

## Resolution 7

That in the light of disturbing recent press coverage about the Society, that the Society urgently reviews how to pursue its stated aim “to protect free speech” and puts in place a robust framework to do so, including a member and Management Committee working group that looks at how best to protect the fundamental right of all authors to express themselves freely within the law, and to uphold the impartiality expected of the Society, including all who govern and work for it. This should include a sub-committee of the Management Committee.

Proposed by

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## Management Committee response

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The Society of Authors always welcomes feedback, suggestions and constructive criticism. We don't always get things right and are always looking at ways to improve. In response to the content and context of Resolution 7, we have reviewed the text of the Resolution line by line.

***“In the light of disturbing recent press coverage about the Society...”***

Resolution 7 provides no specifics or evidence to support its premise. The negative press coverage that we have seen has not supplied any specific evidence of the allegations made. The SoA has always responded to such coverage to correct inaccuracies and misinformation with well-documented facts about the Society and how it is run.

***“...that the Society urgently reviews how to pursue its stated aim ‘to protect free speech’...”***

The SoA continually protects free speech in many ways, but it is not a ‘stated aim’ of the organisation – that is the remit of freedom of speech organisations such as English Pen and Index on Censorship.

The SoA’s overriding strategic aim, which informs all our activities, is

*to empower professional authors and their estates with knowledge, support and community, and to lobby industry and government for an environment that helps sustain and nurture the careers of creators and their work.*

An essential part of this aim is to work towards

*Inclusivity where authors of every background, age, location, career stage and professional focus will have access to the knowledge, individual support and community they need, in an environment that values what they do.*

Our organisational vision is of an

*environment where creativity, creative work and free speech are valued, where professional authors of every discipline and background are empowered to earn a living income on fair terms, whilst retaining control of their work and career.*

We do this by giving advice, campaigning and lobbying. Members receive unlimited free advice on all aspects of the profession, including confidential clause-by-clause contract vetting, and a wide range of exclusive offers. We campaign and lobby on the issues that affect authors and hold a wide range of events across the UK. The SoA also administers grants and prizes to support and celebrate authors at all stages of their careers.

The SoA is committed to working for the rights of ALL types of writers, illustrators and literary translators, at all stages of their careers, although it is our members we answer to. Everything the SoA undertakes is for the sole aim of improving the lives and conditions of ALL authors, no matter their status or personal views.

Championing freedom of expression (often called freedom of speech) is one of the things we do, but we do not have the resource to place it above all our vital core activities – and we should not do so. The campaigns team, which is currently made up of less than one full-time person’s working hours, work on a range of campaigns under five strands. These are:

- Making a living as a creator
- CREATOR (contractual rights including credits)
- Copyright
- Inclusivity

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## *Management Committee response*



- **Freedom of expression**

Within that, our advisory team supports individuals when their freedom of expression is threatened in a professional context, for example, by regularly challenging morality clauses in publishing contracts and seeking fees if contracts are cancelled because of an author's views.

The SoA does a great deal of work on other areas that impinge on freedom of expression, for example:

- We lobbied on proposals in the Online Safety Bill which threaten to severely restrict freedom of expression on online platforms.
- We lobbied against Strategic Lawsuits Against Public Participation (SLAPPs), which have been used repeatedly by rich individuals and corporations to silence critics.
- We protest the treatment of fellow authors, including in Belarus, Ukraine, Turkey and most recently in Egypt.

However, we do not have the resources to do this work full time, which is why we regularly partner with organisations such as English Pen\* and Scottish Pen\*, whose remit and entire workload is to champion the continuation of freedom of expression.

### ***“...and puts in place a robust framework to do so...”***

The SoA already has in place an extremely robust framework for dealing with freedom of expression. This has been stated many times before, but here it is outlined again.

Our approach to promoting freedom of expression and preventing harassment and threats as a result of authors exercising their right to freedom of expression has consistently been:

- To clearly and repeatedly state our support for the right of all authors to hold and express opinions, as per Article 10 of The Human Rights Act of 1998.
- To condemn violence and the threat of violence unequivocally, especially as it relates to attempts to prevent any author exercising their own freedom of expression.
- To condemn any kind of racist, hate or unprofessional speech.
- To have in place a professional code of behaviour for staff and members including the Management Committee that is outlined in our Dignity and Respect policy as well as signing up to the cross-industry Commitment to Professional Behaviour in Publishing.
- To have in place a system where, if an SoA member has concerns about another member's behaviour in their interactions with the SoA, we encourage them to make a complaint under our Dignity and Respect policy. Details of the complaints procedure can be found here: <https://www2.societyofauthors.org/complaints>.
- To not get involved in individual debates, or in disputes between authors.

- To provide guidance on dealing with online abuse, harassment and bullying.
- If asked to do so, to provide private support, both emotional and practical, for authors who are targeted after exercising their freedom of expression, including entering into correspondence with publishers where contractual problems have arisen.
- To reiterate that our committee members, officers and staff work to a code on what they can say on behalf of the SoA. **If it is not expressly stated as such, the person is not speaking for or on behalf of the SoA.**

The SoA deplores bullying, trolling and personal attacks of any kind. However, we don't usually speak out publicly on individual cases, especially if the private support we are providing is ongoing.

While we do not comment on what members should or should not write, draw, perform or translate, we do ask authors, and the wider creative community, to be mindful of the impact of what they create, do and say.

***“...including a member and Management Committee working group...”***

The strategy and direction of the SoA is set by the democratically elected Management Committee. They are the directors of the company and are responsible for its running. It is not appropriate for them to make those decisions jointly with unelected members. The Management Committee is always aware that they answer to the membership, and will consult widely in relation to the proposed investigations outlined in the Management Committee resolutions.

***“...that looks at how best to protect the fundamental right of all authors to express themselves freely within the law...”***

The SoA already have a campaigns subcommittee that looks at all our campaigning areas. It would be against the interests of the membership to give precedence to one area over all the other important work we do. Nevertheless, our teams already do a great deal of work in the area of freedom of expression as explained above.

***“...and to uphold the impartiality expected of the Society, including all who govern and work for it. This should include a sub-committee of the Management Committee...”***

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### *Management Committee response*



The SoA, including its Management Committee and professional staff, is impartial and professional.

Our members hold myriad views and we welcome all of them, whatever their background, experience, genre or career stage. Even among Management Committee members there is a range of views on various subjects, but we come to a consensus, discounting views irrelevant to the central debate, as we work together for the good of SoA members.

We have investigated all cases where members have suggested that the SOA refused to help authors who felt they were in difficulty because of their expressed views and have found no instance where a request for help was refused.

If what Resolution 7 proposers are questioning is the extent to which staff and officers of the SoA should be constrained in their own personal communications *outside* of their SoA position, the Management Committee has already committed to abide by a set of stated guidelines. They have also agreed to undertake a wide-ranging review of this area as they consult on the roles of Council, President and Management Committee, as stated in Resolution 3. All recommendations will be made to **the 2023 AGM**.

**We refute all suggestions that the SoA does not support certain authors or groups because of their views. We will always try to help members who ask for help in disputes that relate to their work as an author and that we can assist them with.**

**We also refute all suggestions that the SoA does not continually strive to allow the voices of ALL authors, whatever their views or circumstances, to be heard.**

**The SOA gives training to members, creates communities, vets contracts, lobbies government on relevant issues, gives grants and prizes.**

**We will continue to do this work while continuing to uphold members' right to freedom of expression, whoever they are.**