



The Spark! School Book Awards Trustees' Annual Report

Period: 06-04-2023 to 31-07-2024

The Trustees of The Spark! School Book Awards present their annual report and independently examined accounts for the period ending 31 July 2024 and confirm they comply with the requirements of the Charities Act 2011.

There were no serious incidents during the period that should have been reported to the Charity Commission.

The Trustees have made consideration of major risks, along with any required actions to mitigate their impact. These will be reviewed by Trustees and any lessons learned from risk events will be used to improve risk management practices.

This report was initially signed off by all Trustees via electronic communication on 18 November 2024 and updates approved on 02 December 2024.

Our Structure

The Spark! School Book Awards is a Charitable Incorporated Organisation (CIO), governed by a charity constitution document dated 20 January 2022. The only voting members are its charity trustees.

Trustee recruitment

Any new trustee must be appointed for a term of three years by a resolution passed at a properly convened meeting of the charity trustees. 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.

Current trustees

Mark Clutterbuck, 20-01-2022 to present (for up to five years)

Patrick Held, 20-01-2022 to present (for up to three years)

Matthew Brown, 20-01-2022 to present (for up to three years)

There have been no trustee appointments or resignations during the period.

Acknowledgements

We would like to formally acknowledge the significant and ongoing contribution of Debbie Thomas, Rebecca Rouillard and Scott Griffin (and their respective organisations) to the work of the Spark! School Book Awards. We would also like to extend our thanks to a range of different volunteers, mentioned elsewhere in this report, who were involved with our awards this year.

Reporting period

The Trustees agreed to extend the reporting period to 31 July in a meeting on 11-03-2024, to better align both financial and general reports with the award cycle. Whilst the reporting period covers the end of the 2022-23 cycle, the majority of the report (excluding the finance section) will only refer to the 2023-24 cycle.

Our Aims

The aims of the Spark! School Book Awards is the advancement of education for the public benefit by the promotion of reading in schools through a set of Book Awards in British schools which:

- Introduce children and teachers to an increasing range of new books and authors
- Build links between authors and pupils by providing opportunities for virtual author visits and other contacts as appropriate
- Develop children's critical approaches to reading by providing a forum for children to vote on their favourite books
- Administer competitions for children to motivate and encourage their interest in reading
- Provide books for disadvantaged children, as identified by the school where they learn

The aims of the Spark! School Book Awards are achieved through the running of an annual competition for children in schools, where they vote for their favourite book from a shortlist selected by teams of volunteers from the education sector across the country. Books are supplied to schools through a discount provided by a local bookshop, and shortlisted authors provide a video for use in schools as well as taking part in online Q&A sessions with children, to help to build relationships between them. Competitions are organised for children on the theme of reading and a magazine is produced and provided based around the shortlisted books. Copies of books are also provided free of charge for disadvantaged pupils as nominated by teachers, purchased via donations from our Book Fund. At the end of the process, the books and authors are celebrated in a ceremony where the winning titles are announced alongside the competition winners.

Our Details

The Spark! School Book Awards

Registered Charity No. 1199965

Address: 25 Denmark Rd, Kingston upon Thames, Surrey, KT1 2SD

Website: www.sparkbookawards.co.uk

Email: hello@sparkbookawards.co.uk (formerly sparkbookawards@gmail.com)

Our Activity and Achievements

New categories

Building on the success of previous years, this year we moved into the secondary sector, with a new category, fiction for readers aged 11 and above, primarily aimed at Key Stage 3 pupils. Many of the pupils in these year groups will have experienced the awards in primary school over the last three years and we hope this helped to engage them in the new category. A £5 discount was also applied to this category to encourage sign up.

In total, we were delighted that 35 schools signed up to this category, which included a small number of primary schools. We had anticipated that the numbers would be smaller, purely because there are far fewer secondary schools than primary schools across the country, but also that the awards would be delivered in a slightly different way, often through book clubs rather than whole year group engagement.

We also moved on to a new guest category this year, following the success of our picture fiction and poetry categories in previous years. The guest category for the 2023-24 award cycle was Graphic Novels for Primary Aged Pupils, chaired by Richard Ruddick, which proved to be incredibly popular with schools this year.

Partnerships

This year marked our second year of partnership with the Open University Reading for Pleasure team, which has been invaluable in promoting our awards across their wide network of schools and teachers, including attendance at conferences. On sign up, 25 schools (15%) indicated they had heard about the awards via OU RfP, although we believe the actual number to be far greater as this may not capture some of those who found out about the awards indirectly via OU, or who previously participated.

Bookmark - It was also the second year of our work with Bookmark, utilising the remaining funding and school places left over from the grant awarded in the previous financial period. Eight schools were funded for two categories each, including extra sets of shortlisted books. These schools were selected by Bookmark, from all eligible schools who had signed up. At the end of the financial period, £417.64 of the original grant still remains from the additional book sets and contingency funding and we will approach Bookmark to discuss how they would like this to be used (or returned).

