

# Scottish Poetry Library

## Chair's Report for AGM 2020

At the time of writing (September 2020) there is much uncertainty across the cultural sector as to the long-term economic impact of the pandemic and its associated lockdown restrictions on day-to-day business continuity. The SPL Board is meeting more frequently online to discuss financial and operational issues as the library responds to the partial uplifting of lockdown. We have repurposed our service offer to include a reserve and collect service and free postal borrowing.

The Board commends the staff for the way in which they have admirably responded and adapted to the pressures of new ways of working from within the library and working from home. Indeed, our new Head Librarian, Jill Mackintosh, started in the role just three days before lockdown began.

Our work remains of high quality and is valued by our borrowers, participants and audiences. We have introduced new innovations, including the SPL Poetry Ambassadors guest curatorship programme and online reader development activity for members of our Friends scheme. I am also encouraged by evolving partnerships with organisations including the teaching union EIS to support the resilience and wellbeing of teachers and the commissioning and tailoring of digital content accessible in the classroom and from home.

As things stand, we do not forecast a financial deficit for the current year 2020/2021. However, our budget modelling for the year beginning April 2021 will be influenced by any decision that the UK Government makes on the job retention scheme. Currently, four of our staff team are furloughed part-time and are working reduced hours.

Creative Scotland has written to its Regularly Funded Organisations (RFO), including the SPL, stating that present RFO grant programme will be extended to March 2022. As a result, the Board and senior management team will focus on strategic planning and stakeholder engagement in support of our next RFO application, building on our strengths and responding to the emerging needs and demands of our borrowers, audiences and partners.

Returning to the annual accounts covering the period April 2018 to March 2019, there were three main strands of activity for the Board's attention: modernising our governance, investing in our staff, and the business model in tandem with our organisational structure.

A major strand of the Board's work was to review our approach to governance, and we made the following significant changes:

- Increased the number of Board meetings to ensure adequate time for consideration of all aspects of the organisation and responsibilities as trustees.
- Agreed an outline timetable for the year ahead, ensuring we cover all aspects and responsibilities.
- Adopted the Scottish Governance Code for the Third Sector
- Approved a Scheme of Delegation clarifying the matters reserved to the Board and those delegated to the Chief Executive
- Approved and published an Operational Plan for 2019/ 20 which covered all aspects of the organisations activity and allowed us to better demonstrate the scope – and the challenges – of our plans
- Approved a new Collections Policy
- Contributed to and approved a Charter of Values

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- Formally considered the major strategic and operational risks to which the charity is exposed, and the Board can be much better satisfied that systems are in place or are being developed to mitigate exposure to such risks.
- Board members met and corresponded with the Honorary Presidents and the Poets Advisory Group and agreed revised terms of reference and support.

A significant Board initiative was the adoption of a comprehensive Development Plan, which identified areas for improvement of particular relevance to staff, which included:

- Developing better mutual understanding and working together, including an all Board and staff Away Day at which we heard presentations from staff and discussed the Development Plan.
- All three senior managers attend Board meetings and also individual staff were invited to present on key aspects of their work.
- We had two all-day workshops with Board members and staff to develop the Equalities, Diversity and Inclusion plan and Charter of Values.
- The Development Plan committed to the implementation of a People Strategy. The aims of the strategy are: a resilient, agile and adaptable organisation, a thriving working environment with a collaborative culture that fosters mutual respect, and an empowered, healthy, diverse and capable workforce and Board.
- The strategy follows the workforce journey through: Recruitment and succession planning, Induction and performance management, Reward – not just remuneration but opportunities too and linked with encouraging individual professional development, and a healthy overall environment including work/life balance, health and wellbeing.
- Because of our small size we recognise that working with the SPL will not necessarily be a commitment for life, but it does provide exceptional career opportunities at different stages

The Board considered the business model throughout the financial year. In December 2018, the Board received an independent review of the Library function and reflected at various points on what impact this should have. The report informed the appointment of our Head Librarian and Assistant Librarian

It also influenced detailed discussions and a growing consensus that there needed to be more focus on the library's collection and visitor engagement with the library.

An HR report in the January 2020 informed the Board's efforts to engage with staff and particularly the development of the People Strategy. We have seen a marked change internally, with very positive feedback from staff, including a letter presented at the AGM in November from the Head Librarian.

