



CANDIDATES' ELECTION STATEMENTS

Election to the Management Committee 2025

Please read carefully before casting your vote.

Morgen Witzel



Writing has been a huge part of my life. I started writing stories as a child, and my career since has included journalism; advertising copywriting; writing and editing academic textbooks and journals; ghost writing; journalism again as a freelance with the *Financial Times*, *South China Morning Post* and various Indian publications; and most recently as a writer of fiction with fifteen published novels. I also

crossed the floor for a while and, with my late wife and frequent co-author, Marilyn Livingstone, ran a contract business in the publishing industry for about 10 years, editing and producing reference works such as encyclopaedias and dictionaries.

Throughout my career I have always been aware of just how hard it is for writers (including me) to make a living, even without the obstacles the industry, government, tech firms and the wider economy throw at us. Average author incomes have declined, the publishing industry is becoming more concentrated, technology looms over us like a shadow, and we are all having to struggle just to tread water. The SoA is there to help and support authors, and although it has done a magnificent job, more still will be required in the future.

I am also a passionate believer in good governance. To me, governance is about engaged stewardship, supporting the organisation and helping it to pursue its causes; but, of course, it is also a matter of ensuring that the organisation is accountable to its members. These are two halves of the same whole: support and accountability go hand in hand.

To this end, I have been involved in charity governance as a trustee or non-executive director for more than 15 years, most recently as a trustee of Libraries Unlimited, the charity that runs the library service in Devon, and as a director of the Crime Writers' Association. I have been involved with research projects focusing on governance, and have helped to produce several books on the subject, and I also teach governance and ethics at post-graduate level. Our changing world, including changes in technology, are pose new and sometimes unexpected problems and challenges for governance.

Hopefully my experience as both a writer and a trustee/director can be of some help as the SoA goes forward.

AJ West



Earlier this year I worked with the SoA to lead a protest against Meta's use of our books to train its AI. I drew on my previous experience as a BBC journalist and charity communications director to coordinate national media coverage and build support in Parliament. I care passionately about protecting British authors from the wholesale misuse of our work. This is a crucial moment in our shared fight to protect British literature from abuse, and I will do all I

can to make sure we maintain our moral and legal right to own our own words.

As an author I have benefited from the best the UK publishing industry has to offer, while also experiencing its most pressing challenges. My first novel was traditionally published without an agent, while my second novel *The Betrayal of Thomas True* struggled on submission only to become a Sunday Times bestseller and winner of the CWA Historical Dagger Award in July 2025. In spite of my outward success, I have dealt with the myriad challenges so many of us navigate in an industry that often leaves us feeling exposed and disempowered. The SoA has assisted me with legal advice and a grant to continue my historical research. With personal connections to authors from diverse backgrounds, and some of the most passionate advocates in publishing – who share our concerns at a time of seismic change – I will be a strident voice in the SoA's mission to make sure writers are given the care, investment and respect they deserve.

As a media trainer, I'm currently working with authors from publishers large and small to help them build confidence in interviews and in public speaking. I am keen to find new opportunities to support authors facing pressure to act as publicists and social media experts as well as creatives. Working as a member of the SoA board will enable me to address this pressure directly with stakeholders.

I am the proud co-founder of The Book Party, a fast-growing event in cities across the UK, empowering hundreds of traditionally published and indie writers to connect with thousands of readers in celebration of British literature. I believe writers are stronger together, regardless of what we create and how we are published.

An advocate for independent booksellers, I regularly tour all nations of the United Kingdom, having visited more than 200 independent and high street bookshops in the past two years. Without them, I would not have a career, and I intend to find new ways to connect my fellow authors with booksellers.

As a board member of the SoA I will represent my peers and listen to members who share their views with me, both privately and in public. I intend to be a proud and vocal champion for my fellow writers. I hope you will consider my candidacy.

