



CHARITY COMMISSION
FOR ENGLAND AND WALES

Trustees' Annual Report for the period

From: 01 April 2024 Period start date To: 31 March 2025 Period end date

Charity name: The Poetry Exchange

Charity registration number: 1185714

Objectives and Activities

	SORP reference	
Summary of the purposes of the charity as set out in its governing document	Para 1.17	To advance the arts and culture, in particular poetry, for the public benefit, by producing events and activities that promote the public's engagement with and appreciation of poetry, for the general public around the UK and worldwide.
Summary of the main activities in relation to those purposes for the public benefit, in particular, the activities, projects or services identified in the accounts.	Para 1.17 and 1.19	<p>The Poetry Exchange runs various activities that enable the widest possible range of people to engage with and appreciate poetry. Through our unique idea of poems as friends, we invite people from all walks of life to discover and share what poems mean to them.</p> <p>We talk with readers around the UK about the poem that has been a friend to them, making space for these individuals to explore and deepen their sense of personal connection with a chosen poem.</p> <p>We share some of these extraordinary conversations through The Poetry Exchange podcast, bringing poems to thousands of listeners around the world through the voices and stories of those who read them.</p> <p>We also run live events and workshops at festivals, libraries, universities, community centres and workspaces, inviting people of all ages and backgrounds to connect more closely with poetry, themselves and each other.</p>
Statement confirming whether the trustees have had regard to the guidance issued by the Charity Commission on public benefit	Para 1.18	The trustees have had regard to the guidance issued by the Charity Commission on public benefit.

Additional information (optional)

You may choose to include further statements where relevant about:

	SORP reference	
Policy on grant making	Para 1.38	
Policy on social investment including program related investment	Para 1.38	
Contribution made by volunteers	Para 1.38	Whilst we pay people appropriately wherever possible for their work (based on Artists Union England rates), our core team, community of practitioners and supporters will often give their time voluntarily, due to their passion for and commitment to The Poetry Exchange and its work.
Other		

Achievements and Performance

	SORP reference	
Summary of the main achievements of the charity, identifying the difference the charity's work has made to the circumstances of its beneficiaries and any wider benefits to society as a whole.	Para 1.20	<p>We were left devastated and heartbroken during 2024-25 when our founder and Artistic Director, Fiona Bennett, became ill with a rare and complex form of cancer in May 2024. Tragically, Fiona passed away in August of the same year.</p> <p>Naturally, this took over all our care and attention during the year, requiring us to put many of our plans on hold. We focussed on being there for Fiona and each other, and on communicating the sad news to the Poetry Exchange community around the world.</p> <p>People wrote in from far and wide to express their love and admiration for Fiona, and gratitude for her work with The Poetry Exchange – including many heartfelt messages from people who had never met Fiona but whose lives had been touched by her voice, her heart, her work:</p> <p><i>"I would like to express my sincerest sympathies and condolences for the loss of Fiona. As a listener from Cyprus I only got to know Fiona through her voice and the latest live stream you organised earlier this year."</i></p>

		<p><i>Despite this, I feel like I lost a friend, who has kept me company for many years through your collective content and I consider myself incredibly fortunate to have been touched by her sensitivity, her depth of thought and feeling and her talent.” – Sergios H</i></p> <p><i>“I’ve never met Fiona but I loved to hear her voice on the Poetry Exchange. She was always so kind and gentle with the guests she had on the show and at the same time, so intellectually rigorous.</i></p> <p><i>I am grateful for her life, for the way she showed up for others, for being brave, authentic, wise and kind.” – Jill Jackson</i></p> <p>In spite of the enormity of what we were feeling and facing, we did manage to carry out some beautiful work during 2024-25, making some shining achievements that are testament to Fiona’s extraordinary presence and leadership, and her boundless legacy.</p> <p>Most notably, we published The Poetry Exchange Anthology <i>Poems as Friends</i> with Quercus Editions in May 2024. The result of two years of intensive work by Fiona Bennett and Michael Shaeffer, drawing on 10 years of work of The Poetry Exchange – this unique anthology shares 60 poems accompanied by the stories of readers who have known them as friends. It truly is a one-of-a-kind book in which extraordinary poems from the past and present sit alongside the voices and stories of people from all walks of life, talking about how these poems have acted as friends to them and have played a vital part in their lives.</p> <p>Even though our plans for the launch and promotion of <i>Poems as Friends</i> had to be scaled back in the circumstances, the response from readers around the UK and worldwide has been fantastic and so moving to receive:</p> <p><i>“The Poetry Exchange found me in COVID lockdown and reminded me how much I treasure the music and soul of good writing. The poems are made fresh by people’s personal readings of them and give me great comfort and joy. Poems are indeed some of our best friends. A wonderful concept beautifully shared.”</i> Anonymous reader review on Amazon</p>
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		<p><i>Poems as Friends</i> received several accolades during 2024-25, including being selected as one of the Poetry Books of the Year by <i>The Guardian</i> in December 2024, and being consistently listed as a 5* seller by Gardners (the UK's largest book distributor).</p> <p>As we moved into 2025, we continued to celebrate <i>Poems as Friends</i> by creating various events and activities that would open up the book with new audiences. This included: an online advent calendar sharing a poem a day during December; readings from the anthology at Garsington Opera, Hertfordshire Libraries, Nottingham University, the National Poetry Library and more.</p> <p>Alongside all of this we also continued our much-loved Poetry Exchange podcast, reaching the extraordinary milestone of our 100th episode in July 2025. Special mention must be made here of our co-host Michael Shaeffer, who continued to steer and host the podcast over the course of Fiona's illness and in the months following her passing, sharing the news and speaking to our listeners with immense sensitivity and love at such a difficult time. Thank you so much Michael for all your incredible hosting, enthusiasm and companionship to so many through The Poetry Exchange podcast over the last 10 years.</p>
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Additional information (optional)

