



ROMANCE
WRITERS OF
NEW ZEALAND

ANNUAL REPORT



2026

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MEET THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE



Rajat Chawla
Treasurer



Kelly Lyndon - President (*left*)
and **Marija Greenhill** - Vice President (*right*)



Shelagh Merlin
Membership Secretary

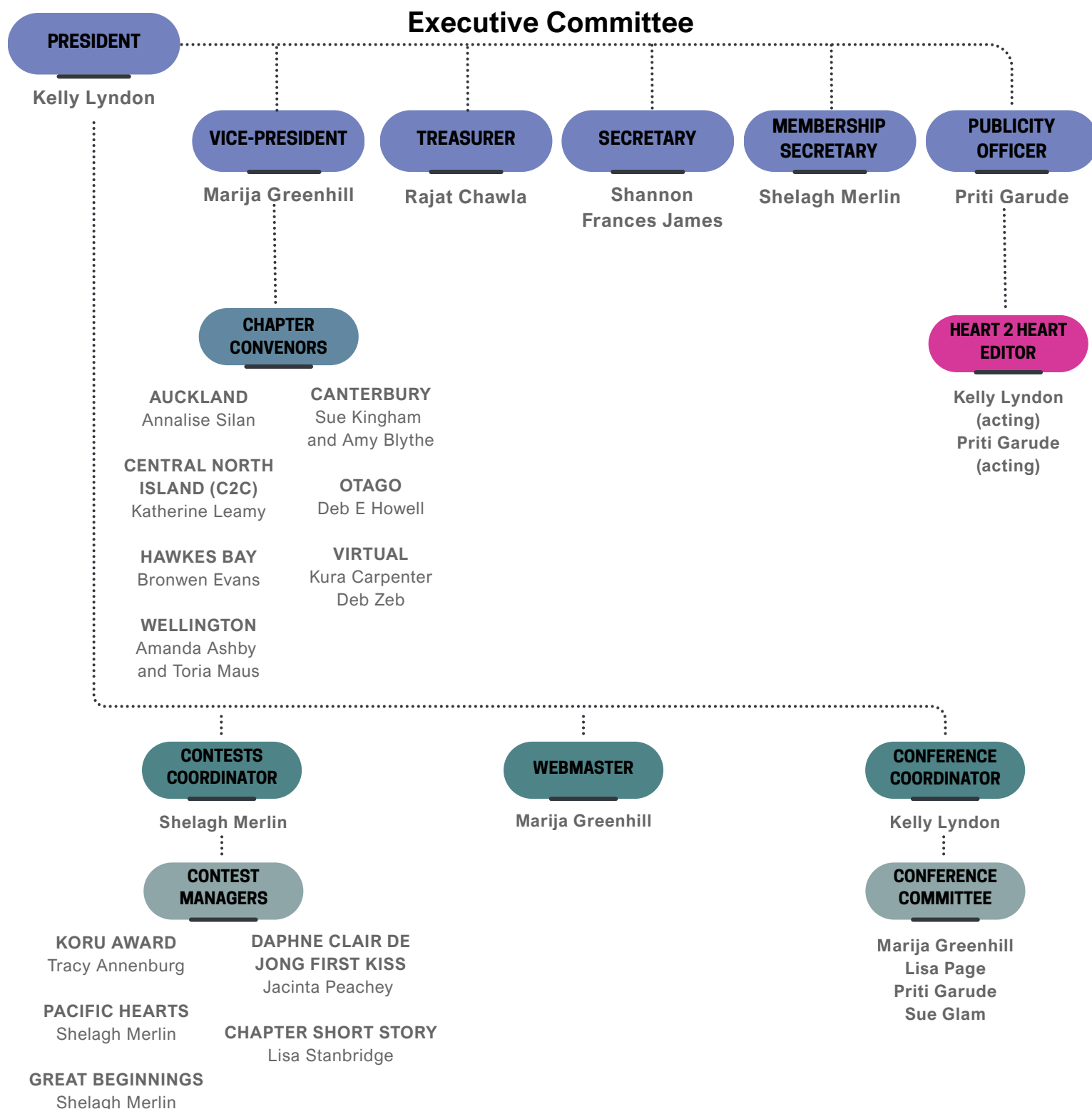


Priti Garude
Publicity Officer



Shannon Frances James
Secretary

OUR ORGANISATION



PRESIDENT'S REPORT

Kelly Lyndon

Kia ora koutou,

What a year it has been!

