

POETRY AND SPOKEN WORD GROUP ELECTION

Candidate Statements 2025



Eric Ngalle Charles

Statement

Dear Committee,

I am writing to express my enthusiastic interest in joining the Poetry and Spoken Word Group. My passion for poetry and spoken arts has been a core part of my life. Through poetry, I found my voice and reclaimed my identity. It has taken me across Wales, Europe, and Africa. Over the past four years, I have served as a judge for the Eric Gregory Awards. In 2017, I received the Creative Wales Award for my work on Memory, Migration, and Trauma. This enabled me to compile the first poetry anthology between Wales and Cameroon, and it also led to the translation of the former national poet of Wales, Mr. Ifor ap Glyn's poem into Mopkwe, a Bantu language spoken by the Bakweri people on the foothills of Mount Cameroon. I am eager to contribute to the group and to continue fostering creative expression.

I am currently a writer-in-residence at the Dylan Thomas Centre in Swansea, where I run creative writing workshops on Thursdays from 10.30 to 30am focused on migration, memory, and language for people who have left their countries of origin and now live in Wales. I believe poetry has the power to connect people, inspire change, and give voice to unique perspectives.

Yours Truly
Eric Ngalle Charles.

Bio

Eric Ngalle Charles, PhD, is a Cameroonian writer, poet, playwright, and human rights activist living in Wales. He is a researcher at King's College London. In 2017, he was awarded a Creative Wales Award Fellowship for his work on migration, trauma, and memory. Parthian Books published his autobiography, *I, Eric Ngalle: One Man's Journey Crossing Continents from Africa to Europe* (2019). He edited *Hiraeth Erzolirzoli: A Wales-Cameroon Anthology* (2018). His poetry collection, *Homelands*, was published by Seren Books in 2022 and won the John Brooks Award from the Society of Authors in October 2025.

Lucy Coats

Statement

As a current activist poet, as well as a published children's poet and writer for many years, I care passionately about poetry both as witness to current events and as a way of making bridges to all ages, cultures and genders. I believe that poetry can cross many kinds of borders and help differing viewpoints to be understood. Working with and talking to young Palestinian poets such as Shahd A. Alnaami via social media has taught me the value of such cross-cultural contacts, and I also believe that the PSWG can have a big role to play in facilitating such conversations. The world is a dark place right now, and I feel strongly that the more we as poets reach out to others in non-traditional ways, rather than looking inward, the more diverse and rich our community can be. We also have a duty and a responsibility to find a way of bringing together and supporting a wide range of poets of all ages who may not currently think they have access to getting their work heard (and lack clear paths to doing so) — perhaps through mentoring schemes, or through encouragement of more local initiatives for open-mics and pop-up events. To quote from *Field of Dreams*: "If we build it they will come". But build it we must.

Bio

Lucy Coats is a neurodivergent poet based in Northamptonshire. Her poetry encompasses the minutiae of nature, as well as war, grief, folklore, queerness, and the effects of patriarchy. Her debut adult poetry collection, which Salena Godden describes as: "*a rallying cry and mourning prayer*", is currently out on submission and she is also writing a poetry/prose fusion book on matriarchal goddesses. In 2024 she was shortlisted for The Bridport Poetry Prize, and in 2022 won the Latin Programme Poetry Prize. Her work has also appeared in *Clarion Quarterly*, *The Winged Moon*, *Beyond Queer Words*, and *Sunday Mornings at the River*, amongst others. From 2015-2018 she was a Committee member of the Society of Authors Children's Writers and Illustrators Group.

Desree

Statement

I'm applying to join the PSWG Committee because I believe passionately in the power of poetry and spoken word to build community, challenge injustice, and amplify underrepresented voices. As both an artist and facilitator, I've spent my career supporting others to find their voice through performance and education. I would bring to the committee my lived experience as a Black British-Caribbean queer woman, my commitment to inclusive practice, and my understanding of both live and digital poetry spaces across the UK.

My work as Creative Director of EMPOWORD and Cultural Programming and Events Producer with The Common Press involved curating events and development opportunities for emerging artists and writers, particularly those from marginalised backgrounds. I've collaborated with organisations such as Apples & Snakes, BBC, and Glastonbury, which has given me insight into the intersections between artistry, industry, and community impact.

As a committee member, I would aim to champion accessibility, fair pay, and the representation of spoken word artists within the wider poetry landscape. I believe in creating sustainable pathways and nurturing collaboration between poets working across genres, and regions. Poetry should reflect the world we live in, and I would love to help the PSWG continue to support that.

Bio

Desree is an award-winning spoken word artist, playwright, and facilitator. Her work explores themes of identity, justice, and community, and has been featured on BBC, TEDx, and Glastonbury Festival, where she was Poet in Residence in 2022. A Jerwood Poetry in Performance and Obsidian Foundation alumna and Desree's poetry has appeared in publications including *Wetgrain Poetry*, *Ink*, *Sweat and Tears*. Her debut collection, *Altar*, (2025, Bad Betty Press) was shortlisted for the Forward Poetry Prize, Best First Collection Award. Passionate about empowering others through storytelling, she serves as Creative Director of EMPOWORD, creating spaces for marginalised voices to be celebrated.