Ian Giles



The significant challenges posed by AI and egregious copyright infringements perpetuated by tax-dodging tech giants make our SoA more important than ever. These core member issues should drive the Management Committee and SoA decision-making processes. I will keep you at the centre of the conversation and work to ensure that we all are respected, protected and paid for the work only we can do.

An SoA survey this year revealed a stark reality: 72% of respondents believe generative AI has negatively impacted opportunities for work, while 57% consider their career unsustainable. My income, like many others', has taken an AI-driven hit. In conversation with translators, I hear with dismay and alarm about publishers' attempts to replace them with AI and their plans to exit the profession.

The urgency cannot be overstated. If we don't confront these challenges head-on, we risk long-term damage to our profession. What we do is skilled work for which we should be paid, and which deserves the protections afforded by copyright. We must not be treated as an afterthought by publishers, Big Tech, or the law. We need to raise awareness that while books continue to be read by humans, human creativity should make them too.

Whether you're a writer navigating shrinking advances, an illustrator facing rights grabs, or a translator being squeezed to the margins, we are all freelancers. We often negotiate contracts alone, manage unpredictable workloads, and shoulder the risks of our creative businesses ourselves. But that doesn't mean we have to act alone. The SoA is our union. For unageted creatives especially, services like contract vetting, rights advice and support in payment disputes are essential, not optional extras. These aren't just helpful; they're vital to keeping creative professionals in the industry.

We need to look forward. Writers are expected to platform-build, illustrators to self-market, translators to multi-task across roles, often without formal training or institutional support. We need the SoA to invest in practical, accessible skills development that reflects how authorship actually works. That includes workshops on rights, pricing, negotiation, income diversification and working responsibly with tech. It's about building resilience, not just reacting to crises.

I believe it is imperative that we ensure the SoA is the best union possible, so that it can work to protect our professional interests and allow us to focus on what we do best: our jobs. This requires the Management Committee to remain focused on the SoA's long-held objective of supporting its members in the business of authorship. With your support, I will be your voice and vote in your union's decision-making processes.

I am a translator of the Scandinavian languages into English with over 35 published books across a range of genres, giving me strong personal experience of how our industry is changing. As Chair of the Translators Association (since 2023), I've championed translators individually and collectively in the face of these same challenges. I bring extensive experience from multiple, small membership organisations and will ensure that all SoA members are well represented.

Lucinda Hawksley



As someone who has been on the Management Committee in the past, I am reapplying because I would love to be able to take a more active part in the SoA's work again. I have been extremely impressed with – and grateful for – the SoA's recent campaigns and would like to be able to get more involved. I am particularly keen to be able to work on behalf of fellow authors in what currently seems a terrifying and bewildering age of AI, and its resultant

plagiarism of our works (7 of my books have already been 'scraped' by Meta for their AI library, so I feel the pain of anyone else who has been through this too). I recently attended a Creators' Rights Alliance event at Portcullis House with the SoA's Anna Ganley, at which we met MPs and talked about the need for creators' concerns to be taken seriously and acted upon. I would like to be able to continue this type of work, putting authors' concerns properly onto the government's agenda.

The majority of my books are adult non-fiction, although I have recently started writing fiction as well. I have also written a couple of books for children, and have worked as a journalist and travel writer, as well as having written scripts for podcasts. I fully understand the frustration of having to take on other 'side jobs' because book publishing does not pay enough for authors to be able to concentrate solely on our writing. Something I feel particularly strongly about is the shocking lowering of advances and the erosion of authors' rights by publishing companies. There is a frustrating assumption that writing is a vocation and therefore people will be happy to do it for free, just for the joy of seeing their name in print. At the start of my career, I worked as a book editor, whilst working on my own book proposals. In that role, I saw both sides of the publishing journey. I have also since witnessed the appalling lowering in editorial standards, and how rapidly publishers have started to devalue authors' contributions.

I am a firm advocate that everyone should be paid – and paid fairly – for their work and expertise. I and many other author friends have been left reeling by how little our work seems to be valued by the industry and I would like to work with the SoA on campaigns to put authors at the forefront of the book industry again.

