

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING MINUTES

*An online AGM of the Society of Authors held from
5-6pm on Thursday 18 November 2021*



Welcome

Joanne Harris, Chair of the Management Committee, welcomed members to the SoA's 2021 online AGM. She noted that the AGM is conducted in accordance with the SoA's Code of Conduct and the Dignity and Respect Policy. The AGM began with a short video highlighting SoA activities during 2021.

A. Report on the SoA's activities during 2021

The Chair reported on SoA activities over the last 12 months.

With the ongoing pandemic protections, most staff have continued working from home supporting members in their individual business negotiations, vetting hundreds of contracts and answering thousands of queries. The advisory team helps members with a vast range of queries from book adaptations, podcast, and radio script agreements, through to self-publishing contracts and collaborations. We advise on T&Cs for competitions, use of images, licensing queries, help to improve or remove morality clauses, or to get paid overdue royalties. Whether it's advising on rights reversions, helping with late payments or copyright infringements, we continue to support members throughout the year. We work hard to ensure members get paid fairly for their creative work.

Collectively, we continued to campaign strongly for members' concerns: we continued to press for a better deal for authors affected by the pandemic and we joined forces with other organisations to make our voices heard loudly. From our joint contributory publishing survey with the Writers Guild of Great Britain to the precariat campaign with the National Association of Writers in Education. We strengthened our relationship with other creative organisations with the appointment of Nicola Solomon as the new Chair of the Creative Rights Alliance (CRA). Together with the CRA we will work on Brexit, 'Global Britain' and highlight the need to reward all creators for their work. In partnership with the British Copyright Council, English Pen and the CRA, we also continue to keep a watching brief on the government's Online Safety Bill and with regards to anonymity and freedom of speech.

In a world first, we worked with second-hand booksellers and the ALCS to support a scheme whereby members can receive royalties on the sales of used books. AuthorSHARE creates a better deal for authors in the used book market.

The SoA also established a consultative network: the Authors & Illustrators Sustainability Working Group to represent the interests of British authors and illustrators and to consult with UK publishers, agencies distributors, suppliers, and retailers to ensure that the book trade reaches net zero carbon emissions by 2050 in line with the Paris Agreement. We signed up to the Publishers Association industry statement on climate change: *Publishing Declares*. Nicola will continue to meet with industry representatives to discuss existing net zero carbon emission pledges to how ourselves, our partners, and other stakeholders accountable. We joined forces with members when over 2,400 of you signed our open letter to credit #TranslatorsOnTheCover.

Looking ahead to 2022, we will concentrate campaign efforts in five overarching campaigns:

- CREATOR
- EARNING A LIVING
- FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION
- INCLUSIVITY AND DIVERSITY
- SUSTAINABILITY

The membership continues to grow despite it being another very difficult year. We are 11,797 members strong, a 3.2.% increase. A benefit of growing is being able to introduce new benefits to members: two valuable new benefits were introduced this year: Membership Plus – the new Public Liability Insurance scheme. We also partnered with Benenden Health to offer access to their healthcare scheme.

We welcomed two new organisations as tenants to Bedford Row: English Pen and The Reading Agency join our existing tenants, the Sasakawa Foundation. In 2022 we look forward to welcoming as many members as we can to the building for hybrid events and meetings.

B. Report of elections to the Management Committee

The Management Committee are chosen by the membership and are responsible for the strategic direction of the SoA. Members of the Committee serve a three-year term and every year, four members complete their terms. This year, Samantha Collett, Woodrow Phoenix and Hugh Roberts completed their three-year terms and Katharine Quarmby, whose term would have also ended this year, stepped down from the Management Committee in September. We thank them enormously for their thoughtful contributions, their time and energy over the last three years and for all the decisions they have helped us to make.

We received six nominations for the four vacancies. The ballot closed on 27 October, and we are pleased to welcome the following members to the Management Committee: Charles Harris, Juliet McKenna, Hugh Roberts (who has been re-elected for a further term) and Tim Tate. Election statements and the report of voting are available on the SoA website.

The past couple of years have been extremely challenging for authors, and the next few years will continue that trend as we try to find a way forward from the pandemic, Brexit and as we face the big issues challenging the creative industries today. The SoA is here to support and represent every type of author, at every stage of their careers. The new Committee members are central to the mission of greater inclusion, diversity, and representation.

The new Committee members will join Simon Cann, Vanessa Fox O'Loughlin, Dorothy Koomson, Abie Longstaff, Anne Rooney, Margaret Skea and Philip Womack. Also on the Management Committee as non-voting members, are the Chairs of our National Groups and our Special Interest Groups who provide valuable insights into areas where they have specialist expertise. They are Mac Logan, Chair of the SoA in Scotland, Paula Brackston, Chair of the SoA in Wales, Ignaty Dyakov-Richmond, Chair of the Educational Writers Group, Dawn Finch, Chair of the Children's Writers and Illustrators Group, David Morley, Chair of the Scriptwriters Group, Katrina Naomi, Chair of our Poetry and Spoken Word Group. We also welcome the new co-chairs of the Translators Association: Sawad Hussain and Rebecca DeWald who replace Kari Dickson and Christina MacSweeney. Thanks to Kari and Christina for their valued input over their term as co-chairs. Thanks were also conveyed to Honorary Treasurer, Barry Kernon.