Suzanna Fitzpatrick

Statement

I write poetry because I want to communicate: I feel it's the closest we can get to telepathy. The way in which it enables us to understand ourselves and each other is vital in these polarised times, and poets themselves need more support than ever in the face of arts funding cuts and AI. I joined the SoA in 2023, and the support my membership gives me has been invaluable. Having published my first collection and become a full member, I'm delighted to be asked to apply to the committee.

I regularly participate in readings in the London poetry scene, and co-organise the new Third Table series with Glyn Maxwell and Sarah Gibbons, as well as regularly pitching to poetry festivals across the UK. A former secondary English teacher, I have experience of leading poetry workshops in schools. I have also worked in higher education management and held voluntary positions in charitable organisations, including a city farm and being Chair of Trustees for my children's pre-school. As a bisexual midlife woman, daughter of a disabled mother and a mother myself, I am keen to represent my communities. I'd also love the chance to work with a diverse committee to ensure that all poets and spoken word artists are supported to work and live to their full potential, and to promote poetry so that it can confidently occupy the space it deserves in our shared culture.

Bio

Suzanna Fitzpatrick (she/her) is a bisexual poet based in the UK with poems on BBC Radio 4 and widely published in magazines and anthologies in the UK and worldwide. Competition successes include being longlisted for the National Poetry Competition, shortlisted twice for the Bridport Prize, coming second in the Café Writers and Buxton Competitions, winning the Poetry Society Hamish Canham Prize, and winning the Newcastle University Chancellor's Prize two years running. Her debut pamphlet, *Fledglings*, was published by Red Squirrel Press in 2016, and her first collection, *Crippled*, is published by them in 2025. She holds the Poetry School/Newcastle University MA in Writing Poetry with Distinction.

Simon Maddrell

Statement

I have thirty years of experience in the corporate and non-profit sectors, including in governance roles. I am currently on the Advisory Board of Creative Future, who support underrepresented writers and artists.

As an early career poet, performer and educator, I am committed to supporting other poets and spoken word artists to gain access to publishing — especially those traditionally underrepresented in the publishing world — through access to knowledge, resources and support. I believe this is especially important for those early stages of getting published in magazines and debut pamphlets, when navigating the whole landscape can be bewildering.

Additionally, it is important that writers are supported with resources and sign-posting to help us deal with the mental health challenges that the industry reality of 'frequent rejection' can cause — especially for those who are non-typically neurodiverse.

Freelancer writers — especially poets & spoken word artists — are extremely challenged in building a sustainable income. I have been working with the SoA to enhance its understanding of the challenges faced by those on Universal Credit and the broader campaign to scrap the Minimum Income Floor.

I would also like to explore how we can best promote 'fair fees' (that the SoA itself offers) for performing, speaking panels & educating throughout the industry as this is a key enabler of sustainable incomes for freelancers.

Bio

Simon Maddrell is a poet, editor, educator, performer and activist whose work appears in *& Change*, *AMBIT*, *Acumen*, *Gutter*, *Magma*, *MODRON*, *Poetry Wales*, *SAND*, *Southword*, *Stand*, *The Gay & Lesbian Review*, *The London Magazine*, *The Moth*, *The Rialto*, *Under the Radar*.

Simon's debut chapbook, *Throatbone*, was published by UnCollected Press in 2020, and *Queerfella* jointly won The Rialto Open Pamphlet Competition. *Isle of Sin* (Polari Press, 2023); *The Whole Island* (Valley Press, 2023); *a finger in derek jarman's mouth* (Polari Press, 2024) were all Poetry Book Society pamphlet selections. *Patient L1* (Polari Press) and *Jo & Ni Go Cruising* (Septum Press) were published in 2025.

Simon's debut collection, *lamping wild rabbits*, is published by Out-Spoken Press in Feb 2026.

Simon is a Manx queer man who lives with HIV and autism in Brighton & Hove.

Simonmaddrell.com

Luke Palmer

Statement

As a published poet of over a decade's experience, I relish the opportunity to join the PSWG committee and give back to the art form which I love. As a graduate of an MA in creative writing, during which I specialised in poetry, and also as a tutor for the Poetry School, I have direct experience of the passion and industry which writers from all backgrounds bring to their craft and the esteem in which poetry is held. However, while I regularly deliver creative writing workshops across the country as part of my work as a young adult author, and also as well-practised secondary school English teacher, my experience of young people's access to poetry has left me feeling a little worried, at times. Poetry, for me, has always been a place of play and a method of working towards and within a space of joyful not-knowing. This often clashes with the requirements placed on poetry in education. I would love to use my role on the PSWG committee to address the place that poetry occupies in schools, and to find opportunities to bring more poets into classrooms across the country to enliven attitudes and diversify experiences of poetry at all levels, allowing more young people to see poetry as something open and accessible to their lives and experiences.

Bio

Luke Palmer is the author of two poetry pamphlets – *Spring in the Hospital* (Prole Books, 2018) and *In all my books my father dies* (Red Ceilings, 2021) and one full collection, *Homunculus* (Broken Sleep, 2024). He has been widely published in journals and anthologies and has appeared on many shortlists for national prizes. Luke won the Winchester Poetry Prize in 2022 and was highly commended in the Forward Prizes in 2025. As well as poetry, Luke is a critically acclaimed writer of fiction for young adults and was shortlisted for the 2025 Carnegie Medal and for Branford Boase Award for new children's writing in 2021.