

Grass Roots Open Writers

CONSTITUTION

1. NAME

The name of the organisation is Grass Roots Open Writers (hereinafter called GROW.)

2. AIMS

- To provide a safe and supportive environment, that helps our members to build their social skills, confidence and self-esteem, while improving their writing, reading and communication skills.
- To organise writing workshops, social activities and networking events, produce our own literature and multimedia presentations.
- To enable our members to find their own voice, experiment with new writing methods and explore different writing styles.
- To help our members get actively involved with the planning, decision-making and running of GROW.
- To promote GROW and publicise the work we do.
- To offer training and support to help our members recognise the skills they already have, acquire new skills and to develop them further.
- To assist our members to take part in social and writing activities that are organised by other local and national groups.
- To encourage our members to help and support each other, and also to share their skills, knowledge and expertise when they feel ready and able to do so.

3. POWERS

In order to promote the agreed aims of GROW, but not otherwise, GROW may:

- a) Employ and pay any persons necessary.
- b) Liaise with organisations and individuals who can help GROW.

- c) Offer financial support for members to visit other organisations for training and networking purposes, where funds allow.
- d) Arrange writing groups, workshops, reading events, training courses, exhibitions, meetings, social gatherings and location visits.
- e) Publish and sell, or give away, magazines, newsletters, books, pamphlets, audio or video tapes, multimedia presentations and exhibition materials.
- f) Publicise and promote GROW and its activities.
- g) Raise funds by any legal means, accept membership fees and contributions.

4. MEMBERSHIP

Membership shall be open to any person (without distinction of gender, ethnic background, age, disability, sexuality, religion, cultural or religious beliefs) who agrees to abide by the GROW Aims and Rules.

Membership is valid for up to 1 year and is renewable on the 1st September.

- a) Full Membership is open to those who:
 - i. Wish to participate in the activities.
 - ii. Agree to abide by the GROW Rules, which will be reviewed at every AGM. **(see Appendix 1)**
 - iii. Support the Aims of GROW **(See Item 2)**
 - iv. Complete a Membership Application Form and pay the annual membership fee in force at the time of application.

Membership is subject to ratification at the first Executive Committee Meeting following receipt of the completed membership application form and membership fee.

b) **Full Members**

- i. May stand for election on to the Executive Committee, provided that they are not legally disqualified (as defined by the Charities Commission) from acting as a Committee Member.
- ii. Are welcome to attend any sessions, events and Executive Committee Meetings organised by GROW, (except **closed** Executive Committee

Meetings, which only Executive Committee Members are permitted to attend.)

- iii. Shall have one vote at General Meetings.
- iv. Are expected to behave in a reasonable manner at workshops, meetings and events.

c) **Honorary Members**

- i. May be appointed at the discretion of the Executive Committee.
- ii. Honorary Members shall not be entitled to vote.

d) **Refusal of Membership**

- i. The Executive Committee have the power to refuse membership to an applicant, where it is considered such membership would be seriously detrimental to the aims, purposes or activities of GROW.
- ii. Any applicant who is refused membership will be informed by the Executive Committee, in writing, of the grounds on which their application was refused and giving details of how to appeal.
- iii. The applicant has the right to appeal against this decision, by following the five step Grievance Procedure. **(See Item 10)**
- iv. Any Membership Fee paid for a membership that has been refused will be returned to applicant.

e) **Termination of Membership**

Membership may be terminated by:

- i. Resignation. Any member may terminate their own membership by notifying the Executive Committee (in writing) of their wish to do so.
- ii. Lapse of Time. All Memberships are due for renewal on 1st September and will end on 31st August the following year.
- iii. Death. Membership of GROW is non-transferable and ceases on the death of any member.
- iv. Termination. Where the Executive Committee have formally voted to terminate membership, having followed the correct procedures **(see Appendix 2)**

5. EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

- a) The policy and general management of the affairs of GROW shall be directed by an Executive Committee.
 - b) The members of the Executive Committee will be known as 'Executives'.
 - c) Only people who agree to be nominated can be elected on to the Executive Committee.
 - d) Only Executives who agree to be nominated for the Officer roles can be elected as Officers.
 - e) Only Executives are eligible to vote at Executive Committee Meetings.
 - f) All Executives are equal - but the Officers each have some additional responsibilities.
 - g) The Executive Committee shall meet not less than four times a year.
 - h) The Executive Committee shall consist of not less than seven people, including the four Officers.
 - i) The Executives will be elected at the Annual General Meeting of GROW. They will hold office for one year, until the end of the following AGM, unless:
 - i. They give written notice of their resignation to the Chair
 - ii. Their membership of GROW is terminated by the Executive Committee.
- (See Item 4.e.iv)**
- j) The Executives will appoint 4 Officers (a Chair, a Vice-Chair, a Treasurer and a Secretary) from amongst themselves at the first Executive Committee Meeting after the AGM.
 - k) The Executive Committee may co-opt up to five further Executives from the existing Full Members, who will be entitled to vote.
 - l) Any casual vacancy in the Executive Committee may be filled by the Executives from the existing Full Members. Any person so appointed will hold office until the end of the next AGM. They will not be eligible to vote, unless they are co-opted on as an Executive.

- m) The Executive Committee may appoint Sub-Committees as may be deemed necessary. Terms of Reference for these Sub-Committees will be decided by the Executive Committee.
- n) Group Leaders (Volunteers) may be elected or appointed as Executives.
- o) Employees (Paid Workers) may not be elected or appointed as Executives.
- p) All Executives must stand down at the end of the AGM. However they are eligible for re-election.
- q) Executive Committee Meetings are usually open to any GROW member who wishes to attend. However, if an Executive meeting is **closed** (for example to discuss a grievance) then only Executives may attend.
- r) All Group Leaders are expected to attend Executive Meetings.
- s) The Executive Committee have the power to terminate the membership of any GROW member, having followed the correct procedures. **(See Appendix 2)**
- t) No GROW Member, Group Leader, Employee, Volunteer or Executive, may be present at an Executive Committee Meeting while termination of their own GROW membership, or a grievance against them personally, is being discussed.
- u) The Executive Committee may co-opt advisors on to the committee (people with skills and knowledge that would be useful to GROW). The advisors can support and advise GROW, but they are not allowed to vote.
- v) Only the Executives are entitled to vote at Executive Meetings.

ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Executives

- Work as part of a team.
- Have the right to represent GROW to outside bodies, with the agreement of the Executive Committee.
- Act in the best interests of GROW at all times.
- Conduct themselves in a way which respects others.

- Declare to the Executive Committee any conflict of interest and abide by any decision about how that conflict should be dealt with.
- Are prepared to attend all meetings - or send apologies if they are unable to do so.
- Are prepared to consider being a signatory for the Bank Account (if any of the officers is unable or unwilling to do this.)

Chair

- Be an Executive AND
- Usually Chair all meetings.
- Ensure that all present can contribute without interruption or intimidation.
- Prepare the agenda with the Secretary and ensure that the agenda items are fully discussed and implemented where possible.
- Be a signatory for the Bank Account.

Vice-Chair

- Be an Executive AND
- Fill the Chair's role when he or she is unavailable.
- Support the Chair.
- Be a signatory for the Bank Account.

Secretary

- Be an Executive AND
- Deal with all correspondence.
- Keep minutes and records.
- Keep all members informed.
- Prepare the agenda with the Chair.
- Be a signatory for the Bank Account.

Treasurer

- Be an Executive AND
- Keep up-to-date records of all financial transactions
- Ensure all members of GROW receive their expenses promptly
- Make regular financial reports
- Prepare accounts for the independent examiner.
- Be a signatory for the Bank Account.

6. WHAT HAPPENS AT AN EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE MEETING

- a) The quorum for an Executive Committee Meeting is five, including at least one officer.
- b) At least 14 days notice must be given of all Executive Committee Meetings.
- c) At the first Executive Committee Meeting following the AGM four officers (Chair, Vice-Chair, Secretary and Treasurer) will be elected from the Executives.
- d) Voting: Wherever possible, the Executive Committee will try to work by consensus (they will try to come to an agreement) but, where this is not possible, questions shall be decided by a simple majority of those present and entitled to vote. In the event of a tied vote, the Chair of the meeting shall have a second or casting vote.
- e) Minutes: The Secretary shall record all proceedings and resolutions of Executive Committee and General Meetings. A copy of the Minutes will be sent to the Executives as soon as possible after the meeting.

After they have been accepted as a true record, at the following Executive Committee meeting, they will be made available to the members.

