

POETRY & SPOKEN WORD GROUP CHAIR REPORT 2021

Annual General Meeting 2021



Welcome to the sixth AGM of the Poetry and Spoken Word Group, a committee of the Society of Authors, a trade union for writers.

The Poetry and Spoken Word Group of the Society of Authors is six years old and in the last year our membership has grown by 20 per cent with 99 new members. We currently have 585 members. So welcome to everyone.

The current committee members are Katrina Naomi (Chair since January 2021), Shazea Quraishi, Keith Jarrett, Carole Bromley, Kavita A. Jindal and Alwyn Marriage. We have also co-opted Philip Gross onto the PSWG from the Society of Authors in Wales and are grateful for his input. We recently held elections and our two new members are Roy McFarlane and Amanda B Holiday, we will hear from them shortly. And we're pleased to say that Shazea Quraishi will be extending her term on the committee for a further year. A huge thank you to Tamar Yoseloff (PSWG's former chair, from 2015 to 2020), and to Helen Shay and Jacqueline Saphra who have stepped down this year. A big thank you to all of them for their brilliance and hard work on the committee.

All of the committee members are practising poets, individually engaged in publishing, performing, education and advocacy. We continue to support the professional standing and rights of poets and spoken word artists and to observe, report and advise on good practice in all public platforms in which poets appear. The PSWG chair attends the Society of Authors' management committee so that poets' voices and concerns are heard, and she has also been attending the Society of Authors' new committee on diversity to learn and to feed back on the PSWG's activities.

We would like to thank our former committee secretary Nadia Bonini and also Nusrat Raahi who provided support and liaison between the group and the SoA, and to welcome our new committee secretary Johanna Clarke, who helps us stay organised. We would also like to thank the SoA's Chief Executive, Nicola Solomon for all of her advice and expertise this year, and for her interest in the rights of poets.

STATISTICS

15 per cent of our members are under 35, 61 per cent are 35-65 and 24 per cent are over 65, which represents little change from last year. Most of our members are in Greater London, 19 per cent, with 17 per cent in the North of England. The South, South East, South West, Midlands, East Anglia and Scotland are fairly equally represented at between 8 and 10 per cent. Wales is at 4 per cent. We have 7 members in Northern Ireland and we've gained 38 international members since last year. We don't yet have other breakdowns of our members, regarding ethnicity, disability, class, gender, class or sexuality.

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EVENTS

All of our public events last year were held online, as part of the ongoing SoA@Home Festival including:

- an online Positive Poetry Party hosted by Rachel Long
- a Resilience for Poets event chaired by Deborah Alma with Hannah Hodgson and Amy Acre on the panel
- Afternoon Tea with Salena Godden, in conversation with Kadish Morris
- Afternoon Tea with Daljit Nagra, in conversation with Nicola Solomon
- Afternoon Tea with Kayo Chingonyi, in conversation with Dzifa Benson
- The Role of Agents in Poetry, chaired by Carole Bromley who spoke with Vanessa Kisuule and Becky Thomas

We've been delighted at the audience numbers and the feedback we've received on these events.

We have an event What Did Zoom Every Do for Us, on protecting accessibility for poetry events as things 'open up', which will be held after our AGM this morning, chaired by Aki Schilz, with panel members Polly Atkin, Daniel Sluman and Roy McFarlane. And we are planning some more exciting events this year including another positive poetry party and a panel on sustainability.

We welcome ideas from members for future events, on practical and creative issues of interest to poets and spoken word artists.

ACTIONS

Over the last year we have continued to offer advice to Society of Authors' staff on individual poets' concerns and to raise wider issues with publishers and prize committees. This year, for example, we received reassurance from the Costa Prize to help any independent poetry publisher who could not afford the financial commitment, should one of their poets' collections be shortlisted. We have also been working with Poetry London on copyright and digitisation, and hope to ensure poets' copyright is protected in other publishers' digital projects.

In 2021, the Authors' Contingency Fund gave £413,250 to writers with 37 of the 325 grantees being poets (around 11%). The fund is still very active, and 2022 applications are welcome.

We plan to campaign on poets' pay this year. And we're open to other ideas from our members – that's you! Please, don't be shy, let us know what's important to you?

Katrina Naomi
PSWG Committee Chair
2 March 2022