You may choose to include further statements where relevant about:

Achievements against objectives set	Para 1.41	
Performance of fundraising activities against objectives set	Para 1.41	<p>Even though we had a lower income in 2024-25 compared to the previous year, we still ended the period with a healthy £13,692 cash funds available to see through our planned activity into 2025-26. This included the remainder of a grant from Arts Council England (£29,993 total), for which the funder allowed us an extension on its expenditure and reporting (until December 2025).</p>
	Para 1.41	

Investment performance against objectives		
Other		

Financial Review

Review of the charity's financial position at the end of the period	Para 1.21	The Poetry Exchange is in a healthy position at the end of 2024-25, with £13,692 cash funds carried over into 2025-26. The majority of this is the remainder of a significant grant from Arts Council England (£29,993 total), for which the funder allowed us an extension on its expenditure and reporting until December 2025.
Statement explaining the policy for holding reserves stating why they are held	Para 1.22	The trustees' ambition is to generate sufficient reserves to sustain the regular costs of The Poetry Exchange's 'core' programme for up to 4 months, which would allow us sufficient time either to pause or wind up our activity, or to raise additional funds to continue beyond this period.
Amount of reserves held	Para 1.22	No reserves in place at this stage.
Reasons for holding zero reserves	Para 1.22	Whilst The Poetry Exchange does not currently hold formal reserves, we operate as a very light-touch organisation with no offices, salaried staff or other overheads to consider. Therefore this does not pose a significant risk to The Poetry Exchange's viability.
Details of fund materially in deficit	Para 1.24	
Explanation of any uncertainties about the charity continuing as a going concern	Para 1.23	The Poetry Exchange operates sustainably as a small charity, through having no offices, salaried staff or other overheads to consider, and by only undertaking work when we have sufficient funds/resources to do so.

Additional information (optional)

You may choose to include further statements where relevant about:

The charity's principal sources of funds (including any fundraising)	Para 1.47	We saw the remaining £6,000 payment from Quercus Editions towards The Poetry Exchange Anthology in 2024-25, covering editorial fees and rights/permissions (secured by The Poetry Exchange). The total fee from Quercus of £11,000 was fully allocated on the production of The Poetry Exchange Anthology over 2023-25.

Investment policy and objectives including any social investment policy adopted	Para 1.46	
A description of the principal risks facing the charity	Para 1.46	<p>Risk: lack of continuity or capacity due to high levels of freelance and/or volunteer work.</p> <p>Mitigation: The Poetry Exchange is run by a passionate team and community, and we scale our work depending on the resources and time available.</p>
Other		

Structure, Governance and Management

Description of charity's trusts:		N/A	
Type of governing document (trust deed, royal charter)	Para 1.25	Foundation model constitution	
How is the charity constituted? (e.g unincorporated association, CIO)	Para 1.25	Charitable Incorporated Organisation (CIO)	
Trustee selection methods including details of any constitutional provisions e.g. election to post or name of any person or body entitled to appoint one or more trustees	Para 1.25	<p>New trustees appointed by existing trustees i.e. Alison McManus, Roy McFarlane, Andrea Witzke Slot.</p> <p>Every trustee must be appointed for a term of three years by a resolution passed at a meeting of the charity trustees.</p> <p>In selecting individuals for appointment as charity trustees, the charity trustees must have regard to the skills, knowledge and experience needed for the effective administration of the CIO.</p>	

Additional information (optional)

You may choose to include further statements where relevant about:

Policies and procedures adopted for the induction and training of trustees	Para 1.51	
The charity's organisational structure and any wider network with which the charity works	Para 1.51	

