

Co-chairs' Report to the Annual General Meeting of the Translators Association – 7 November 2024

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Background and Objectives

The [Translators Association](#) (TA) is a Special Interest Group (SIG) of the Society of Authors (SoA) founded in 1958. The TA provides a source of expert advice for individual literary translators and is also a collective voice representing the profession as a whole. Translators automatically become a member of the TA on joining the SoA. The interests of TA members are represented via the elected TA committee.

What Does the TA Committee Do?

The TA Committee ensures that the TA's advocacy reflects the needs of the wider TA membership. It ensures a good flow of communication between TA members and the administrative team at the SoA who work on the TA's behalf. It also works to address issues raised by the membership and respond on the membership's behalf to relevant issues in the wider literary and cultural landscape. The Committee is always open to ideas on both campaigning and events and the wider membership is encouraged to get in touch with the staff coordinators to share these.

The committee meets on a quarterly basis either virtually or on a hybrid basis, and communicates by email in intervals between meetings. The chair or co-chairs of the committee are appointed by the committee. The TA chair/co-chair attends SoA Management Committee (Mancom) meetings (in a non-voting capacity) to represent the interests of TA members.

The TA is a member of the European Council of Literary Translators' Associations (CEATL) and sends at least one delegate to the organisation's AGM, in addition to contributing to CEATL's research and policy work through participation in working groups.

Who Is On the TA Committee?

Following the 2023 AGM, the TA committee had 8 elected members. These were: Ian Giles (co-chair); Vineet Lal (co-chair); Isabel del Rio; Rosie Hedger; Anju Okhandiar; Clare Richards; Nichola Smalley; and Fiona Sze-Lorrain. The TA's two delegates to the European Council of Literary Translators' Associations (CEATL), Roland Glasser and Shaun Whiteside, were also full members.

The 2024 TA AGM marks the retirement of Rosie Hedger, Vineet Lal, Anju Okhandiar and Clare Richards from the TA committee having reached the end of their terms. Shaun Whiteside retired as CEATL delegate in October 2024. The TA extends its heartfelt gratitude to all five for their service.

Nominations were sought for two committee vacancies in September 2024 and two nominations were received. The 2024 AGM marks the beginning of terms for members Paul Russell Garrett and Kathy Saranpa on the TA committee.

At its meeting in September 2024, the TA committee endorsed a proposal not to appoint a Co-chair to serve alongside Ian Giles until the AGM in 2025 in light of the ongoing Author Communities Review being conducted internally by the Society of Authors given the uncertainty around the future constitution of SIGs (of which the TA is one) and their committees. The future role of co-chairs will be discussed in 2025.

[Further details about the current TA committee can be found here.](#)

What Is the Author Communities Review?

In November 2023, Mancom agreed to commission an Author Communities Review (ACR). The goals of the ACR include:

- To ensure that current SoA author communities are run effectively and provide opportunities for more members to connect, learn from and support one another
- To enable an increase in opportunities to form new author communities in a sustainable way which connect more members from areas that the SoA does not currently reach
- To improve SoA member retention through an active, engaged SIG membership

This work is seeking to improve both the member and staff experience of SIGs and networks within. The TA co-chairs were involved in the initial review process conducted by Francesca Howell whose role was then taken over by Emma Boniwell. Preliminary findings and recommendations were presented at the Mancom meeting in May 2024, but the co-chairs along with several other SIG and network chairs requested further dialogue. A working group to explore the best model/s for SIGs has been established and the co-chairs have been participating in this. The ACR is likely to issue its final recommendations in the first half of 2025 and this may result in changes in the way that SIGs work within SoA.

What Resources Does the TA Have?

The TA's SoA staff co-coordinators are Catherine Fuller and Ambre Morvan who each spend one day per working week on TA-related issues. Their work in the SoA's Contracts and Policy teams respectively also intersect at many points with the aims of the TA. The TA is otherwise dependent on the staff and resources provided to its SIGs by the SoA.

Activities

Activities undertaken and led by the group's committee and co-chairs in the last year:

- TA AGM and virtual Afternoon Tea event with Sarah Death, November 2023
- Attendance at Warwick Prize for Women in Translation event, November 2023
- Attendance at Translation Prizes event at British Library, February 2024 (co-chairs spoke and handed out First Translation Prize)
- Membership of London Book Fair's Literary Translation Centre steering group (ongoing), with responsibility for organisation and programming of three events, March 2024

