# Minutes: SPL Poets Advisory Group Meeting, 09/06/2018

Present: Katie Ailes (chair), Diana Hendry, Nadine Aisha Jassat, Caroline Johnstone, Rachel Rankin, Calum Rodger, Harry Smart & Samuel Tongue

Head Librarian Rebecca Oliva discussed the notes from the previous PAG, and how the SPL can act on them.

## Website Feedback

Rebecca lead the group through the new website, set to launch later in the year.

Points discussed:
- Addition of a location filter for searching poets
- Addition of what submissions publishers accept (pamphlets, books, single poems)
- Discussed if the website should advertise when submissions for publishers are open – decided this would be impossible to keep up to date
- Request to not make the website overly twee
- Discussion: could the website link into StAnza's 2015 poetry map
- Discussed features for the website to include International Womens' Day, Black History Month
- Addition of SPL's projects tab. Projects need to be more accessible
- PAG to read through website copy before it goes live
- Request for the members of the PAG to check out the current 'Publishers' and 'Poets' pages and give feedback to the Chair, who will pass this onto the SPL Librarians
- On the poet's pages, request that social media handles/links be included
- Possible inclusion of performance poets in the 'For poets' section
- Poems in the website – how to include different forms of poetry, i.e. concrete poems. Discussed the inclusion of film poems and the potential to digitise concrete work

As part of the SPL PAG's consultancy practice, some members asked their local writers groups to give feedback on the current website design. These suggestions were circulated to PAG members prior to the meeting and are included below:

**Jay Whittaker: feedback from The Other Writers (Edinburgh):**
Other Poet: My only comments on the website are about the difficulty in finding information about what's on. It took me a while to work out that the route to listings of poetry events, groups etc. was through 'Learn' followed by 'For Poets'. And then it's still confusing: the categories have a certain overlap 'Writers Groups and Regular Workshops' and 'Short courses, Writers Retreats ... ' for instance. Also, the 'Regularly Occurring Live Poetry Events' attachment is a bit out of date. It might help if subheadings, eg. Edinburgh, Glasgow, etc. were used so that you don't have to trawl through everything.
A.N.Other Poet: Agree about difficulty navigating SPL site - headings / categories could be re-thought and finding things made more logical or intuitive.
And two things I'd really welcome on the website:
A list of which poetry magazines the Library stocks - could we borrow old issues;
Other Poet: Could we borrow issues of poetry mags - it can be much easier to get a sense of them, if your work would fit, etc. if you can take them away

A list of Scottish poetry competitions. The 'Poetry Competitions' section is just a link to the Saison Poetry Library's list which I've just had a look at. There wasn't a single Scottish competition on it!

A.N. Other Poet: There are so many competitions...this would be a BIG undertaking for staff

**Caroline Johnstone: feedback from Wyvern Poetry Group (Dundee)**
- Overall the website is good and provides useful links
- In particular they liked the podcasts and information on upcoming events
- Some felt the site was rather cluttered and could do more for poetry writing groups outside Edinburgh

suggestions included (given many make a full day visit to the library):
- Make available current pamphlets for the past 2 years (arrangement upstairs rather overwhelming)
- hold more day events (starting late morning) on themed topics eg modernist poetry, Edinburgh poets
- additional educational events around writing and publishing poetry in Scotland

A specific comment from a member was: Refers to Poetry Box Reading Guides number 3 – Reading a Poem. I'm a member of a group that gives feedback to each other on poems. I wanted a structure to work with that would help me study and consider the poems carefully so I looked at the 'poetry box reading guides', particularly *Reading a Poem*. I found numbers 6-10 of the guidance list very useful but numbers 1-5 much less so. I think the concept used in suggestion 2 (Taste) sounds very 'middle class' and not particularly accessible to a younger reader/poet. The language in 3 (Linger) seems a bit corny and dense viz: 'Let the poem start to unwind in your presence…..Begin a conversation with the poem'. The large quotation by WS Graham right in the middle of the page is distracting and not particularly helpful to a beginner.


## New Code of Conduct Discussion

Request by Diana Hendy to have statement minuted:
'It seems deeply ironic to be considering this Code of Conduct when at the last AGM considerable concern and anxiety were expressed at the conduct of both the Director and the then Chair of the Board. As far as I know, such concerns are still on-going.'

Paragraph two: descriptions of persons needs to be broader, as it stands it does not reflect legislation. Details here: https://www.equalityhumanrights.com/en/equality-act/protected-characteristics

Page 1, point 2: 'Must respect audiences' – in what sense? (i.e., content warnings?). Possible solution: link back to aforementioned conduct, when brought into line with legislation, in paragraph 2. Concern there will be censorship.

How will the C.o.C. be made available: website?

Who hold the ultimate responsibility for the conduct, is it the publisher or the poet?

Page 1, point 4: what information will be disclosed to the workshop leader? Who would be the first point of contact to go to with confidential information? Has there been a Care Manager appointed? Is this separate from reporting misconduct?

Concern there is too much responsibility for staff. There needs to be an independent, outside source for grievances, or an appointed member of the SPL Board.

Needs to be a piece of policy for workshop leaders and workshop attendees (including guidance on safe spaces, confidentiality, etc).

There's no policy regarding child protection.

Page 2, point 6: 'informs individuals' – needs to be clear what information is given here.

'Misconduct' is not a good word to use throughout the document, use 'concerns' or 'issues' instead (misconduct cannot be used with regards to volunteers – it's mainly for paid employees.)

Complaints register: needs to be in line with GDPR (who has access to it, and what is to be kept?)

'Process for Investigating misconduct':
- Are individuals notified if there has been a complaint made against them?
- There needs to be a record saying if the complaints are resolved.
- What level of detail is being kept?
- Is there an appeal process? (Most places have this). Need an outline of how this can be made.
- When does the person who is alleged against get a word in? Needs to be early in the investigation.
- Points on page 2 need reordered
- Need another document saying how to register the complaint and how it will be dealt with/what everyone's rights are.
- What is the 'investigation'? No word of how the misconduct is handled

Page 2, paragraph 3: suggested there is not a strict timescale. 28 days is not always reasonable; some issues take longer, some take a week.
How long until a response is given?

**Important: Has a legal professional/HR Representative looked at this? The document seems too flawed and not robust enough for this to be the case.**

First white bullet point:needs to be more extensive, add in 'list is not exhaustive' (4 or 4 points necessary, e.g. physical assault, predatory behaviour

Last paragraph: remove 'volunteers' (they should be covered under a different set of policies).

A.P. Chair to check with Volunteer Manager how the C.o.C. relates to volunteers.

## Other Points
- Recruit new members of the PAG (two places unfilled at the time of the meeting)

- Chair to discuss how to appoint a new chair (December will be Katie Ailes' last meeting) and how to appoint new members (particularly outwith the Central Belt).

**Next Meeting Date:**
8th December 2018