

**RNA STRATEGY 2022-2025**

**Introduction**

The Romantic Novelists’ Association (RNA) was founded in 1960 to both celebrate, and demand respect for, romantic fiction. Founder members included Denise Robins, Barbara Cartland, Elizabeth Goudge, Netta Muskett, Catherine Cookson and Rosamunde Pilcher. The first President of the Association, Denise Robins, noted that although romantic fiction gave great pleasure to many readers, the writers almost felt they had to apologise for what they did. The RNA was going to put a stop to those apologies and, instead, celebrate and promote romantic authorship.

The RNA has grown from what was essentially a luncheon club for novelists into a professional authors’ group of around 700 full members and a further 300 probationary members who participate in the New Writers’ Scheme intended to nurture as-yet unpublished writers. The membership also includes publishing professionals, booksellers, writers in other media and book reviewers as associate members.

The RNA is, fundamentally, a membership organisation. Through its activities it seeks to enhance the readers’ experience and to raise the prestige of romantic fiction more broadly. But it does this by enabling its members to hone their craft, learn from other writers and understand how to navigate the publishing industry. It is run by and for its members and encourages writers of romantic fiction from all backgrounds and stages in their writing journey to join the RNA, including those who are not yet published, and those who are independently or traditionally published. With associate members from the publishing industry, it helps build relationships that will foster opportunities for its other members and the genre.

As well as growth in its membership, the range of programmes and events that the RNA delivers has also expanded significantly over time. This has resulted in a workload that is unsustainable for an organisation that is almost-entirely volunteer-run. In 2021, the RNA’s Management Committee commissioned Professional Governance Services Ltd (PGS) to complete an external review to identify the steps required to put the RNA on a stable footing for the future. A key finding of that review was that the RNA needs a strategy to give it clear direction and agreed priorities. The review found that, whilst there was some consistency in the view people held about the RNA’s purpose and what it should do, this needed to be more clearly defined and communicated both internally and externally. A new strategy would help create a shared understanding of why the RNA exists and its vision for the future, around which members could coalesce.

**How this strategy has been developed**

Initial discussions on identifying the RNA’s vision, purpose and values, and its strategic priorities, formed part of the Management Committee’s away day on 5 February 2022, facilitated by PGS. This built on the extensive review undertaken by PGS from October 2021 to January 2022, which examined feedback from members in the 2018 Membership Survey and the 2021 Listening Exercise, as well as interviews with a broader group of volunteers. During the away day a ‘logic model’ was used to guide discussions including about the outcomes the RNA wishes to achieve.

These initial discussions were followed by three 2-hour online workshops with members of the Management Committee in April and May 2022. This document summarises the strategy that has emerged.

This strategy covers a period of 3 years (from July 2022 to June 2025). It combines (a) a primary focus on consolidation; with (b) innovation/ development particularly with regard to the RNA’s learning and development offering for members. This builds on the work already underway to review and revitalise the RNA’s structure, mission and activities and will provide a solid foundation for the RNA to move forward and to continue to evolve over the next 60 years.

**Our vision, purpose and values**

The RNA’s vision sets out the future we want to create. Our purpose describes the reason why we exist. And our values capture what is important to us and the behaviours we want to exhibit.

**Vision: *A heart for romantic fiction***

The RNA seeks to cultivate a love for writing romantic fiction. By extension, it aims to bring joy and delight to readers of romantic fiction, and to challenge negative stereotypes and derogatory attitudes about the genre.

The vision is both personal and universal. We want to create a future where writers can tell stories that convey their individual passion and interests, and where the diversity of our members and their writing means that all readers can find characters that resonate with their experiences, aspirations or desires.

**Purpose: *Connecting, supporting and championing all members to create their best romantic fiction***

The RNA encourages all writers of romantic fiction to become members, recognising that our strength is in the different ideas, experiences and perspectives that we bring together. We give romantic fiction writers a place to belong and help members evolve as individual writers.

The RNA **connects** writers with others that understand the challenges, creativity and loneliness that can come from being a romantic fiction writer and who share an interest in the different facets of romantic fiction.

The RNA **supports** writers at every stage of their writing ‘career’ from those who are only beginning to discover the genre, to those who have made a full-time career out of writing, those who savour writing alongside other work, and those who are stepping back from the limelight but still have a love for the genre and in sharing and learning with others.

