centre is a national flagship cultural institution. It is Europe's largest arts centre and one of the UK's top six visitor attractions, occupying an 11-acre site that sits in the midst of London's most vibrant cultural quarter on the South Bank of the Thames. Its impact and reach are significant and it is respected internationally as a convener of great artists and diverse audiences. This year's 75th anniversary programme has attracted the participation of globally recognised artists, from Harry Styles to Anish Kapoor.

The Southbank Centre is made up of the Royal Festival Hall, Queen Elizabeth Hall, Purcell Room, Hayward Gallery and the National Poetry Library. It occupies an 11-acre estate enabling a substantial programme of free arts and culture.

The Southbank Centre is ambitious and innovative. We recognise that we must be different and distinctive to be relevant to the artists we work with and to the audiences and communities we want to reach.

Southbank Centre believes that a commitment to diversity and inclusion helps it be a more relevant and effective organisation.

The Southbank Centre is a registered charity.

Our Artistic Mission

We are a Creative Engine, forging the artistic practices of the future; and we strive to be the country's most culturally democratic arts space, building purposeful programmes through co-creation and opening up our 11-acre site to the communities that surround us.

Southbank Centre exists to provide great artistic experiences for everyone. Through art, we invite our visitors to enjoy shared cultural encounters together. To gaze. To listen. To be moved. To discover a new idea or a new perspective. We are proud that for 75 years, the performances and exhibitions here have moved millions.

We're serious about the arts — but not stuffy. Culture here can be playful, provocative, exciting and entertaining. It is a joy, not a duty.

Our values are:

- Make wonderful experiences together
- Sparking new thinking
- Creating welcoming spaces

SOUTHBANK CENTRE

PURPOSE OF THE ROLE:

Literature and the spoken word are a defining part of Southbank Centre's identity and programme. We are the home to the National Poetry Library, the largest public collection of modern poetry in the world, and to the London Literature Festival, the longest-running literature and spoken word festival in the capital.

The Head of Literature and Spoken Word is responsible for curating and overseeing the delivery of approximately 150+ literature and spoken word events a year across a broad literary landscape, including live poetry and interdisciplinary performance, in-conversations, talks and debates. These events are a mixture of our own promotions — including the iconic annual London Literature Festival which this year is co-curated with Dua Lipa, themed festivals and our year-round programme — and incoming hires and co-promotions, including current partnerships with Goalhanger to produce The Rest Is Fest.

This role isn't just about presenting events. This is a senior role for someone with a fundamental desire to connect with a broad public through literature and spoken word and for someone who believes in the power of literature and spoken word to transcend artistic boundaries and be deeply meaningful for our times. The postholder will build new relationships across the literary and publishing industry with authors, agents and publishers, nurture new and diverse literary voices, help develop Southbank's family of Associate Artists and contribute to the content strategy for our digital platforms.

The Literature and Spoken Word programme is currently guided by a newly launched 3-year strategy that clearly presents the need for its work, along with its outcomes and impact, whilst also firmly positioning this programme as part of our wider artistic vision.

The Literature and Spoken Word Team is made up of Head of Literature and Spoken Word, Literature Programmer (job-share), and Literature and Spoken Word Programming Coordinator. The team is further supported in programme delivery by colleagues across the organisation.

Main Responsibilities

Programme Delivery

- To deliver the Literature and Spoken Word Strategy, which addresses three key societal and sector needs – reversing reading decline, supporting author sustainability and driving public discourse – through the year-round literature and spoken word programme and related initiatives.
- To lead on curating the literature and spoken word programme across the Southbank Centre site and online, including the London Literature Festival, own-promotions, co-promotions, new commissions and rentals. To work with the Head of the National Poetry Library, to contribute to programming, exhibitions and events of the National Poetry Library.
- To attract talent - whether globally renowned or underground and emerging - in a variety of literary forms and spoken word styles, including fiction, non-fiction, poetry, spoken word, live podcasts, discussion and debate.
- To be responsible and accountable for overseeing the booking, management and delivery of the literature and spoken word programme on time and to agreed budgets, working with the Arts Programming, Arts Planning and Producing, Audiences and Technical and Production teams to

SOUTHBANK CENTRE

ensure high quality presentations in the Royal Festival Hall, Queen Elizabeth Hall, Purcell Rooms, across the site and in digital spaces.

- To contribute to the wider artistic life of the Southbank Centre, fully engaging with the artistic planning process, forging collaborative projects with art-form leads across music, performance and dance, creative technology and visual arts; and to work closely with the Creative Engagement and Public Programming teams on learning, engagement and artist development programmes, including the Southbank Centre's Associate Artists scheme.
- To maintain and develop Southbank Centre's leading role for innovation and excellence by developing relationships and partnerships with leading writers, thinkers, publishers, agents, promoters, industry bodies and the media; and by supporting artists and promoters from under-represented backgrounds.

