Minutes of the 97th Annual General Meeting of English PEN  
6 December 2018  
Free Word Centre, London

Presiding: Maureen Freely (MF) Chair, Antonia Byatt (AB) Director

Reports: Sanjay Jawa (SJ) Honorary Treasurer, Antonia Byatt (AB) Director, Cat Lucas (CL) Writers at Risk Programme Manager, Hannah Trevarthen (HT) Events and Development Manager, Theodora Danek (TD) Writers in Translation Manager,

Present: Philippe Sands (PS) President

1. Apologies

MF thanked all for attending and opened the meeting. MF informed all present that there were apologies from 25 members for non-attendance this year and 9 proxy forms.

2. Deceased Members

MF asked for a minute’s silence to be observed for members who have died this year, thanked them for their work for English PEN over the years, and offered condolences to their families:

Jessica Mann, V S Naipaul, Clive Sinclair, Penny Vincenzi

3. Matters arising from the Minutes of the 96th Annual General Meeting of English PEN, held on 6 December 2017

MF asked for any matters arising. None brought forward.

4. To receive and consider the Annual Report and Audited Accounts 2017-18

The Annual Report and Audited Accounts for 2017-18 were considered and received by the members:

i. Chair’s Report

MF addressed the AGM. Highlights from the address are contained below:

MF highlighted that questions around freedom of expression are becoming more difficult and more important. In this context, English PEN has been re-examining its ethos, thinking about how we can create spaces where proper conversations are no longer happening and bringing together people and groups that have stopped speaking except to insult each other on social media.

MF drew attention to the following examples of work, carried out in 2018-19:

- Residencies for three Turkish writer/journalist at risk
- Funding the translation of 34 new titles from 20 languages and International Translation Day
- Brave New Voices, our programme for refugee and migrant young voices
• Continued selection of excellent writers of the PEN Pinter Prize, in 2017 Michael Longley with Mahvash Sabet named as International Writer of Courage
• A serious good comedy gig.

MF reported that during 2017-18, Jo Glanville stepped down as Director to pursue a career in research and writing. MF thanked her on behalf of the board for all hard work and continuing commitment to English PEN.

MF also reported that AB took up the role of Interim Director in July 2017, and was subsequently confirmed in the role of Director.

MF reminded members that it had been decided to separate out the roles of President and Chair which she had been carrying for some time.

ii. Treasurer’s Annual Report/Audited Accounts

MF invited SJ, Honorary Treasurer, to deliver the Treasurer’s report on English PEN’s finances 2017-18 for the year ended 31 March 2018.

SJ reported that financially English PEN had had a solid year. He reminded members that in the previous financial year, with support and funding from Arts Council England, English PEN had taken the difficult steps of restructuring the organisation. He explained that if those additional funds were excluded from the comparative figures for the previous year, income for the current year compared very well with the previous year.

SJ reported that in summary, there had been a small deficit of around £22k, but highlighted that around £20k related to some of the restructuring costs. He added that in the previous financial year the charity had benefited from around £30k of historic Gift Aid receipts relating to previous years.

SJ concluded by noting that one thing that is very important from a risk perspective is to build the unrestricted reserves and that this year the charity had achieved the ambition of Very important from a risk perspective to build our unrestricted reserves, and in course of year we achieved the ambition of achieving unrestricted reserves equivalent to three and a half months of operating expenditure.

SJ opened to the floor for questions.

A member asked for clarification about Gift Aid. SJ explained that in year ending 31 March 2017 there had been an exercise to claim Gift Aid on membership subscriptions from previous years.

No other questions raised.

iii. Programme Reports:

A. Campaigns & Writers at Risk

MF invited CL, Writers at Risk Programme Manager, to report on English PEN’s campaigns. CL outlined relevant activities summarised in the annual report.

MF opened to the floor for questions. None raised.
B.  UK Campaigns & Readers and Writers

MF invited AB to report on UK Campaigns and the Readers and Writers programme.

AB outlined relevant activities summarised in the annual report. She also spoke about activities since April and the forthcoming round table about attending literature festivals where human rights are threatened.

MF opened to the floor for questions. None raised.

C.  Public Programme and Development

MF invited HT, Events and Development Manager, to report on English PEN’s Public Programme and Development.

HT outlined relevant activities summarised in the annual report.

HT opened to the floor for questions. None raised.

D.  Writers in Translation

MF invited TD, Writers in Translation Programme Manager, to report on English PEN’s Writers in Translation programme 2017/18.

TD outlined relevant activities summarised in the annual report.

TD opened the floor to questions. None raised.

5.  Update on PEN Congress

MF invited AB to report on the PEN Congress.

AB reported that Congress had been held in Pune, India and welcomed a number of new PEN centres including from Moscow, Perth, Cape Verde and Guinea Bissau. Jennifer Clement was re-elected as president, with N’gugi Wa Thiong’o, Perumal Murugan and Nayantara Sasgal elected as honorary vice presidents. AB referred members to the International PEN website for a full report of Congress.

The next PEN Congress will be in the Philippines.

MF opened the floor to questions. None raised.

6.  Re-appoint the auditors, Grant Harrod Lerman Davis LLP.

**Action:** As the meeting was not quorate, MF explained that consideration of this item was adjourned and would be considered at a meeting convened for that sole purpose at 4pm on 13 December.
To delegate authority to the trustees to fix the remuneration of the auditors on an ongoing basis until this authority is revoked by further members’ ordinary resolution

**Action:** As above,

7. **Retirement & Election of trustees to the Board of English PEN**

Three trustees are retiring or have retired from the board and not seeking re-appointment: Geraldine Proudler, Al Ghaff and Catherine Moore. MF thanked them on behalf of the entire board for all they have done for PEN.

MF noted that no new trustees were being proposed at the meeting and that recent changes to the constitution allow trustees to be appointed in the course of the year and then ratified at the next AGM.

MF also announced that she would be stepping down as Chair in September 2019.

**Action:** Trustees to review the board skills audit and identify areas where new expertise is required, and to agree the process for recruiting a new Chair.

8. **Any Other Business**

A member asked whether English PEN was content with the amount of media attention it manages to attract. In response, CL stated that English PEN gets a reasonable amount of press coverage and AB emphasized the importance of using the voice of British writers to amplify the stories of writers at risk.

A member asked about plans for the centenary, specifically whether there were plans to have a definitive history of the last 100 years. In response, AB outlined plans for the centenary including the 100th Congress organised together with International PEN in Oxford

Alistair Fruish, writing in residence at HMP Leicester, thanked English PEN for its support in holding a grant for work in prisons.

Steven Smith suggested the impact of the loss of local newspapers on writers as a theme to be explored during the centenary programme.

Claire Armistead noted that from her perspective at The Guardian, English PEN punches above its weight and is very effective given its small size. She thanked MF and AB for all their work, congratulated the whole staff team and trustees, and urged members to help bring more members into the organisation.

MF thanked Rob Sharp, who had recently left English PEN, for his valuable contribution over 10 years.

MF closed the AGM.

END.