As I sat down to write this report, I realised there was one theme that kept coming back to me; that this year has been about strengthening RWNZ for the future. Whether it's been modernising our website, updating our Constitution, building new partnerships, investing in educational resources for our members, or tackling some long-standing technical challenges, every decision we've made has been with one goal in mind: ensuring Romance Writers of New Zealand continues to grow and thrive for many years to come.

I'm incredibly proud of what we've achieved together so far.

One of our biggest achievements this year has been the launch of our brand-new website. It has given RWNZ a fresh, modern look and a much stronger online presence. More importantly, it provides us with a platform that will support the organisation well into the future.

Behind the scenes, we also undertook the significant task of reviewing and updating our Constitution to ensure it complied with the Incorporated Societies Act 2022. Our previous Constitution had served the organisation well for many years, so this wasn't about starting from scratch, it was about ensuring it reflected the new legislative requirements while preserving the strong governance framework that was already in place.

To help us through the process, we engaged specialist lawyer Daniel Watterson to review the document and guide us through the changes. It involved many weeks of reviewing, discussing and refining the proposed amendments before they were adopted by members at our Special General Meeting in March. While it was a substantial undertaking, the effort was well worth it.



We now have a Constitution that honours the excellent work of those who came before us while ensuring RWNZ is well positioned to meet the requirements of the new legislation into the future.

You may also notice something a little different this year - our first Annual Report in a long while. Although not specifically required under the Incorporated Societies Act 2022, as an Executive we felt it was an important step in continuing to strengthen transparency and communication with our members. So much of the work that happens throughout the year takes place behind the scenes, and we wanted to create a record that not only captures our financial performance, but also celebrates the achievements, milestones and volunteer effort that make RWNZ what it is.

We hope the Annual Report becomes something our members look forward to each year.

Now, this President's Report would not be complete without talking about the elephant in the room (or maybe I should say ghost...) WooooooCommerce! Those of you who experienced issues renewing your membership will know exactly what I'm talking about!

In September 2025 our clever Kura Carpenter discovered a significant issue in our Woo Commerce membership database that was incorrectly identifying some members as inactive, preventing them from renewing their memberships online.

Annual Report 2026

In the past every time someone contacted us we were able to correct their account, but we now knew we were treating symptoms rather than fixing what we soon realised was a big underlying problem.

We sought advice from more than one IT provider and were initially advised that upgrading the website would likely resolve the issue. Unfortunately once the website was launched it soon became apparent that the membership database operated independently of the website itself, so the problem remained.

After many months of investigation by our current IT partner, WooCommerce personally referred us to a specialist developer in Los Angeles, who has now identified the underlying cause of the issue, which, in short, was years of not doing regular maintenance including plugin updates. Thankfully it was not a virus or bugs as we first feared. The other good news is that now that we finally know what we're dealing with we have two incredibly talented Exec members in Marija Greenhill and Shelagh Merlin, whose IT backgrounds mean we can tackle the solution in-house.

To our members who experienced problems renewing their membership, I sincerely apologise and thank you for your patience while we've worked through this complex and frustrating time as we tried to find the ghost in the machine (it certainly put the "wooooo" into WooCommerce more than any of us expected!) A special thanks to Kura Carpenter, Marija Greenhill, Lisa Page, Raj Chawla and Shelagh Merlin, who have spent countless extra hours investigating problems, helping members and working towards a permanent solution. Your persistence has been remarkable.

Thankfully, despite that challenge, we've still managed to achieve an extraordinary amount this year.