The RNA **champions** individual writers and the genre of romantic fiction, celebrating excellence in romantic fiction, and equipping members to grow into their full potential.

**Values:**

* **Community** – we have a collective passion, creating a place where we can share ideas and experiences, learn from one another and grow together
* **Learning** – we embrace the opportunity to continuously develop, in our craft as writers and in the ‘business’ of being a writer
* **Respect** – we value one another and this is reflected in how we interact, whether or not we agree
* **Professionalism** – we bring our best to what we do and how we work together
* **Creativity** – we are imaginative, inventive and inspiring in our writing and in how we encourage one another

**Strategic aims and priorities for 2022-2025**

We want to continue delivering programmes and events that connect and celebrate our members, recognising that there is much that is valued about what the RNA delivers. We also need to recognise the constraints on our capacity and a need to focus on the things which are most effective in achieving our purpose. We have identified strategic objectives or aims to refine and develop what and how we operate as an organisation, under three headings: sustainability, membership and learning.

1. **Sustainability**

Our goal:

***To ensure the RNA has a sustainable future***

Our key actions:

* We will complete the process of converting to a company structure with a board of directors (equivalent to the Management Committee) overseeing volunteer teams
* We will introduce more paid resource including a part-time Business Manager, while ensuring that our volunteer-led ethos is maintained
* We will improve our management and finance systems and ways of working
* We will put in place role descriptions for directors and volunteers and will promote good succession planning, including being more open with members about the roles available, the skills and other qualities we need and how to apply for roles
* We will continue connecting members and celebrating their achievements including through Chapters, *Romance Matters*, and our Awards and events

How we will we know if we’ve achieved our goal?

* By the end of year 1, our new organisational structure is fully embedded and our Business Manager appointed
* We have oversight and control over our finances, with information readily accessible to directors, other volunteers and staff who need it and budgets in place for all programmes and events
* Members and volunteers are clear about the volunteering roles available and what these involve
* We have increased the number of people volunteering with the RNA
* 1/3 of directors on the board will be newly elected by the end of 3.

1. **Membership**

Our goal:

***To make the RNA’s membership more accessible, encompassing the broad collective of romantic fiction writers and giving all members a sense of belonging***

Our key actions:

* We will actively promote membership to writers from under-represented groups and those writing about historically under-represented characters
* We will review the bursary scheme so that it is focussed on those it can benefit most.
* We will develop a new members induction and revitalise conference buddying
* We will adapt our programmes and events so that they are more accessible, in particular for those with low incomes or who have a chronic illness or disability or are neurodiverse
* We will introduce a new Code of Conduct or Members’ Charter to ensure all members are treated fairly and with respect, dealing with complaints, disputes and grievances in a timely and objective way
* We will ensure that feedback mechanisms are in place, for example, a bi-annual members’ survey, so that we continue to hear regularly from the grassroots of the RNA

How we will we know if we’ve achieved our goal?

* Our membership data will show an increase in diversity of members’ backgrounds and of writing interests, styles and sub-genres
* We will improve retention rates among new members and maintain retention rates among those who have been members for 3 years or more
* Feedback from members (e.g. in our membership survey) will show that members feel part of a community and are clear about how the RNA benefits them
* The number of formal complaints received from members will decrease as members have clearer expectations of one another and differences of opinion are resolved at an earlier stage

1. **Learning**

Our goal:

***To encourage learning at every stage of a romantic fiction writer’s career***

Our key actions:

* We will review the New Writers Scheme to provide more targeted support for emerging writers and be clearer about what to expect from the Scheme and the support available.
* We will ensure that RNA Learning encompasses a broad range of topics covering both the craft of writing, the publishing industry and how to forge a career in writing, and how to engage with readers and the media
* We will promote peer-to-peer learning, giving a voice to emerging, recently published and long-standing writers including those who have experienced both success and challenges
* We will provide space for members to engage with others from different sub-genres, backgrounds and expertise to explore different perspectives and experiences

How we will we know if we’ve achieved our goal?

* Feedback from both ongoing participants, graduates and readers of the New Writers Scheme shows that the programme has enhanced their writing and/or editing skills and been a positive experience
* Writers attending courses and events include individuals at different stages in their writing journey/ career and from different sub-genres or interest groups, as evidenced by attendance and evaluation records
* Course evaluations show that the majority of attendees would recommend the course to another writer
* The number of members who have had work published increases year on year, as ongoing learning and understanding of the publishing industry helps advance careers