- Committee members provided official comment in two articles:
 - [AI translation: how to train ‘the horses of enlightenment’](#)
 - [Survey finds generative AI proving major threat to the work of translators](#)
- Attendance at SoA Awards event at Southwark Cathedral, June 2024 (both co-chairs represented the TA)
- TA Lates event hosted at Bedford Row, September 2024
- Attendance by several committee members and staff in-person and virtually to CEATL conference in Strasbourg, October 2024
- Shaun Whiteside involved in planning and delivery of CEATL conference, October 2024
- One or both co-chairs have attended all meetings of Mancom since the 2023 AGM
- Attendance by co-chairs to relevant SoA sub-committee meetings, including the Policy sub-committee.
- New guidance relating to readers’ reports being prepared jointly by staff and committee for publication by early 2025
- Participation in the activities of CEATL through delegates (ongoing)
- Engagement with SoA Author Communities Review (the co-chairs are members of the working group convened by Emma Boniwell)
- Engagement with the issues posed specifically to translators by AI (ongoing), including dialogue with SoA CEO, Policy team, & external stakeholders
- Engagement with new Chair and CEO of SoA (ongoing)
- Discussion about evolving best practice around nascent translator-agent arrangements (ongoing)
- Nominations of TA members for relevant awards and distinctions offered internally by SoA and by external stakeholders (ongoing)

Additional activities undertaken by the group’s co-coordinators in the last year:

- ‘Japan Week’ event series (run by Prizes & Events) coordinated by Catherine Fuller, January 2024
- Talk on translation and contracts by both co-coordinators delivered to National Centre for Writing’s Emerging Translator Mentorship cohort, February 2024
- Sought to engage with Nielsen and industry to ensure inclusion of translators’ names in publication metadata (ongoing)
- Catherine Fuller talk on contracts at Bristol Translates summer school, July 2024
- Catherine Fuller appeared in the [‘The SoA Advisory Clinic: Found in translation’](#) podcast
- Planning for ‘French Week’ event series (run by Prizes & Events), scheduled for January 2025.
- The TA coordinators have met with industry actors (including publishers and agents) with the aim of raising awareness about translators’ rights and interests, as well as discussing topical issues, sharing examples of good industry practice and positive initiatives, and improving their industry networks. These meetings have been positive and the initiative will be continued in 2025.
- Work has begun to revise and update the TA translator-publisher model contract and is expected to be completed during 2025.

A Note On AI

The continuing debate around AI and its potential impact on literary translation and translators has been one of the key themes of the last year. Numerous organisations in the literary sector have attempted to engage with the debate in recent months, and to at least tease out where the issues and challenges lie. As representatives of the literary translation sector in the UK, and of our members, we felt it important to – at the very least – attempt to untangle some of the threads in this conversation, and to see whether we could help in clarifying our user-led position. Whilst the SoA Policy team have already been working hard to defend the rights of content creators – including authors, illustrators and translators – and to advocate (along with other industry partners) against the improper use of their intellectual property to train AI tools, we were keen to understand more about how AI might impact literary translation from a practitioner perspective, including areas such as ethics, copyright and ability to harness AI as

an additional practitioner tool. To this end, a number of very useful exploratory conversations took place with experts in AI, academics involved in CALT and experienced translators, all of which helped to form a picture of current thinking and where advances in AI might lead in the coming months. (As part of this, Roland Glasser took part in a very useful workshop with other creative practitioners at the Queen Mary Centre for Arts, Culture and Creative Collaboration in May.)

It became very clear that this is a hugely sensitive and potentially divisive topic, and one where – given the pace of developments – it would be impossible to establish ethical or practical ground rules that would have any lasting validity. We had envisaged, originally, that a working group might be a way forward, but in the light of our research, and conversations with both the SoA and fellow Committee members, eventually came to the conclusion that – at least for the time being – the best we could do was to acknowledge that AI remains an issue that will, at some level, have implications for our profession, to remain engaged with the discussion within our organisation and with partners/other stakeholders, and to return to the discussion over coming months when both publishers and translators have had more experience of what the repercussions are.

Membership Statistics (as of November 2024)

As of 7 November 2024, the total TA membership was 937 (+38 on November 2023) and represents 7.5% of the SoA’s total membership (12,488 members). Of these, 780 (83%) are Full Members and 157 (17%) are Associates. The TA membership can be broken down as follows:

Location	No.
England	632
<i>East Anglia</i>	79
<i>London</i>	223
<i>Midlands</i>	52
<i>North East</i>	38
<i>North West</i>	32
<i>South Central</i>	72
<i>South East</i>	75
<i>South West</i>	61
Northern Ireland	4
Scotland	76
Wales	29
Outside of UK	195

Age	No.
20-29	23
30-39	131
40-49	142
50-59	174
60-69	181
70-79	119
80-89	34
90-99	5
Unknown	128

Any questions? Please ask during the AGM or get in touch by email:

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Ian Giles (TA Chair) may be contacted via the co-ordinators

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