Welcome to the seventh 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 seven years old and in the last year our membership has grown by 35 per cent with 210 new members. We currently have 795 members. So welcome to everyone.

The current committee members are Katrina Naomi (Chair since January 2021), Amanda B Holiday, 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 three new members are Isabel del Rio, Michaela Morgan, and Penny Pepper - we will say hello to them shortly though Michaela can’t be here today and sends her apologies. A huge thank you to Shaza Quraishi, Keith Jarrett, and Roy McFarlane 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 SoA staff coordinators Johanna Clarke and Tilly Zeeman who help 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

14 per cent of our members are under 35, 50 per cent are 35-65 and 22 per cent are over 65, which represents little change from last year. Most of our members are in Greater London, 18 per cent, with 17 per cent in the North of England and 12% in the Scotland. The South, South East, South West, East Anglia and Midlands are fairly equally represented at between 8 and 9 per cent. Wales is at 5 per cent. We have 7 members in Northern Ireland and we have 47 international members. We don’t yet have other breakdowns of our members, regarding ethnicity, disability, class, gender, class or sexuality.

EVENTS

All of our public events last year were held online, as part of the ongoing SoA@Home Festival including:
POETRY & SPOKEN WORD
GROUP CHAIR REPORT
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• A post-AGM industry insider What Did Zoom Ever Do for Us? Chaired by Aki Schilz who was joined by poets Polly Atkin, Roy McFarlane and Daniel Sluman
• A Positive Poetry Party to celebrate the winners of the Eric Gregory and Cholmondeley prizes, hosted by Joelle Taylor.
• Afternoon Tea with Raymond Antrobus in conversation with Victoria Adukwei Bulley.
• An Industry Insider event as part of the SoA’s AGM week: Poetry in This Time of Eco Crisis, chaired by Kay Syrad who spoke to Caleb Parkin, Phoebe Power and Jacqueline Saphra.

We’ve been delighted at the audience numbers and the feedback we’ve received on these events. We will continue to host our events online in the main, with in-person events planned only when we believe this format is absolutely necessary. You can also watch all the recordings for these events via the SoA’s Vimeo channel so don’t worry if you missed them.

We have an event on Poetry Film which will be held after our AGM this morning, chaired by Director of The Poetry Society, Judith Palmer, with panel members Chaucer Cameron, Yomi Sode and Nathalie Teitler. And we are planning some more exciting events this year including hopefully another positive poetry party and a panel on poetry in translation.

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. We have continued to work with Poetry London on copyright and digitisation (they have now revised their licence wording for submissions!) and organising a symposium on digital archiving for later this year. We have also been in touch with UEA regarding their new poetry archive. And have contributed to SoA’s internal Inclusivity programme as well as joining up with the SoA, the Authors with Disabilities and Chronic Illnesses network and Inklusion to issue a statement on turning back the clock on festival and event accessibility in March 2022. Inclusion and accessibility remains a top priority within all our activity as a committee.

In 2022, the Authors’ Contingency Fund gave £323,140 to writers with 29 of the 207 grantees being poets (around 14%). The Authors’ Foundation and K Blundell Trust supported 10 applicants working on poetry (around 8%). Both funds are currently accepting applications.

We plan to focus on live events and festivals 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
20 March 2023