On behalf of the Board I should like to pay tribute to the former Chair, Jane Ryder, and Company Secretary, John Gillies. Jane immeasurably strengthened our governance policies and procedures and her hard work and exceptional input has steered the SPL to a solid platform, which will stand the Library in good stead. John was a long-standing Board member whose contributions to the Board were appreciated. John's continued input to the *Tools of the Trade: Poems for Doctors* anthology is eloquent testimony to his affinity for the Library.

I should also like to thank Kyra Pollitt and Rory Anderson whose contributions, insight and perspectives to the Board during the year were appreciated. Kyra's expertise and championing of services for people with hearing impairment was valued. Rory's insight on legal matters was welcomed by his colleagues.

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In November, Nuala Watt and Stuart Paterson will be standing down from the Board. Their participation and presence will be missed. Nuala spoke often of the day-to-day experience and challenges of being a writer. In addition to sharing Nuala's perspective as a poet, Stuart championed the inclusion of Scots language.

The co-option of Laura Fyfe in May 2020 brought her considerable experience of secondary education and community facilitation. The Board recognises that the SPL is best served with a better balance in its representation of women. For the upcoming cycle of elections to the Board we will actively encourage applicants from equalities communities of interest with expertise in business development, employment law and governance - key areas we have identified as important for our Board skills portfolio.

Looking ahead, there will be very considerable demands on the Board and specifically the Chair. So we will be adopting the principle of co-Chairing, which enables a sharing of personal workload, and can offer both business continuity and bring different skills to the organisation.

Gordon Munro  
SPL Chair  
September 2020

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## Director's Report for AGM 2020

The financial year to March 2020 ended with the country going into lockdown as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic. The detrimental economic impact on the cultural sector has been severe, particularly for venues reliant on events and commercial income, and also for the freelance artists and curators that they commission. The SPL's financial health is resilient to the year's end to March 2021, benefitting from room hire revenue and with some staff furloughed part-time on the job retention scheme.

Looking further afield at the literary sector in general, we are deeply concerned for our partners in publishing, bookselling and book festivals. The knock-on effect on income for writers, performers and freelance curators and programmers has been particularly brutal.

In step with other arts organisations, much of our activity since lockdown was redesigned to be delivered on digital platforms. The prudent investment in a new website that was launched in late 2018 has meant that we were better able to adapt to new challenges of both continuing existing activities, such as creative writing and reader development workshops, but also to commission new works in print, video and as sound podcasts.

Much of the SPL's work relating to health and wellbeing and teachers' learning resources and training has been repurposed to be delivered and accessed online. The pandemic has made our activity on these themes more necessary than ever, so it is with this work that this report begins its reflection on our programme of activity from April 2019 to March 2020.

Through a grant from Scottish Libraries & Information Council's Innovation and Development Fund, the SPL partnered with Lapidus Scotland and Scottish Government Digital Health and Care Division on mapping and researching creative words for wellbeing activity across Scotland. We commissioned a researcher who organised roundtable events in Edinburgh, Stirling and Aberdeen in January and February 2020 with a total of 45 participants from across the arts, libraries and health sectors.

A report recommending a network for practitioner development and support was produced in April 2020. The SPL has partnered with Lapidus Scotland to deliver three online workshops and seminars in the autumn of 2020, we will be supporting a facilitator to manage six monthly creative writing workshops for individuals experiencing the long term effects of COVID-19 (called *Long Covid*). In May 2019, we facilitated three writing workshops around grief and remembrance in collaboration with North Berwick Wellbeing Partnership and the *Good Life, Good Death and Good Grief* project.

Another aspect of our wellbeing programme included a visit to the library by clients and workers of Crisis Scotland. There were helpful discussions on the library's role as a sanctuary and where poetry activity, both organised and self-directed, can aid recovery from the experience of homelessness.

The SPL was a partner venue for the pilot of *Prescribe Culture*, a social prescription project whereby students and academic staff attached to the University of Edinburgh were signposted by GPs to engage with arts activity in support of recovery from symptoms of light to mild depression, often associated with social isolation.

We improved access to the building and our resources through the installation of a hearing loop, funded by an award from the Dr David Summers Trust, and the purchased a Braille labeller to label the collection with alphabetic spacers. An accessibility improvement report was presented by Andrew Pettigrew, a work experience student (and poet) at the Royal Blind School.

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The third edition of *Tools of the Trade: Poems for Doctors* was launched in June 2019. In support of this we facilitated a panel at the Edinburgh International Book Festival in August 2019 on mental health and wellbeing.

We are expanding our publishing portfolio of wellbeing and resilience-themed anthologies to include nurses and midwives and social workers. The second edition of *To Learn the Future: Poems for Teachers* will be published in May 2021.