Any confidential Minutes will be kept in a sealed, dated envelope and may be seen only by the Executive Committee. Confidential Minutes are those which contain sensitive, private or personal information that it would be inappropriate to circulate outside the Executive Committee.

- f) Rules: The Executive Committee shall have the power to adopt and issue Rules for GROW. Such Rules shall come into operation immediately, but they shall be subject to review at the next AGM.
- g) Ratification of Full Members who have applied since the last Executive Committee Meeting. If Full Membership is refused then the procedures in **Item 4(d)** must be followed.
- h) Grievances. Any complaints, disputes, appeals or grievances received since the last Executive Committee Meeting will be discussed and hopefully resolved informally. If it is not possible to come to an informal resolution, the Executive Committee may decide to hold a **closed** Executive Committee Meeting, that only the Executives are permitted to attend. **(See Item 5.r. and Item 10)**

7. WHAT HAPPENS AT THE ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING (AGM)

- a) Quorum: The quorum for the Annual General Meeting will be ten Full Members, including at least two officers, **or** ten percent of the Full Members, including at least two officers, whichever is the greater.
- b) If any AGM is not quorate, another AGM must be held within 60 days. If this AGM is also not quorate then whoever is present at the meeting will decide what course of action to take.
- c) At least 28 days notice must be given of all Annual General Meetings.
- d) The AGM will take place every year and within 15 months of the previous AGM.
- e) The minutes of the previous AGM will be presented, amended if necessary and approved.
- f) An Annual Review of the Groups activities will be given. (Chair's Report)
- g) The Independently Examined Accounts will be presented and adopted. (Treasurer's Report)
- h) The existing Executive Committee will stand down (although they will hold office until the end of the AGM) and they are eligible for re-election.
- i) The Executive Committee for the next year will be elected.
- j) Any amendments to the Constitution will be voted on.

- k) We will appoint an Independent Examiner for our accounts, to ensure that all expenditure and income is recorded and that we have good systems for looking after any funding that we have.
- l) We will review the Membership Fee.
- m) We will review the GROW Rules.
 - If no-one is willing to stand for election, the current Executive Committee will decide whether to start procedures to close GROW down.
 - Alternatively, the Executive Committee can continue in Office for up to 6 months.
 - It will be the responsibility of the Executive Committee to recruit a new committee or formally dissolve GROW within that period.

8. EXTRAORDINARY GENERAL MEETINGS (EGM)

- a) An EGM, open to all Full Members, must be held if at least half of the Full Members request this in writing to the Secretary, stating their reason for wanting one.
- b) This could be in the form of a single letter signed by at least half of the Full Members.
- c) The Secretary will ensure that the meeting is held within 60 days.
- d) Quorum: The quorum for the Extraordinary General Meeting will be ten Full Members, including at least two officers **or** ten percent of the Full Members, including at least two officers, whichever is the greater.
- e) At least 28 days notice must be given of all Extraordinary General Meetings.

9. FINANCE

- a) The Treasurer shall keep proper accounts of the finances of GROW, which shall be Independently Examined or Audited once a year by the person appointed at the Annual General Meeting.
- b) An Independently Examined or Audited set of accounts for the last financial year shall be submitted by the Executive Committee to the Annual General Meeting for adoption.

- c) A bank account is to be held in the name of GROW, at such bank as the Executive Committee shall from time to time decide.
- d) Four designated signatories (normally the Officers) shall be agreed at the first meeting of the Committee following the AGM, and the names of the agreed signatories recorded in the Minutes of that meeting. All cheques drawn on the account must be signed by at least two of the designated signatories.
- e) The financial year will run from 1st September to 31st August.
- f) The Treasurer will give an interim report to the AGM (an update on the current financial situation) to cover the period from the end of the financial year to the date of the AGM.

10. GRIEVANCES

Grievances are concerns, problems or complaints that might arise within GROW.

Wherever possible grievances will be settled informally.

However, if this is not possible, GROW has a five step formal grievance procedure available to all the members.

Having a formal grievance procedure in place means that GROW should be able to give any grievance reasonable consideration and deal with it fairly, quickly and consistently.