I have been a member of the SoA for about 20 years and it has been invaluable in many ways. There have been several times in my writing career when I have felt things have just got too difficult – and yet every time the SoA has helped me find a solution. I would like to be a part of that solution process for fellow authors.

Jen Calleja



For as long as I have been writing and translating, I have spoken and written about the largely invisible workloads and payment structures of authors and literary translators. After raising awareness of these issues through public speaking and the written word, I've learned that writers and translators must work together to shape our industry. That is why I am standing for the Management Committee of the SoA: to become actively involved in

shaping the future for authors and translators.

As an author, I've witnessed the steep decline in writer pay. Being a writer is currently not a sustainable career even if successful 'on paper'. Too often, writers are asked to take on the burden of risk through smaller advances and the bulk of promotional labour, often being made a hedged bet rather than experiencing long-term investment in our future and wellbeing. It is vital that the SoA leads the fight against the normalisation of these practices before even fewer of us can afford to write professionally.

As a translator, I've personally had my translations used without permission in training so-called Artificial Intelligence software and have already been asked to edit 'translations' created by AI. I've previously been a judge and a shortlistee the SoA Translation Prizes (Schlegel-Tieck Prize) and I was the inaugural Translator in Residence at the British Library. I want to bring my prominence and networks in literary translation to the Committee to end the use of AI instead of human translators.

As a writer-translator from a working-class background I have a unique perspective on the publishing industry. I recently published *Fair: The Life-Art of Translation*, which explores the working conditions of literary translators and other freelancers, and I would use these insights to strengthen the bridge between the Translators Association and the Management Committee. I will ensure that the unique barriers and issues experienced by working-class writers are always in the room during the Committee's discussions.

I have hands-on and extensive experience of what it takes to write, translate, edit, publish and publicise a book. For the last fifteen years, I've worked as a freelance author, literary translator and co-publisher of a small press for Maltese literature in translation. I have previously worked as Press and Public Relations Coordinator within a cultural institute, and was a Director, senior trainer, spokesperson and press contact at the Good Night Out Campaign CIC.

Having gone full-time eight years ago, and having first become a SoA member in 2014, I firmly believe in the strength and community forged through joining other writers and translators to organise for change together. Up to now, I've published seven books of fiction, poetry and memoir with small independent presses, and around twenty book translations from German into English with a variety of large and small publishers. I will bring that experience to the Management Committee and fight for fair pay, professional acknowledgement and respect for writers and translators.

Matt Abbott



I'm a poet, award-winning lyricist, educator, and activist from Wakefield. Ever since I began writing and performing poetry in 2006, I've been politically minded and have become attached to various social and humanitarian causes. I've now been a full-time poet for 10 years and have a wide range of experience in the industry. I joined the SoA in 2021, having previously been a member of Equity since 2014.

As a working-class poet who was recently diagnosed with ADHD, I've spent most of the past decade accepting things as they are and being grateful for whatever I'm offered. At best, authors' pay has frozen during this time. In many cases, it's declined, coinciding with the severely reduced likelihood of receiving public funding. Now, at 36, I've found the confidence to start advocating for myself, and I want to step into a role that will allow me to support as many other authors as possible.

I'm determined to campaign for authors at all stages of their careers to be paid properly and treated with the value and respect that they deserve. The rise of AI is petrifying for all of you, particularly when some leading literary festivals and publishers appear to be embracing rather than shunning it. With this sudden and grave threat, your value as emerging, post-emerging, or established authors should be higher than ever. Despite this, you're increasingly being cast aside in favour of celebrity authors with no prior background in writing.

I'm also passionate about campaigning for both vocal and practical expressions of Palestinian solidarity. As workers within the literary industry, we can use our collective power to push arts institutions to end their complicity with the ongoing genocide. With freedom of expression under threat, publicly opposing the heartbreaking scenes in the Middle East as a professional author is not without risk. I would work to strengthen the protection of freedom of speech and expression so that authors can safely continue to speak out against global injustices.