We announced the first of our five teacher fellowships programme with schools and colleges in Kilmarnock, Dunfermline, Stirling, Glasgow and Edinburgh. One of the fellows was a Gaelic language teacher, a discipline that was identified as a priority in our equalities plan. The teachers engaged in professional development days at the library on promoting anti-racism; mindfulness and wellbeing, Edwin Morgan's centenary; and celebrating Scots language. A planned residential at Moniack Mhor in June 2020 was postponed due to lockdown. We are working with the Educational Institute Scotland as to how we might provide online creative writing and Health and Wellbeing Sessions for teachers. Our learning offer included delivering poetry workshops for Literacy Day in association with Museums of University of St Andrews in May 2019.

For National Poetry Day, in October 2019, we partnered with Literature Wales, Forward Arts Foundation and the Gaelic Books Council to share resources and distribute six poetry postcards featuring works in Scottish Gaelic, Scots, Manx, Cornish, Welsh and English. On the day itself we hosted Sally Crabtree's *Sweetshop of Words* with school visits. With regards to our support for minority languages, we were grateful for an award from Bord Na Gaidhlig for translating key website resources into Scottish Gaelic.

We partnered with the Saltire Society to incorporate the Callum Macdonald Memorial Award for Scottish poetry pamphlet publishing within the Saltire Literary Awards Scheme. We took over the administration of the award from the National Library of Scotland. The winner announced at the Saltire Awards ceremony was Sarah Stewart for her pamphlet, *Glisk* published by Tapsalteerie. We also supported the judging panel for the Saltire Literary Award for Best Poetry Collection, which was awarded to Janette Ayachi for *Hand Over Mouth Music* published by Liverpool University Press.

For our *Best Scottish Poems* online anthology, our guest editor Roseanne Watt selected her 20 favourite poems published in the calendar year. For the first time we also appointed guest editors in Scottish Gaelic (Niall O'Gallagher) and Scots (Derek Ross). Roseanne Watt, a winner of the Edwin Morgan Poetry Award, also represented Scotland at the Transpoesie European poetry festival in Brussels in September 2019, at which the SPL's Director co-chaired a minority languages event with the director of Literature Wales.

Our engagement programme included our ongoing support for three University of the Third Age reading groups, The School of Poets and Home-schooled Children activity hosted at the library. We also started writing workshops for young mothers and Black & Minority Ethnic poets. The SPL hosted a special showcase event for the B&ME Writers Group. We also supported the organisations Edinburgh Women's Aid and Shakti through the delivery of poetry workshops that led to the launch of the anthology *When Women Speak, I Hear* at the library in April 2019. Our staff participated in the *Be United family fun day* event at St Bride's Community Centre in Edinburgh in June 2019. We continued to deliver reader development workshops, *Nothing But The Poem*, at Edinburgh International Book Festival.

We managed activity with care-experienced Young People's poetry group in partnership with Moniack Mhor, and we supported Adoption UK to deliver three public workshops and a special

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event at the library celebrating and showcasing work produced by care-experienced young people as part of the *First Ministers' 1000 Voices* project presented during Adoption Week in November.

Our work with younger audiences involved supporting Scottish Youth Theatre's *Easter Mini Makers Festival*, a week of performance poetry that culminated in a performance written and performed by twenty children in Glasgow in April 2019.

The library was a participating venue in Edinburgh's pilot of the *Open Streets Sunday* initiative that encouraged family-friendly visits activity in the historic Old Town area of the city. As a partner of Edinburgh UNESCO City of Literature, our Head Librarian was invited to deliver a case study presentation on our *Tools of the Trade* at an international conference of UNESCO Cities that took place in Norwich in May 2019.

The SPL managed the selection process of a poet to take up a residency at the new Edinburgh Park development. Parabola, the developer, had commissioned the renowned sculptor David Mach to design an iconic, multipurpose building made from shipping containers. As a result of this relationship, the developer is planning further poetry commissions over the lifetime of the building work.

Our staff supported the curation of algorithm-generated poetry for the UK Pavilion at *Expo 2020: Dubai*. This innovative installation was commissioned by the Department for International Trade in partnership with the SPL, The Poetry Society and The Poetry Archive.