Some of our highlights include:

- [Launching our new-look RWNZ website](#)
- [Welcoming HQ \(formerly Harlequin\) back as a conference sponsor after an eight-year absence](#)
- [Bringing in-person pitching back to conference](#)

- [Acquiring three fantastic online writing courses from our own Rage Against the Manuscript legend and former President, Steffanie Holmes, which will be available to members from September](#)
- [Forming a new partnership with the New Zealand Society of Authors, giving RWNZ members a 50% discount on NZSA membership from 1 September](#)
- [Welcoming Priti Garude to the Exec as Publicity Officer. With a strong background in content creation, public relations and communications, Priti has brought a wealth of experience and fresh ideas to the role. Her creativity and enthusiasm have helped breathe new life into our social media presence and Heart2Heart magazine!](#)

This year also looked a little different when it came to conference planning. Rather than establishing a separate Conference Committee, the Executive Committee took on the responsibility for organising the 2026 conference as well. This was a deliberate one-off decision. We wanted to reconnect with former sponsors, introduce some new processes, and streamline the way we planned and delivered conference before handing those updates on to future Conference Committees.

I'm delighted to say that approach achieved what we hoped. We welcomed HQ back as a conference sponsor after an eight-year absence, introduced several new initiatives, including the return of in-person pitching, and have sold more conference registrations than we originally anticipated in this tough economic climate. This is great news, not only because more members will be joining us in August, but because it also means we may not need to increase conference prices in 2027 as much as we initially expected.

Despite the membership database issues affecting renewals throughout the year, RWNZ remains in a healthy financial position thanks to the careful stewardship of our Treasurer, Raj Chawla. We've continued to invest in the future of the organisation while maintaining strong financial reserves, and that's something we can all be proud of.

Another thing that has been particularly exciting this year has been seeing romance continue to receive the recognition it deserves across the New Zealand literary community. Of course we've always known that romance is one of the world's most popular and enduring genres, but this year it has been wonderful to see that reflected more widely across the book industry.

We saw the launch of New Zealand's first romance-only reader event, A Romantic Adventure in Christchurch, where many of our members participated, and a significant increase in the presence of romance authors at Hamilton's Ages of Pages festival.

At the Auckland Writers Festival, romance took centre stage with a panel titled The Rise of Romance. At the New Zealand Booksellers Conference, industry professionals explored the question Is Romance a Bookselling Bubble or Bedrock? Featuring RWNZ member Jackie Ashenden who joined a conversation that would have been very unlikely just a few years ago. During this discussion, it was clear that sales of romance novels have rocketed especially since covid, and it reflects the remarkable continued growth and strength of our genre. These events and the discussions currently taking place are fabulous for our community. It really is a fantastic time to be a romance author, and this is reflected in our growing membership numbers which have increased steadily to an extra 19% since July 2025. A big warm welcome to our new members!

I'd also like to congratulate RWNZ member Juliet Gengenbach on the opening of XO Book Co. in Wellington. Seeing another bookstore dedicated to romance open its doors is more fabulous news for our genre and community, and we wish Juliet every success.

At this year's AGM we'll be asking members to consider a Special Resolution. It proposes extending complimentary conference passes beyond the Executive and Conference Committee to include our Contest Coordinator, Heart 2 Heart Editor, Webmaster and Regional Convenors.

As an organisation run entirely by volunteers, we simply wouldn't exist without the enormous amount of work these volunteers do behind the scenes. Much of their contribution goes unseen, yet it is absolutely essential to keeping RWNZ running.

After Raj diligently reviewed our finances and forecasted future expenses, we're very confident we can afford to make this investment in our volunteers. More importantly, we believe it's the right thing to do. It's our way of recognising the dedication, expertise and countless hours they contribute every year, while making it easier for them to attend and participate in our annual conference.

I encourage you to attend the AGM to vote on this resolution or appoint a proxy if you're unable to be there so your vote can be included and help shape the future of our organisation.

Another matter - because it's impossible to finish this report without mentioning the rapid rise of artificial intelligence - be assured your Executive is monitoring this closely. We'll continue to keep members informed about what we know as it evolves. As AI continues to influence the publishing landscape, important questions continue to be raised around copyright, intellectual property and the future of authorship. I'm particularly pleased that this year's conference includes a dedicated session on AI, copyright and publishing with NZSA CEO Jenny Nagle and lawyer Daniel Watterson, helping ensure our members have access to expert guidance on this fast-moving topic.