Browns - As a result of our continued growth, this year we made the decision to move to a new book supplier, Brown's Books, who were better equipped and efficient for nationwide delivery. This means that the shortlisted books arrived at schools earlier, whilst also providing a larger discount for both us and schools, allowing everyone to save money. We intend to continue with the arrangement moving forward.

School sign up

This year, we were joined by 177 different schools, 22 (or 14%) more than in 2022-23. This total includes eight schools who each had two categories funded by Bookmark, using the remaining funding and places from the previous year. Three of these schools also opted in additional categories.

Below is a table showing the number of sign ups across the different award categories.

Category	No. Schools
Picture Fiction for Early Readers	96
Fiction for Ages 7+	97
Fiction for Ages 9+	106
Fiction for Ages 11+	35
Graphic Novels (Guest)	80

Panels

This year our five shortlisting panels consisted of 44 volunteers from 35 different educational establishments, the majority of whom were school based. This does not include our five panel chairs, one of whom is a Trustee, three of whom are heavily involved in the awards and mentioned previously in this report, and our guest category chair Richard Ruddick, who we would like to thank, for both sharing his expertise on graphic novels as part of the shortlisting process and for hosting our online author meets.

We would also like to extend our thanks to all of our panellists for their commitment to the awards this year, alongside their organisations for supporting them in doing so, as their contribution to the awards was greatly valued by everyone involved.

Author events

Our approach to author visits changed slightly this year, in response to the lower attendance from schools in the previous year. Instead of hosting two sessions, a morning and afternoon session, we instead opted for just the latter, as feedback from schools suggested these would be better attended.

In total, we hosted 20 online author events this year, one session for each of the shortlisted books. Where relevant, illustrators were also invited to take part in these sessions. The sessions were hosted (as far as possible) at a consistent time, although slight changes were made to accommodate authors presenting from a different time zone. Similarly, the sessions for the secondary category were held after the school day, when schools were more likely to be able to access them.

Books provided

As part of our offer, schools automatically receive a set of the four shortlisted books for any category they participate in. The eight Bookmark schools also received an additional set in each of the two categories they chose to access, as agreed and funded by Bookmark. In total, this meant we provided 1,736 books to our participating schools this year. There were several schools who opted out of the awards at a late stage, after the orders had been placed, so the books provided to them were redistributed to other schools.

There was a stock issue with one of the shortlisted titles and copies had to be sourced from other suppliers (which also affected our Book Fund). Whilst this led to a slight delay in delivery, we were able to fulfil our offer and any nominations via the Book Fund.

As part of our agreement with Browns Books, a significant discount on additional copies of the shortlisted books is also available to participating schools. Unfortunately, it is not possible to know how many schools took advantage of this offer or how many books they ordered.

Spark! Book Fund

The aim of our Spark! Book Fund is to ensure that everyone is included in our awards, particularly those with lesser access to the shortlisted books. All of the funds donated are used to purchase additional copies of these books and give them to disadvantaged pupils nominated by teachers in participating schools.

At the end of the previous financial period, there was £1,399.08 of unrestricted funds remaining to be used towards our Book Fund (in addition to further restricted funds for other purposes). As the previous period ended part way through the award cycle, a further £1,323.00 of this was used, leaving £76.08, which was carried over into the current cycle. Only this remaining balance will be included in the information below, relating to the 2023-24 award cycle.

In total, we received £4,788.74 in donations over the financial period to be used towards our charitable aims. This consisted of:

- £4,000.00 from the Brother's Trust;
- £500.00 direct donation from an individual known to the organisation;
- £105.00 from participating schools as a voluntary contribution on sign up;
- £183.74 from our JustGiving page and Amazon Smile (before it was discontinued), after fees had been deducted.

This generosity allowed us to provide a set of four shortlisted books in a selected category to all of the disadvantaged children nominated by their teachers. In total, we provided 836 books to 209 children, across 41 different participating schools.

In total, £4,653.89 of the funds available were used to provide the books for disadvantaged pupils, leaving a further £210.93, which will be carried over into the next cycle and used to supplement further donations.

Below is some anecdotal feedback we have received from schools who accessed the Book Fund:

"I just wanted to say a massive thank you for the books we received for our disadvantaged children. I have just given them their bundles and they were so delighted. They were all so grateful and it was wonderful to witness."

"It is wonderful to see the excitement that these amazing picture books can generate among all children and to hear all of the children chatting about their favourite book. Thank you for this - it really is helping us reduce the number of 'book poor' children in our school community."

"Accessing the Spark! Book Fund was absolutely brilliant for us, as we were able to ensure that children who have no books at home were able to have some to keep for the first time in their lives."

"Pupils were blown away by the opportunity that the Spark awards afforded them. Two of our recipients of the book fund books did not have any books of their own at home and so thoroughly treasured the books that they were gifted."

