

The Peter Shaffer Postgraduate Award for Playwriting

Introduction and context

Sir Peter Shaffer CBE (1926–2016) is one of Trinity’s most distinguished literary alumni. His plays included *Five Finger Exercise* (1958), *The Royal Hunt of the Sun* (1964), *Equus* (1973) and *Amadeus* (1979), all adapted into films, the last-named winning eight Academy awards. Sir Peter generously bequeathed his own archive of playscripts and correspondence to the Wren Library at Trinity. This is the first major dramatic archive to be held by a Cambridge college, and has already attracted considerable academic interest.

The Sir Peter Shaffer Charitable Foundation has made a further generous donation to support a playwright at an early stage of their career, and specifically to promote the writing of plays with significant dramatic ambition involving more than three characters.

Supported by the award, the beneficiary will have the freedom to dedicate their time and energy to creating at least one substantial new drama. They will be able to draw on the resources of the student theatrical community. This is an outstanding opportunity for talented individuals to develop their craft in a stimulating environment. The award holder will be known as ‘The Peter Shaffer Playwright in Residence’.

Post-holders to date:

2022–3	India Harrison Peppe
2023–4	Tom Murray
2024–5	Aisling Towl
2025–6	Imogen Usherwood

Tenure and eligibility

The award will be for twelve months, ordinarily running 1 October – 30 September. To fulfil Sir Peter’s wish to support a playwright at the beginning of their career, the award will be made to a student who is a graduate of a university in the United Kingdom and who has completed their undergraduate degree no more than five years prior to taking up the award. Students will be eligible to apply to take up the award immediately following graduation.

Conditions and objectives of the award

The recipient will be expected to reside in Cambridge during term-time. They will be eligible for College accommodation on the same terms as those for postgraduate students taking a one year course (see [Rooms for Postgraduate Students](#)), though they will be allocated a specific room rather than entering the ballot. They will be assigned an Advisor. By the end of their tenure, the recipient will be expected to have written at least one substantial piece of drama involving more than three characters. This work should be performed by one of the University of Cambridge or College drama societies at an approved venue in Cambridge (such as the ADC theatre) and/or elsewhere (such as the Edinburgh International Fringe Festival), before or within three months after the end of their tenure. The recipient will write a short report to the Sir Peter Shaffer Charitable Foundation within one month of the end of their tenure summarising their achievements of the year, their experiences, the creative process, and indicating their plans for the future.

Emoluments

The emoluments of the recipient will be set at a level comparable to an External Research Student Maintenance Grant and the recipient will be accorded access to College facilities and resources.¹

Application and selection process

Applicants will be required to submit a CV and covering letter which should summarise their interest and experience in playwriting. They should also provide an outline of their proposed drama(s), not exceeding 1000 words. Two references from theatre or appropriate academic professionals will be required. A panel of at least three Trinity Fellows and an external member in the field of drama or literature will convene to review applications and recommend to the Trinity College Council the recipient of the award.

Donor recognition

The Sir Peter Shaffer Charitable Foundation will be listed in Trinity College donor lists and media. Representatives appointed by the Foundation will be invited to the performance of the play(s) written during the tenure of the award, as well as any other relevant donor recognition events. The recipient will acknowledge the support of the Sir Peter Shaffer Charitable

¹ ERS maintenance grant in 2025–6 was set at the UKRI rate of £20,780. [The Peter Shaffer Postgraduate Award](#) will include, in addition, a £1,200 research allowance.

Foundation in any future performances and publication of the work(s) written during the tenure of the award.

Timetable

Deadline for applications	Friday 16 January 2026, 12 noon
Deadline for references	Friday 23 January 2026, 12 noon
Longlisted applicants to submit sample work	Friday 27 February 2026, 12 noon
Shortlisted applicants interviewed	late April 2026
Offer of appointment	early May 2026
Award holder in post	1 October 2026