Before I finish, I'd like to thank our amazing Executive Committee. Every member of this team volunteers their time around full-time jobs, family commitments and everything else life throws at us. For some, this year has also included personal health challenges, yet every single one of them continued to show up, support one another and work tirelessly for RWNZ.

No President accomplishes anything alone, and much of the work we do goes unseen outside of our team. I have been incredibly fortunate to work alongside such a talented, dedicated and vibrant group of people. They challenge me, support me, make me laugh when things get a bit rough, and are a constant reminder of why I love being part of this organisation. They really are an extraordinary team, and I couldn't ask for better people to stand beside me and lead RWNZ.

I would like to acknowledge and sincerely thank Lisa Page, who recently stepped down from the Executive to focus on her family. Since joining the Executive in 2023, first as Publicity Officer and later as Membership Secretary, Lisa has made an enormous contribution to RWNZ, including being a contest manager, conference committee member along with leading the Wellington Chapter group since 2022. Her diligence, kindness and willingness to help wherever she was needed have been greatly appreciated by all of us, and she will be very much missed. On behalf of the Executive and our members, thank you, Lisa, for everything you have done for RWNZ. We wish you and your family all the very best for the future.

I would also like to acknowledge Shelagh Merlin, who very generously stepped into the Acting Membership Secretary role following Lisa's departure in late June. Many of us already know Shelagh through her outstanding work as our Contests Coordinator which we know is a big role, and despite this she didn't hesitate to put up her hand to help out with the Membership portfolio.

Since then, Shelagh advised me that she has really enjoyed the role and intends to stand for election as Membership Secretary at this year's AGM. Knowing how many RWNZ hats Shelagh already wears, I wanted to make sure she wasn't taking on too much. It quickly became clear that I needn't have worried—she is just as enthusiastic and committed to this role as she is to all other contributions she makes to our organisation. Shelagh's willingness to step in when RWNZ needs her is yet another example of her incredible generosity. We are exceptionally fortunate to have Shelagh's passion, talent and commitment to our organisation.

Finally, thank you to you - our members. Thank you for continuing to support Romance Writers of New Zealand. Thank you for your enthusiasm, your creativity and your belief in romance writing and what our organisation can achieve. It has been an honour, a privilege and, quite simply, a great deal of fun to serve as your President over the past two years. And after some reflection, I have also decided it will be unlikely that I will stand again in 2027. I love everything about this role, but when I accepted it I don't think I fully appreciated just how much time it would require.

Like most of the Exec, I work full-time, and while serving as your President is very rewarding, it has also meant putting much of my own writing on hold, which is a little ironic, given that is probably why most of us join RWNZ in the first place(!)

So why stand again? Quite simply, because I believe consistency matters. Over the past two years we've worked hard to strengthen RWNZ through good governance, stronger industry relationships and new opportunities for our members. One former sponsor commented that they couldn't keep up with who the President of RWNZ was because the role changed so frequently. That really resonated with me, because building relationships takes time, and so does maintaining the relationships and initiatives now in place.

I'm also really proud that every member of the current Executive team has chosen to stand for re-election. That's unusual, and it gives us a unique opportunity to carry the momentum we've built into 2027 before handing over an even stronger organisation to those who follow.

If the members choose to place their trust in me again, I would be delighted to continue leading RWNZ into another exciting year. We've achieved an extraordinary amount this year, but I truly believe the best is still to come.

Thank you for reading (I did not intend it to be this long!), thank you for your continued support, and I really look forward to seeing many of you at our conference next week.

Bye for now ❤️

Ngā mihi nui,

Kelly Lyndon

**President
Romance Writers of New Zealand**

FINANCIAL REPORT

Rajat Chawla

For the year ended 31 March 2026

This report sets out where the society's money came from, how it was spent, and what we hold in reserve. Figures are in New Zealand dollars, exclude GST, and are shown alongside the prior year for comparison.

INDEPENDENT REVIEW

The independent financial review reproduced at the end of this section covers the year ended 31 March 2025 (FY25), the most recent year reviewed under section 12.8 of the Constitution. The FY26 review will be completed and issued to members within six months of balance date.