Alongside being an author in my own right, I've also regularly produced live poetry events around the UK since 2014. Providing platforms for a diverse range of voices and creating opportunities to aid writer development has always been at the forefront of my practice. I want to channel this energy into a more formalised and structured role.

I have nearly 20 years of experience in digital marketing. This has included paid roles as well as promoting myself, my band, my spoken word record label, and latterly, LIVEwire Poetry. I also fronted a poetry fundraiser for Write Out Loud in 2021/22 and would draw on this experience to help SoA membership reach its full potential. There are thousands of writers in the UK who are not members of the SoA and I intend to use my experience to grow the membership of your union and, in the process, build the power to change the publishing industry for the better.

Polly Atkin



I'm a poet, nonfiction writer (biography, memoir and nature writing), editor, and bookseller based in Cumbria. Living in a rural area with an escalating housing crisis and wage gap, I know first-hand how low income inhibits creative potential, and how opportunity dwindles away from the centres of cultural production.

Over the past 2 decades, I've found the support of the SoA central to navigating isolation and lack of experience in the industry. Now I want to use the knowledge I've gained to improve conditions for others, which is why I am standing for the Management Committee. I intend to bring the same passion, integrity and care to the Management Committee that I bring to all my commitments as a professional writer.

I've been a member of the SoA ADCI group (for Disabled / Chronically Ill Authors) since it was founded in 2020. The support and mutual care the group offer is an essential resource in an increasingly hostile society. On the Management Committee I will continue to argue for better access at all stages of the writing life for disabled, D/deaf and neurodivergent people and advocate for our rights and needs.

The industry needs a culture shift to make it more accessible to disabled, D/deaf and neurodivergent people, and to ensure we have the same opportunities as nondisabled people. I've seen many arts organisations and publishers talk about change but not take the practical steps needed to improve basic access, or worse, roll back access. This represents a huge loss of perspective, representation, learning and enjoyment to the industry and to readers.

Accessibility in the arts and equity of access and opportunity are more pressing than ever, as we experience unprecedented dismantling of support. At least 1 in 4 people in the UK are disabled, with disabled writers treated as outliers in the industry despite constituting a huge proportion of it.

I have worked in retail, heritage, childcare, marketing, housekeeping, cleaning and arts administration. I worked in both primary and secondary schools as a teacher and teaching assistant, and in academia (in Sociology, Literature and Creative Writing) before it became incompatible with my health. I have many years' experience as an arts event organiser and producer, and event host. Since 2017, freelance writing and teaching work has been my main source of income, and I know all the pressures and precarity freelancers face. As the co-owner of an 138-year-old indie bookshop, I now know the book world from a bookseller perspective too. I know many sides of the industry but from a slant perspective, and I want to bring that experience to the Management Committee.

I strongly believe in fairness for everyone and a sustainable, accessible future for the arts. I believe in disability justice as inextricable from climate justice and social justice. Words have the power to change the world, but without equal access, our words cannot be seen or heard. Together, we can make thriving in this industry possible for everyone.

Mohamed Tonsy



I'm an Egyptian writer, bookseller at Lighthouse Bookshop, and ceramicist based in Edinburgh. I joined the SoA in 2022 upon publishing my debut novel, based on the 2011 Egyptian revolution and its aftermaths. As a diaspora writer who has made their home in the UK, it was important for me to be part of a trade union given the challenges of making a living as a writer here.

As a writer of colour, I've experienced a literary atmosphere that largely undervalues work by people of colour. Offers for unpaid work still regularly arrive in my inbox, while AI threatens the livelihoods of writers, illustrators and translators across the board. This decline in income can only be stymied by a firm stance from a union ready to advocate and fight for its workers' rights.