1. You inform the Executive Committee of your grievance in writing.
2. You meet with the Executive Committee to discuss the grievance.
3. The Executive Committee discusses the grievance in a **closed** Executive Committee Meeting (only Executives may attend.)
4. The Executive Committee will inform you, in writing, of their decision and of any action they have agreed to take in order to resolve your grievance.
5. If you are still not satisfied with the way that your grievance has been dealt with, the Executive Committee will hold an appeal, if you request them to do so.

If necessary, the Executive Committee may ask an independent advisor for advice.

11. ALTERATIONS TO THE CONSTITUTION

Any proposed alterations to the Constitution must first be agreed by the Executive Committee. The Constitution may only be altered at a General Meeting (Annual or Extraordinary.) At least 28 days Notice of the General Meeting must be given to the members, stating the terms of the proposed alterations.

Item Number 1 (The Name) may not be changed.

Item Number 2 (The Aims) may not be deleted or removed. However, they may be added to, provided that any additions do not conflict with the original aims.

12. DISSOLUTION

GROW may only be dissolved at a General Meeting.

All members must be informed that a decision about the future of GROW will be on the Agenda.

It is the responsibility of the serving Executive Committee to ensure that all members are informed in advance of the meeting and its purpose.

A proposal to dissolve GROW will only be carried if agreed by two thirds of the members or if GROW is unable to form a committee.

All outstanding bills will be paid.

Funders will be contacted and, where appropriate, funding will be returned to the relevant funder.

The remaining funds and possessions will be donated to an organisation with similar aims to GROW.

13. NOTICES

Notices must be served in writing to the last known address of the recipient. They will be assumed to have been received 2 weeks after posting.

14. INTERPRETATION AND POINTS NOT YET COVERED

Any interpretation of this constitution, or any additional points not covered as yet, will be decided by a majority vote of the Executive Committee. The question will then be referred to the next AGM in the form of a Constitutional Amendment.

Signed by(Chair)
on behalf of all those present at the AGM (See attached Signature Sheet)

*Adopted at 2nd AGM held on 7th October 2009
in the Roosevelt Court Lounge, Stonehouse Drive, St. Leonards*

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Appendix 1

GROW RULES

A Code of Conduct for GROW Groups

1. Respect, Appreciate, Value and Encourage all our members and their work.
2. All GROW meetings, workshops, activities and events are open to any member who wishes to attend, and who agrees to abide by the GROW rules.
3. Do not discriminate against anyone on the grounds of race, religion or belief, culture, social or economic status, age, disability, appearance, gender or sexual orientation.
4. Do not make prejudiced remarks or tell rude or inappropriate jokes.
5. Do not swear or use rude or coarse language. Do not talk about inappropriate subjects in the group.
6. Do not monopolize the group discussions.
Help the Group Leader to give everyone an equal chance to talk.
7. Think carefully before reading out your work. Could anyone be offended, hurt or embarrassed by what you have written? If you are unsure please check with the Group Leader first.
8. Do not take more than your fair share of the reading time.
Help the Group Leader to give everyone an equal chance to read.
9. Listen carefully when other members are reading out their work.
10. Be polite, patient and kind. Make sure your feedback is positive.
11. Always try to be aware of other member's needs and vulnerabilities.
12. Speak slowly and clearly. Do not cover your mouth while talking or reading.
13. Keep bags and walking aides in a safe place, where they won't trip anyone up.
14. If you have a problem within the group, please tell the Group Leader about it straight away. We will do our best to resolve any issues that may arise.

Appendix 2

Procedure for Terminating GROW Membership

1. Verbal Warning - A panel of 3 Executive Committee Members (including at least 1 officer) will meet with the person to explain which of the GROW Rules (**See Appendix 1**) they are in breach of, why it might be necessary to terminate their membership and what they must do in order to keep their GROW membership.
2. Written Warning - If, after the verbal warning, the person has still not complied with the GROW Rules, (**See Appendix 1**) The Executive Committee will write to the person to explain which of the GROW Rules they are in breach of, why it might be necessary to terminate their membership and what they must do in order to keep their GROW membership.
3. Written Notice of Membership Termination. If, after the written warning, the person has still not complied with the GROW Rules (**See Appendix 1**), The Executive Committee will write to the person to explain which of the GROW Rules they are in breach of and why it has been necessary to terminate their membership. They will be informed of their right to appeal and of the 5 step Grievance Procedure. (**See Item 5.r. and Item 10**)