INCORPORATION NUMBER

1213046

NZBN

9429043005888

REGISTERED UNDER

Incorporated Societies Act 2022

PREPARED BY

The Finance Guy Limited

NET SURPLUS

\$12,452

2025: deficit of \$3,136

TOTAL INCOME

\$72,144

2025: \$91,278

NET ASSETS

\$159,422

2025: \$146,970

CASH & TERM DEPOSITS

\$140,037

2025: \$133,952

Summary Financial Statements

YEAR ENDED 31 MARCH 2026

Notes to the statements follow. All figures in NZ dollars, GST exclusive.

FINANCIAL PERFORMANCE

	2026	2025	CHANGE
Conference	47,331	69,365	(22,034)
Membership subscriptions	16,148	18,054	(1,906)
Interest	6,686	2,071	4,615
Contests and awards	1,980	1,790	
Total revenue	72,144	91,278	(19,134)
Conference delivery	35,057	68,614	33,557
Website and technology	7,928	4,001	(3,927)
Governance and professional	4,030	—	(4,030)
Subscriptions and software	3,152	8,705	5,553
Payment and bank fees	2,951	4,709	1,758
Contests and awards	1,366	1,227	(139)
Travel	1,248	—	(1,248)
All other costs	3,960	7,159	3,199
Total expenditure	59,692	94,415	34,723

Net surplus / (deficit)

12,452

(3,136)

15,588

Summary Financial Position

AS AT 31 MARCH 2026

	2026	2025	CHANGE
Cash and term deposits	140,037	133,952	6,085
Other current assets	17,695	20,866	
Website, net of depreciation	16,948	—	16,948
Total assets	174,680	154,818	19,862
Payables and accruals	9,527	610	(8,917)
Funds held pending allocation note 4	5,724	4,662	(1,062)
Credit card payable	3,774	—	(3,774)
GST and other	(3,766)	2,577	6,343
Total liabilities	15,259	7,849	(7,410)
Net assets	159,422	146,970	12,452
ACCUMULATED FUNDS			
General funds	136,058	123,606	12,452
Conference reserve	23,364	23,364	—

FOR THE COMMITTEE'S ATTENTION

Cash includes \$5,724 received through a fraudulent transaction. The funds sit in the society's accounts but are not the society's money and are carried as a liability pending resolution. Excluding this, free cash is \$134,313.

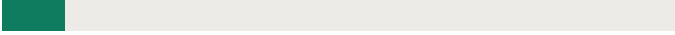
The year at a glance

YEAR ENDED 31 MARCH 2026

RWNZ returned a surplus of \$12,452 this year, after a deficit of \$3,136 in 2025. Total income was lower than last year because the 2025 figures included a larger conference, but the 2026 conference was delivered at a healthier margin. Subscription income remains the society's steady base, and interest on term deposits more than tripled.

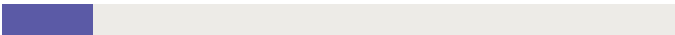
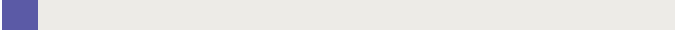
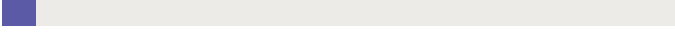
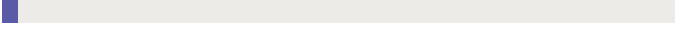
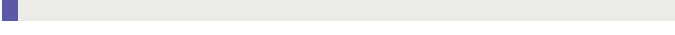
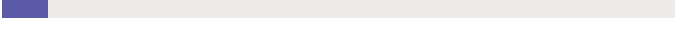
WHERE INCOME CAME FROM

Total \$72,144

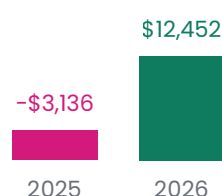
Conference		\$47,331
Membership renewals		\$11,499
Interest income		\$6,686
New & reactivated members		\$4,649
Contests & awards		\$1,980

WHERE IT WAS SPENT

Total \$59,692, including cost of sales

Conference delivery		\$35,057
Website & technology		\$7,928
Governance & professional		\$4,030
Subscriptions		\$3,152
Payment & bank fees		\$2,951
Contest & award costs		\$1,366
Travel		\$1,248
Other operating costs		\$3,960

TWO-YEAR RESULT



READING THESE STATEMENTS

The statement of financial performance shows income and spending over the year. The statement of financial position shows what the society owned and owed at 31 March. Figures in brackets are negative.