Competitions and Voting

Engagement with our pupil competitions remained very strong this year, with a large number of entries to both competitions, from a variety of different schools.

There were 20 winners across our poetry and main competitions, each of whom received a variety of prizes, including certificates, trophies, book vouchers and more. Runners up received a smaller selection of prizes. Our poetry winners also had the opportunity to record their poems, with the videos played during our award ceremony.

106 schools placed their votes for their favourite books this year, our best engagement ever and considerably higher than the previous year (75 schools).

Feedback

At the end of the award cycle we collect feedback from participating schools to explore any ways our awards could be improved and better engage schools and pupils. Unfortunately, the response rate to this form was incredibly low this year, with just eight responses, representing 5% of participating schools.

As a result of the low response rate, it's very difficult to draw out meaningful feedback, although the responses are almost universally positive and we will consider the engagement from schools next year a proxy for the value they place in our awards.

Our Future Plans

Guest category

Each year we hope to engage children and teachers with a broader range of types of children's literature, via our annual guest category.

Our plan for 2024-25 is for this category to focus on non-fiction/information texts, aimed at pupils aged 6 to 12 years. Nikki Gamble has been approached to be the guest panel chair.

The Spark! Mark

Next year, we are hoping to launch our 'Spark! Mark', a school accreditation aiming to promote and maximise engagement with all aspects of our awards and ensure new schools have a better idea of what to expect and how to deliver them in their school.

Funded places for schools

Due to the budget pressures schools are facing, we are also exploring the possibility of providing a number of funded places in our awards for schools new to our awards, although these may also be available to schools who have previously participated. Further work will be done to this end, early in the new year.

Our Finances

The Spark! School Book Awards

Charity no. 1199965

Receipts and payments accounts

Period: 06-04-2023 to 31-07-2024

	Unrestricted funds	Restricted funds	Total funds
Receipts			
Donations and grants		£4,789	
Participation fees	£29,650		
Misc. income	£193		
Sub total	£29,843	£4,789	£34,632
Payments			
Author events	£2,808	£757	
Book fund		£5,977	
Books	£9,189	£693	
Book vouchers	£1,109	£299	
Book deliveries			
Marketing & design	£2,457	£662	
Postage & packaging	£914	£246	
Misc. expenses	£2,100	£566	
Sub total	£18,577	£9,200	£27,777
Assets			
Not applicable	£0	£0	£0
Liabilities			
Not applicable	£0	£0	£0
Net total	£11,266	-£4,411	£6,855
Cash funds last period end	£6,911	£5,040	£11,951
Cash funds this period end	£18,177	£629	£18,806

Notes

- The financial period was extended to better coincide with the award cycle.
- The Charity holds no assets or liabilities beyond those stated above.
- Some payments have been manually adjusted in a proportional manner between unrestricted and eligible restricted funds, where the purpose was not specified beyond delivering the awards.

Reserves

The Trustees have agreed that £3,000 will be kept in reserve to protect against unforeseen financial difficulties and to assist with planning for future growth. The reserves policy will be updated accordingly in the near future.

Signed

 *Mark Clutterbuck* *Patrick Held* 

Mark Clutterbuck, Patrick Held and Matt Brown, 18 November 2024 (updated 02 December)



Section A

Independent Examiner's Report

Report to the trustees/
members of

The Spark! School Book Awards

On accounts for the year
ended

31st July 2024

Charity no
(if any)

1199965

Set out on pages

Above

I report to the trustees on my examination of the accounts of the above charity ("the Trust") for the period ended **31 / 07 / 2024**.

Responsibilities and
basis of report

As the charity trustees of the Trust, you are responsible for the preparation of the accounts in accordance with the requirements of the Charities Act 2011 ("the Act").

I report in respect of my examination of the Trust's accounts carried out under section 145 of the 2011 Act and in carrying out my examination, I have followed the applicable Directions given by the Charity Commission under section 145(5)(b) of the Act.

Independent
examiner's statement

I have completed my examination. I confirm that no material matters have come to my attention (other than that disclosed below *) in connection with the examination which gives me cause to believe that in, any material respect:

- accounting records were not kept in accordance with section 130 of the Act or
- the accounts do not accord with the accounting records

I have no concerns and have come across no other matters in connection with the examination to which attention should be drawn in order to enable a proper understanding of the accounts to be reached.

** Please delete the words in the brackets if they do not apply.*

Signed:

Date:

21 January 2025

Name:

Tomas Wilcox

Relevant professional
qualification(s) or body
(if any):

FCIE

Address:

Counterculture Partnership LLP

Bank Chambers, Main Street

Hawes, North Yorkshire, DL8 3QL

Only complete if the examiner needs to highlight matters of concern (see CC32, Independent examination of charity accounts: directions and guidance for examiners).

Give here brief details of any items that the examiner wishes to disclose.

N/a