With regards to the management and development of our collection, our Head Librarian produced our first written collections management policy. This resulted in standardising the labelling of books; including the introduction of reference marks; printed spine labels for reference and pamphlets; and barcodes for reference items. The librarians also modernised our subject indexing guidelines and updated old-fashioned terms in the subject index. This was undertaken with a view of following international standards more closely and contributing our records to the National Bibliographic Knowledgebase, a new UK-wide service to help libraries collaboratively manage their collections and improve access to print and digital resources

The framed material in the archive (roughly 250 items) was added to a comprehensive inventory to be catalogued alongside works from the Alan Riddell archive. Colin Paton, a placement from University of Strathclyde, joined the SPL on a 12-week placement in January 2020 to support this cataloguing alongside making recommendations on better differentiating our offer for children and for young adults.

In 2019, we hosted Nell Widger's post-doctoral placement with the University of Dundee. Nell undertook a project to photograph and digitise a selection of our visual art collection for accessing on our website. Nell also curated an exhibition and the public event, *What is a poem? Special Collections at the Scottish Poetry Library and the challenge of digitisation*.

Our exhibitions programme also included writers' portraits by Joyce Gunn Cairns, a miscellany of World Poetry, LGBTQ+ History Month with Our Story Scotland, the *Blash o God: the life of Elspeth Buchan*, and artwork by Jules Bradbury.

Our librarians were active members in both Edinburgh Library and Information Services (ELISA) and the RIVAL network - a formal Scotland-wide network of LIS researchers and practitioners hosted by Edinburgh Napier University. The SPL also hosted and took part in a new network of poetry libraries, instigated by the development of the Manchester Poetry Library, which was scheduled to open in the summer of 2020.

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The library hosted a wide variety of events, including the monthly *Vespers* night. Writers who read at the SPL included John Hegley, Ilya Kaminsky, Donna Ogunnaike, Janette Ayachi, Jo Clifford, Gerry Cambridge, Em Strang, Fred Freeman, Ian Spring, Aileen Ballantyne, Eleanor Rees, MacGillivray, Juana Adcock, Iain Morrison, Nina Borgin, Jenny Lindsay, Miriam Gamble, Katrina Porteous, Lynn Davidson, Tracey Rosenberg, Tessa Berring, Ross McCleary, Kevin Williamson, Colin Heard and Colin Will.

As the result of a generous legacy, we introduced the first of our annual Scots language showcase in memory of Bette Boyd with a lecture by the scholar and broadcaster Billy Kay in June 2019.

Through the year we hosted *Polari*, the gay literary salon; *Race and Poetry in Scotland*, a conversation with B&ME writers; *A Day of Conversation* in association with Voluntary Arts Scotland; *That's What She Said*, women and n-b evenings at the Fringe; *The Gaelic Ballad: Past & Present* in support of the Edinburgh Gaelic Festival; *St Andrew's Fair Saturday* with writing groups from WHALE Arts, Dunbar Writing Mums and Crisis Scotland; *Vision of Home* produced by Edinburgh Caribbean Association; and in partnership with Zero Tolerance we produced an event exploring the writing of violence against women supported by Book Week Scotland.

Our popular podcast series saw interviews recorded with Fiona Moore, Liz Berry, Penny Boxall, Mary Jean Chan, Tolu Agbelusi and Niall O'Gallagher.

We grew our relationship with the Scottish Government Hubs through supporting their poetry events in Dublin, Brussels, Berlin and Paris. These featured Iona Lee, Leyla Josephine, Colin Bramwell, Michael Pedersen, Holly McNish and Roseanne Watt. Our developing partnership with Literature Wales and the Welsh laureate Ifor ap Glyn involved the participation of Scottish Gaelic poet Pdraig MacAoidh.

In relation to physical improvements to the library, in February 2020, we incorporated new glass doors to the lounge area to create an additional meeting room and replaced our ailing twenty year-old boiler. These spending commitments were made possible by a legacy donation and revenue from a long-term room hire. The glass doors feature a quote from Kathleen Jamie's poem, *Here Lies Our Land*.

On the operations side we introduced a new payment method to enable annually recurring Friends subscriptions to be purchased through our redesigned website. We also increased the product range available from our website's retail pages through subscribing to our suppliers drop ship service.

On a more personal note, I should like to thank Maria Carnegie, who left the role of Head Librarian to take up a senior role at the University of Durham. Maria introduced a detailed collections policy for the organisation and played an active role in modernising our services in line with both best practise and legislation. A highlight of working together was presenting with Maria the work of the SPL to the CILIPS conference in Dundee in June 2019. Our new Head Librarian, Jill Mackintosh, brings a wealth of experience of working in a public library environment Perth & Kinross. Jill, who started in March 2020, has admirably redesigned our services in response to the pandemic lockdown restrictions.

Asif Khan  
SPL Director  
September 2020