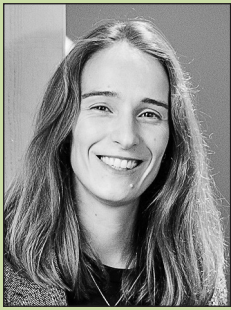
My debut novel was published with a small, radical, London-based indie press, Hajar Press. The publishing contract came through Maslaha's MFest Short Story Competition. Groups such as the Scottish BPOC Writers Network provided me with a sense of community and writing opportunities as well as accessible workshops, helping me advance in my career. Without the labour of organisations run by people of colour for people of colour, I wouldn't have been able to share my work. Spaces like these provide essential points of access to the publishing industry through their missions to make publishing equitable and accessible.

However, a relentlessly challenging funding atmosphere threatens to derail this work. Too many journals and presses have gone into hiatus or folded and, as recently as 2024, Creative Scotland – the largest funding body for Scottish arts and culture – was threatened with closure. Similar concerns resonate across the UK arts sector, putting far too many authors' careers in a state of constant uncertainty. These funds don't just supplement writers' livings, but are a lifeline for those trying to create while reckoning with a cost-of-living crisis and declining rates of pay. As the largest trade union for writers, the SoA is uniquely positioned to challenge these politics of austerity. It is an absolute priority to me to help writers access these funds, thrive in the literary world, and protect their work and their livelihood.

My experience in bookselling and events has shown me the vital role both play in articulating the relationship between publishers, authors and their audiences, placing our books in readers' hands. Indie bookshops, such as Lighthouse, are where early-career writers are most likely to be platformed. With the growing threat of Amazon to indie bookshops' existence, now is the time to act as a union if we are to safeguard spaces where writers' voices are heard for the first time.

As a member of the SoA board, I will push for making the book world more accessible to people of colour, fight for more equitable pay, and strategise to connect all our members to collectives, groups and environments that can nourish their practice and safeguard our indie bookstores.

Hetty Saunders



Hello! I'm a freelance editor and writer. I trained as an English literature academic at Cambridge and Edinburgh universities, then as an academic editor at the University of London. Helping authors with their writing means putting aside your ego and figuring out how best to represent their vision; it's about lifting others up and listening to their needs, skills I will bring to the role of board member.

Writing has always been a part of my life and work. Along the way I've been a non-fiction judge for the James Tait Black prize, taught Romantic poetry to undergrads, run creative writing workshops, worked in second-hand bookshops and stage-managed a version of King Lear with sheep (Google it).

My academic research looked at the urgent questions that environmental crisis poses to creatives and how writers contribute to articulating these difficult topics and the difficult feelings around them. This work taught me the importance of making space and advocating for those who don't have a voice or whose voice has been ignored.

In 2023, I co-edited a collection of speculative nature writing with the University of East Anglia. This project involved working to make nature writing a more inclusive space, supporting new writers from underrepresented groups, including neurodivergent, global majority and disabled authors. As a board member, I will work to make the SoA inclusive to all writers, promoting an environmental agenda that helps everyone and defends our future by pushing for more sustainability and environmental responsibility in the industry.

Book publishing is a bewildering world for first-time authors. In 2017, I published a biography of the nature writer J.A. Baker and became a member of the SoA. I felt uncertain of myself among all the "real", grown-up writers, but the SoA gave me a likeminded community. I want to help other members navigate the industry with more confidence than I had.

The best way to nurture that confidence and creativity is through connecting with each other as well as with readers. The idea that writers toil away alone in their garrets is outdated; it takes a village to write and publish a book, and as an editor I know the power of collaboration. I will work to promote community, connection and collaboration through the face-to-face events that are so crucial to our professional development.

Representing the SoA's members also means championing the UK as a world-leading hub for writing, illustrating, translation and creatives. An editor's job is to uphold the highest standards when it comes to protecting IP and promoting quality. In this world of ultra-processed information, I believe in banging the drum for more nutritious content, especially when creatives of all stripes are being threatened by poor-quality AI-generation. At the same time, I am (cautiously) optimistic that AI can be a tool for good. I want to work with the SoA, other creative bodies and publishers to help writers embrace the parts of AI that can enable and empower them, while defending them from those that disenfranchise them.