Advocacy and Representation

- To advocate for Southbank Centre across the arts and creative industries, including representing the Southbank Centre at conferences and meetings and networking to ensure that the Southbank Centre is seen as a key player at national and international literary events.
- To promote a welcoming culture to the public, artists and promoters.
- To contribute to Marketing and Communications strategies, working closely with the Audiences team to maximise public engagement.

Finance, Fundraising and Legal

- To negotiate and execute contracts, working with our in-house Legal Counsel as required.
- To contribute to the annual budget setting process across the Artistic Programming Team, in conjunction with the Director of Arts Planning and Producing and Finance Team, and to be accountable for the Literature and Spoken Word team's financial targets to the Artistic Director and the Director of Arts Planning and Producing.
- To work with the Southbank Centre's Development Department to identify and develop funding and investment opportunities for the literature and spoken word programme.

Leadership

- To line manage the Literature and Spoken Word Team and oversee their performance management, professional development and any individual personnel issues.
- To ensure the team takes a visible leadership role and presence at Southbank Centre and across the sector, including attending relevant events.
- To be an active and visible senior artistic voice within the Southbank Centre playing a key role in the Curatorial Leadership Group and collaborating closely with other artform heads to co-curate programmes.

General

- Actively engaging with the organisation's vision, values and policies, including those regarding equality, diversity and inclusion, artistic ambition, participation and engagement, health and safety, evaluation and monitoring.
- Any other duties that are commensurate with the post.

SOUTHBANK CENTRE

PERSON SPECIFICATION

Essential

- A track record of programming an innovative and wide-ranging literature and spoken word offer;
- A keen interest and understanding of how strategy can maximise the impact of artistic programmes;
- Extensive knowledge of across major literary genres and current literary trends and of the literature and publishing sector;
- An authoritative and credible advocate for the power of literature and the spoken word with significant networks that include authors, literary agents, funders, publishers and literary organisations;
- Understanding of Intellectual Property rights and digital distribution, and an entrepreneurial approach to developing and monetising IP in formats and projects;
- Experience of managing people, ensuring that they are motivated, engaged and clear about expected standards of performance;
- Financial management experience, including budget forecasting and reporting;
- A strong interest beyond Literature and Spoken Word across a range of art forms, contemporary culture and the role of an arts centre;
- The ability to communicate to a high standard in a way that is both informative and accessible to a wide range of different types of audiences;
- Enthusiasm for training, mentoring and support of emerging talent, writers and thinkers.

This is a creative and dynamic role and we are keen to hear from a range of candidates with a variety of backgrounds. Specifically, you do not need to have programmed literature-specific events in the cultural sector. You should though bring a working knowledge and network within the world of literature along with an openness to working across artforms to create a series of unforgettable programmes and experiences for a broad public to engage with the big questions facing the world today.

TERMS AND CONDITIONS

Reporting to
Direct Line Report
Contract
Working Hours

Artistic Director
Literature and Spoken Word team
Permanent

This is a full-time role. Our week is Monday to Sunday. Normal hours of operation are 8.00am to 11.00pm each day. Your working hours will normally be between 8am and 6pm, Monday to Friday less one hour for lunch on each day. Due to the nature of this role, you will be required to work alternative hours and alternative days on occasion in line with the events programme and demands of the role.

We operate a hybrid working policy with staff, on average, working a

SOUTHBANK CENTRE

Location

minimum of 3 days in the office and 2 days from home. Due to the nature of the role time on site will be vital to build relationships and for the management and delivery of the events programme.

Southbank Centre, Belvedere Road, London, SE1 8XX

BENEFITS & PERKS

As well as working at one of London's most popular and exciting sites the successful candidate will also benefit from the following:

- A min 5% employer's pension contribution (rising to 9% depending on your employee contribution), from day 1 of employment
- 28 days annual leave, plus bank holidays (pro-rata for part time employees)
- Hybrid working model (3 days office working, 2 days from home)
- Health cash plan benefits
- Enhanced sick pay
- Enhanced family leave benefits
- Up to 30% discounts at onsite retail, food and beverage vendors
- Staff ticket offers for Southbank Centre events
- Free entry to Hayward Gallery
- Free/discounted entry with other reciprocal organisations
- Free staff yoga

FURTHER INFORMATION ABOUT THE ROLE

We are working with Achates as our recruitment partner on this appointment. If you would like to arrange an informal, confidential conversation about the role before submitting an application you can do so by reaching out to Vicki Grace, Director of Recruitment and Organisational Change on vicki@achates.org.uk.

HOW TO APPLY

Applications for the role of **Head of Literature and Spoken Word** should be submitted via our online application form. For more information, please see our application guide [here](#).

APPLICATION PROCESS AND TIMELINE

Deadline for applications	23.59 Sunday 27 th September 2026
First Round Interviews	wc 19 October
Second Round Interviews	wc 26 October

Applicants will be contacted during wc 5 and 12 October regarding the outcome of your application and to confirm if you will be invited to interview.