

I'd entered the Mairtín Crawford Award more than once and kept coming back to it because it's an award that makes sense. It's aimed at writers working towards a first full collection and recognises direction rather than a single finished outcome, which matters in poetry, where one poem rarely tells the whole story. By focusing on a group of poems, it allows a writer to show range and consistency, the beginnings of a voice rather than a one-off success. At the stage I was at, that approach felt both generous and practical. Winning the award mattered to me because it marked a point of recognition at exactly the right time, confirming that the work was being read carefully and on its own terms.

There's also the practical reality. The Mairtín Crawford Award carries real weight. Having it on my CV matters. It's a respected award with a clear ethos and that kind of recognition helps your work to be taken seriously. It opens doors to conversations and opportunities that might not otherwise happen and it signals a level of trust in the work at a crucial point.

Since winning, I've given readings, had more poems published and completed my first full collection, which is now ready to be sent out. The award played a significant role in giving me the confidence to bring that work to completion.

Winning the award mattered, but the residency at the Crescent Arts Centre was where it was fully realised. It created breathing space, time that wasn't immediately swallowed by other demands, and that space made sustained work possible. It allowed me to concentrate properly rather than fitting writing around the edges of everyday life. Proper, uninterrupted time. Time with nothing to think about except writing. No squeezing poems into the edges of the day, no constant low-level distraction. Just writing.

The Crescent itself is a genuinely democratic space, full of life and activity. It brings together people at different stages of their creative lives, professionals, emerging artists and people making work simply because they want to. It reflects a belief I share, that art isn't the preserve of a small group and that creativity happens best when it's embedded in a wider community.

Mairtín Crawford's commitment to making space for developing voices is clearly reflected in how the award operates and being part of that legacy is something I value greatly. Working in that environment sharpened my attention and made the days feel properly given over to the work. I arrived with a clear plan to put together a pamphlet. That was realistic and I did get it done. Having the space to look at the poems together, to test sequences and to sit with drafts made a real difference. I could see more clearly what was working together and what wasn't.

One of the most valuable things the residency offered was unstructured time. Time to sit, think and let ideas drift without needing to justify that as productivity. That kind of thinking is easy to squeeze out of a normal working life, but it's often where poems begin. Having the space to slow

down and to follow thoughts without immediately shaping them led directly to new work. The poems I wrote during the residency came out of that quieter time.

Often editing and preparing work for submission can drain the joy from writing, but that wasn't the case here. Working on existing poems and writing new ones felt connected. The two fed into each other, rather than competing for attention which reinforced the importance of allowing work to develop at its own pace.

I left Belfast with a finished pamphlet, new poems and a strong sense of momentum. That's what the residency gave me, time and space to work properly, and a clear, steady trust in the direction I'm taking as a poet.

**Siobhan Flynn**  
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**Winner of the Mairtín Crawford Award for Poetry 2025**