Notes to the Financial Statements

YEAR ENDED 31 MARCH 2026

1 Reporting entity

Romance Writers of New Zealand Incorporated is a not-for-profit public benefit entity registered under the Incorporated Societies Act 2022. Incorporation number 1213046, NZBN 9429043005888. The society was first incorporated on 17 May 2002 and re-registered under the 2022 Act on 23 March 2026. Its registered office is 30 Brian Crescent, Stanmore Bay, Whangaparaoa 0932.

2 Basis of preparation

These statements have been prepared on an accrual basis in accordance with PBE SFR-A (NFP), the Tier 3 standard for not-for-profit public benefit entities. The society is eligible to report in Tier 3 as its annual expenses are under \$5 million. Amounts are presented in New Zealand dollars, rounded to the nearest dollar, and exclude GST.

3 Property, plant and equipment

The society's new website was capitalised at a cost of \$18,693 and is depreciated on a straightline basis. Depreciation of \$1,745 was charged in the year, leaving a carrying value of \$16,948 at balance date.

4 Funds held pending allocation

\$5,724 shown in current liabilities arises from unauthorised card transactions processed through the society's website during a bot attack, in which third-party card details were used without authorisation to test the payment gateway. Affected cardholders identified to date have been refunded. The balance is held in the society's bank accounts and is therefore included in cash, but it is not the society's money and is carried as a liability pending identification and refund of the remaining cardholders. The independent reviewer has recommended the Committee formally resolve and document the outcome.

5 Audit and preparation

These statements were compiled by The Finance Guy Limited, bookkeepers and accountants to the society, from the records provided to them. They have not yet been audited or reviewed.

6 Events after balance date

From 1 September 2026 the annual membership renewal fee will increase from \$59 to \$65. The \$15 joining administration fee is unchanged, so the fee for a new membership (and renewing an expired membership) moves from \$74 to \$80. All contest entry fees will increase by \$5. Neither fee has been raised in ten years, and the society has absorbed rising costs over that period; the increases restore the margin on both activities. The society will also introduce a Buy Now, Pay Later option, such as AfterPay, so members can spread the cost of membership, conference and contest entries. Neither change affects the figures reported for the year ended 31 March 2026.

Approval of the financial statements

The Committee approved these financial statements for issue to members.

Financial Report 2026 32 **SECTION 12.8, RWNZ CONSTITUTION**

SECTION 12.8, RWNZ CONSTITUTION

Independent Financial Review Report

For the year ended 31 March 2025

Reviewer	Vipul Munjal, CA — Member, Chartered Accountants Australia and New Zealand
Financial year	1 April 2024 to 31 March 2025
Statements reviewed	Profit & Loss Statement; Balance Sheet as at 31 March 2025
President	Kelly Lydon
Treasurer	Rajat Chawla
Date of report	2 May 2025

Respective responsibilities

The Executive is responsible for preparing the annual financial statements in accordance with the society's accounting policies, and for maintaining the internal controls necessary to enable preparation of statements free from material misstatement. In accordance with section 12.8.1 of the Constitution, the Executive provided the Reviewer with access to all relevant information and records, any additional information requested, and reasonable access to persons within RWNZ.

The Reviewer's responsibility is to report whether anything has come to their attention to cause them to believe the financial information is not presented in accordance with the society's accounting policies. This review is substantially less in scope than an audit conducted under New Zealand generally accepted auditing standards, and accordingly no audit opinion is expressed. The Reviewer is not a member of the Executive and is not an employee of RWNZ, satisfying the independence requirements of section 12.8.