The Chair thanked the Management Committee and Group Chairs for the way they have approached some very difficult discussions and to Nicola for steering a steady course through what has been a turbulent year.

A final thanks was conveyed to all members who have generously volunteered their time and energy for the SoA over the last 12 months. From all our brilliant ambassadors on the Council, our President, our Management Committee, our Special Interest and National Group Committees, through to our many dedicated local group organisers, judges, assessors, charity trustees, and all members who have stuck with the SoA during another difficult year.

C. Resolutions

The AGM is open to Members and Associates but only Full Members have voting rights.

Resolution 1 (proposed by the Management Committee): that the minutes of the meeting held on 19 November 2020 be approved. A link to the 2020 minutes was shared. Hugh Roberts seconded this resolution - it was carried 92% in favour (8% abstained).

Resolution 2 (proposed by the Management Committee): that the Company's annual report and accounts for 2020 be approved. A link to the Annual Report and Accounts was shared. Juliet McKenna seconded this resolution - it was carried, 81% in favour (19% abstained).

Resolution 3: according to s22.2 of the bye-laws the appointment of the following persons to the Society of Authors' Council by the Management Committee: Gwyneth Lewis, Sarah McIntyre, Nicola Morgan and Daljit Nagra. A link to the Council page was shared. Margaret Skea seconded this resolution - it was carried 93% in favour (7% abstained).

Resolution 4: election of Bob Swarup to the Committee of the P.D. James Memorial Fund. A link to the P.D. James Memorial Fund was shared. Patricia O'Riley seconded this resolution – it was carried 88% in favour (12% abstained).

D. Short Quiz

Nicola Solomon chaired a short interactive quiz:

1. How much money has the SoA paid out to authors via the Contingency Fund since the pandemic began?

As the impacts of the pandemic continue, the SoA will keep up fundraising efforts to ensure we can continue to help authors most in need. If you have been more fortunate during this time, please consider donating to the Contingency Fund so that we can keep this open for those needing financial relief.

Correct answer: over £1.6 million

2. How many events has the SoA programmed for members over the 12 months?

The SoA @ Home programme has continued to be hugely popular, with a broad range of professional development sessions, industry insider panel discussions, afternoon teas and feel-good Friday events that have kept members connected, informed, and entertained. We were thrilled that Sophia Jackson, our Head of Events, was picked by *The Bookseller* magazine as one of its 'Rising Stars'.

The pandemic has acted as a catalyst to take our events online, which has had the positive impact of making our events more accessible, more inclusive and has helped keep members connected through lockdowns.

Correct answer: 70+

3. What is the newest prize in the SoA's list?

This year we kept our SoA Awards Party online. Though we miss the opportunity to get together in person, we have benefited from getting to know the winners of the prizes by hearing directly from them through speeches and readings. We paid out over £105,000 to 35 writers, poets, and illustrators at the Awards party, which is the UK's biggest literary prize fund. Overall, this year we have awarded more than £120,000 in prizes for fiction, non-fiction, illustration, audio drama and translation. You can still watch the ceremony on the SoA's Vimeo channel.

Correct answer: The Volcano Prize

From 2022, the **Volcano Prize** will present £2,000 for a novel which focuses on the experience of travel away from home. Inspired by Malcolm Lowry's novel *Under the Volcano*, the Volcano Prize is endowed by Lowry's biographer Gordon Bowker and his widow Ramdei Bowker. **The prize opened for entries in August 2021.**

4. How many local groups does the SoA have?

We currently have 40 active local groups who meet regularly throughout the year and numbers are growing all the time. This is thanks to the fantastic work of Francesca Howell – our Head of Author Communities - and all our local group volunteers who give their time to strengthen our communities by organising online and in-person events.

Correct answer: 40 +

5. How many members received silver pin badges (for 25 years' membership) and how many received gold pin badges (for 50 years' membership)?

Correct answer: 742 and 37.

E. Any other business authorised by the Chair

Question from John Hands: with an increasing number of members moving to self-publishing, what support is the SoA giving to such authors?

Nicola Solomon answered to say that the SoA supports self-published and hybrid members with lots of events throughout the year. Most recently, Kate Pool did a Q&A as part of our self-publishing series of events, which is on our Vimeo channel. If you have specific questions, our contracts team is extremely knowledgeable in this area. Early in the new year we will put out the results of our contributory publishing survey. There are so many people offering services that are not good. We would strongly advise all members to show us all contributory publishing contracts. The more we can increase our knowledge, the better we can reflect to members on the advice we give. We are redoing the website and there will be more self-publishing resources on there.

There being no further questions, the Chair closed the AGM.