Relationship with any related parties	Para 1.51	
Other		

Reference and Administrative details

Charity name	The Poetry Exchange
Other name the charity uses	
Registered charity number	1185714
Charity's principal address	26 Monument Court Woolners Way Stevenage SG1 3AD

Names of the charity trustees who manage the charity

	Trustee name	Office (if any)	Dates acted if not for whole year	Name of person (or body) entitled to appoint trustee (if any)
1	Alison McManus	Chair		
2	Roy McFarlane			
3	Andrea Witzke Slot			
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Corporate trustees – names of the directors at the date the report was approved

[illegible]

Name of trustees holding title to property belonging to the charity

[illegible]

Funds held as custodian trustees on behalf of others

Description of the assets held in this capacity	
Name and objects of the charity on whose behalf the assets are held and how this falls within the custodian charity's objects	
Details of arrangements for safe custody and segregation of such assets from the charity's own assets	

Additional information (optional)

Names and addresses of advisers (Optional information)

Type of adviser	Name	Address

Name of chief executive or names of senior staff members (Optional information)

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Exemptions from disclosure

Reason for non-disclosure of key personnel details

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Other optional information

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Declarations

The trustees declare that they have approved the trustees' report above.

Signed on behalf of the charity's trustees

Signature(s)	 <small>Alison McManus (Jan 26, 2026 13:58:10 GMT)</small>	
Full name(s)	Alison McManus	Andrea Witzke Slot
Position (eg Secretary, Chair, etc)	Chair	
Date	26/01/2026	



CHARITY COMMISSION
FOR ENGLAND AND WALES

The Poetry Exchange

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Receipts and payments accounts

For the period from	01/04/2024	To	31/03/2025
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Section A Receipts and payments

	Unrestricted funds to the nearest £	Restricted funds to the nearest £	Endowment funds to the nearest £	Total funds to the nearest £	Last year to the nearest £
A1 Receipts					
Arts Council England National Lottery Project Grants				-	-
Earned income - fees from partners	887			887	3,120
Earned income - fees for Anthology from Quercus	6,000			6,000	5,000
Donations - fundraising event(s)	-			-	1,550
Individual donations	1,360			1,360	550
Sub total (Gross income for AR)	8,247	-		8,247	10,220
A2 Asset and investment sales, (see table).					
Sub total				8,247	10,220
Total receipts	8,247			8,247	10,220

A3 Payments

Artists' fees & expenses	644	1,503		2,147	3,240
Venue hire & materials	350	524		874	202
Producing & marketing	962	1,443		2,405	2,200
Audio production		1,800		1,800	2,900
Other freelance support				-	905
Rights & permissions				-	536
Advertising & promotion	517			517	149
Software, subscriptions, insurance	1,129	1,693		2,822	2,136
Travel, tickets, subsistence - core team & trustees	527			527	844
Supporter & donor care	281			281	552
Anthology - author fees	2,607			2,607	3,000
Anthology - rights & permissions	1,000			1,000	6,928
Sub total	8,017	6,964		14,980	23,593

A4 Asset and investment purchases, (see table)					
Sub total					
Total payments	8,017	6,964		14,980	23,593
Net of receipts/(payments)	231	- 6,964		- 6,733	- 13,373
A5 Transfers between funds					
A6 Cash funds last year end	4,497	15,928		20,424	16,912
Cash funds this year end	4,728	8,965		13,692	#####

Section B Statement of assets and liabilities at the end of the period

Categories	Details	Unrestricted funds to nearest £	Restricted funds to nearest £	Endow ment funds to nearest £
B1 Cash funds		4,728	8,965	
	Total cash funds (agree balances with receipts and payments account(s))	4,728	8,965	
		Unrestricted funds to nearest £	Restricted funds to nearest £	Endow ment to nearest £
B2 Other monetary		-	-	-
		Fund to which asset belongs	Cost (optional)	Current value (optional)
B3 Investment assets			-	-
		Fund to which asset belongs	Cost (optional)	Current value (optional)
B4 Assets retained for the charity's own use			-	-
		Fund to which liability relates	Amount due (optional)	When due (optional)
B5 Liabilities			-	

Signed by one or two
trustees on behalf of all the
trustees

Signature	Print Name	Date of approval
	Alison McManus	26.01.26
	Andrea Witzke Slot	
		26.01.26

Notes: £635 paid to trustee Roy McFarlane and £1,607 paid to trustee Fiona Bennett for artistic services to The Poetry Exchange over 2024-25. A resolution was in place and updated by all trustees to allow for Roy McFarlane and Fiona Bennett to receive these payments at specific moments during 2024-25, given their unique skills and experience within The Poetry Exchange team.