Matters noted during the review

Suspense account — unresolved bot attack transactions, \$4,662

The society's website was subject to a bot attack during the year, resulting in unauthorised card transactions. Cardholders identified to date have been refunded; the balance represents amounts where cardholders have not been identified or refunds remain outstanding. These funds are not the society's money. Recognising them as income without a formal Executive resolution and exhaustive investigation would be inappropriate and may expose the society to reputational and legal risk. **The Reviewer recommends the Executive formally investigate whether the balance can be traced and refunded, document the outcome, and clear this matter before the next review.**

Conference income and costs

Income of \$69,365 and direct costs of \$68,614, a net contribution of approximately \$751. Consistent with a breakeven conference model; no concerns raised provided the Executive is satisfied with the outcome. No comparable amounts in FY2024.

Independent Review, continued

YEAR ENDED 31 MARCH 2025

Matters noted, continued

Loss on sale, \$7,246

A significant item with no prior-year equivalent. The Executive should retain accessible documentation of the asset disposal and its authorisation.

US dollar account, \$14,356

Subject to foreign currency risk; a movement loss of \$673 was recorded in the comparative year. The Executive should consider whether a hedging or conversion policy is appropriate.

Based on the review conducted, and subject to the matters noted above — in particular the unresolved suspense account balance of \$4,662 relating to the bot attack — nothing else has come to the Reviewer's attention to cause the Reviewer to believe that the financial statements of Romance Writers of New Zealand for the year ended 31 March 2025 are not presented in accordance with the society's accounting policies.

The society recorded a net loss of \$3,136 for the year ended 31 March 2025, against net assets of \$146,970. The society remains in a sound financial position.

This report is issued solely for the information of the Executive and the members of the society and should not be used for any other purpose.

Vipul Munjal, CA

Independent Reviewer

Member, Chartered Accountants Australia and New Zealand

Rajat Chawla

Treasurer

Romance Writers of New Zealand

CONSTITUTIONAL BASIS

This review was conducted in accordance with section 12.8 of the RWNZ Constitution, which requires the President (with Executive approval) to appoint an accountant to review the annual financial statements; the Reviewer to be a member of the New Zealand Institute of Chartered Accountants; the Reviewer to be neither a member of the Executive nor an employee of RWNZ; and the Executive to provide full access to records, documentation and persons. All requirements of section 12.8 were satisfied in respect of this review.

MEMBERSHIP REPORT

Shelagh Merlin

The annual membership report below shows a steady increase of 59 members net from 307 members, a pleasing growth rate in the 12 months to 30 June 2026 of 19%.

All our Chapters grew through 2025-26 with Auckland/Northland recording the largest overall growth of 31%. This was followed closely by overseas membership, up 22% and Wellington/Wairarapapa up 17%.

Now that we have upgraded our website, the next tasks are to tidy up the Woo Commerce membership records including investigating and, where appropriate, cancelling memberships.

Feel free to contact me at membership@romancewriters.co.nz if you have any questions.

Annual Membership Report						
Membership by Region	30 June 2025	31 May 2026	30 June 2026	Change Month	Change YTD	Current % of Total
Auckland/Northland	88	106	110	4%	25%	31%
Coast to Coast	26	30	30	0%	15%	8%
Hawkes Bay	9	10	11	10%	22%	3%
Wellington/Wairarapapa	58	63	64	2%	10%	17%
Canterbury/Westland	39	48	49	2%	25%	13%
Otago/Southland	14	15	15	0%	7%	4%
Overseas	67	81	81	0%	21%	22%
Not Specified	6	6	6	0%	0%	2%
TOTAL	307	359	366	2%	19%	

Contests

Shelagh Merlin

The contest season has officially wrapped up for 2025/26 and now we eagerly await the announcement of winners of the Koru and Pacific Hearts. We would like to thank and congratulate all those who entered and hope you all received some valuable feedback. The next contest year begins with the Great Beginnings opening on 1st September, so make sure to get those first three chapters (5000 words) of your manuscript shining and perhaps we'll be celebrating your win at the 2027 conference!

Many thanks to the contest coordinators:

- Daphne Clair de Jong First Kiss - Jacinta Peachey
- Koru - Tracy Annenberg
- Chapter Short Story - Lisa Stanbridge

The Great Beginnings and Pacific Hearts contests have been managed by the contest coordinator. We'd love to welcome a new coordinator or two to the team.

If you'd like to volunteer as a contest judge or coordinator, please email:

contests@romancewriters.co.nz

