

# EQUITY

incorporating the Variety Artistes' Federation

Autumn/Winter  
2022




## PAY UP!


IN THE MIDST OF A COST OF LIVING CRISIS, EQUITY MEMBERS'  
DEMAND TO THEATRE BOSSES IS CLEAR.

ALSO INSIDE:

BREAKING THE SILENCE ON NDAS • THE COMEDIANS' CHARTER  
BEHIND THE NEW BANNER • IMPROVING ACCESS FOR DANCERS



**“Those who fight, can  
lose. Those who don’t  
fight, have already lost”**



- Bertolt Brecht

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## NEWS

### Equity member wins fight to improve access to Spotlight for d/Deaf and disabled members



DANEKA ETHELLES

Earlier this year, Equity member Daneka Etchells successfully campaigned for Spotlight to remove barriers preventing disabled members accessing their d/Deaf and disabled members discount. Here Daneka shares how they achieved the change.

In February 2022, I launched a formal complaint process with Spotlight regarding the d/Deaf and disabled members discount. My grievance was with their lack of transparency of the scheme, their failure to inform all members of the discount's existence and requiring an invasive 'proof of disability'. I had been a member for five years and had no knowledge of it.

When I asked other disabled members, they either were unaware of it or had tried to access it but had been dismissed on medical evidence. Very few actually had access to the discount. Previously, to qualify for the discount Spotlight required disability benefit paperwork on each evidence pathway, which immediately excluded the majority of disabled people. If you couldn't provide this, you needed

a medical certification from a healthcare professional (which you have to pay substantially for) detailing invasive, unnecessary medical information.

Having access to diagnostic paperwork as a disabled person is a privilege and requiring this omitted many on grounds of medical racism, migrant status, low-income backgrounds, medical misogyny, age and gender. We constantly position disabled people by impairment, valuing identity credibility by medical intervention, rather than the societal, attitudinal and physical barriers which disable us.

The complaints process took a few months to complete, with support from Ian Manborde, Equity's Equalities & Education Officer. Finally, at the end of April, after a discussion with Spotlight, they committed to removing barriers and aligning more with a social model of disability. They removed requiring medical evidence and committed to a wider communication of the discount, especially within the joining and renewal process, alongside agent reminders and clearly signalling the discount under the profile edit page.

I'm really pleased with how Spotlight responded so comprehensively, thoughtfully and promptly with meaningful action. I am fiercely passionate about levelling the playing field for us disabled creatives, championing our rights and industry welfare. I hope this is the first of many changes I am part of #NothingAboutUsWithoutUs

*If you want to play an active role in improving the entertainment industry for d/Deaf and disabled artists, you can raise issues with Equity's Deaf and Disabled Members Committee [ddmcommittee@equity.org.uk](mailto:ddmcommittee@equity.org.uk), or stand for election to the committee in 2023. If there is an equality and diversity issue that you would like to take action on, email Ian Manborde [imanborde@equity.org.uk](mailto:imanborde@equity.org.uk)*

### Could you stand in next year's Committee Elections?

Equity's Industrial, Equalities and National Committees will all be up for election in the Spring of 2023. Standing for election to a committee is a great way to engage with and shape the work of the union – including for those who have not done so before – and with well over 100 positions to be filled it's crucial that members get involved.

Committees play a vital role within the union in helping to steer the agenda for the union's work in their area, advising

the Council on issues within their expertise, and some have the critical responsibility of settling our industrial agreements.

Nominations will open in February/March 2023 and a link to the online nominations page will be circulated to all members. If you are unable to nominate online or would prefer to receive a paper nomination form, please write to Sam Winter at [swinter@equity.org.uk](mailto:swinter@equity.org.uk) or Guild House, Upper St Martin's Lane, London WC2H 9EG.

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## NEWS

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### NTS widens pool of casting directors following Equity's popular Scottish AGM motion



The National Theatre of Scotland are changing their casting model, with freelance casting directors being brought on board for each production, allowing the theatre to work with a wider range of people. Prior to this, the theatre employed one person in a casting director role.

The change follows a motion that passed at Equity's Scottish AGM in 2019, regarding concerns around gatekeeping in Scottish casting. The motion was so popular that it drew support from over 240 Equity members – the highest number ever for a Scottish AGM.

The motion called on the union to contact major employers in Scotland and ask them to make casting in Scotland more open. This included making casting "accessible to the acting talent based in Scotland before broadening the search geographically" and challenging "why artistic directors/directors have allowed a monopoly on theatre casting in three of Scotland's main houses," before calling for "a more objective system that allows Scottish talent work opportunities."

The union then followed up with meetings with NTS to discuss the motion and rolled out Equity's Manifesto for Casting to other employers across Scotland.

"We have discussed at length how best we can serve the Scottish acting community and ensure best practice in our casting and auditioning practices," says a statement from the NTS regarding the change to their casting model. "We want to ensure that we engage with as wide a pool of actors as possible and we remain committed to improving our casting processes."

The theatre has also announced that it will be launching a call out later in the year for actors based in Scotland who either haven't worked with NTS in the past five years, or who have never worked with them before. These actors will be invited to send in audition self-tapes to be viewed by a panel. You can sign up to receive further information about this at [nationaltheatrescotland.com/mailling-list](https://nationaltheatrescotland.com/mailling-list).

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## Vote in the Rulebook Referendum 2022

Voting is now open and closes at 12 noon on Friday 2 December 2022. Voting papers are included with this magazine, along with details as to how you can vote online.

A modern, accessible rulebook is vital for a progressive, fighting union.

The Council (the union's elected governing body) has been reviewing the union's rules and is now putting forward a new rulebook for the membership's approval. Their key aim is to make the union's current rules and practices more accessible and easier to understand, along with some limited changes.

The rules are set by you, the members. A wide-ranging consultation was conducted in September, allowing members to share their thoughts on the Council's initial proposals. Following the consultation, the Council reviewed members' comments and finalised the rulebook being presented to you now. A referendum of the entire membership is now open to decide whether to accept that new rulebook.

Along with your ballot paper, you will receive statements for and against the change, a detailed explanation of the substantive changes made, and links to the old and new rulebook.



## NEWS

### New green standards in theatre agreements believed to be a world first



Equity has negotiated two landmark theatre agreements, believed to be the first union agreements in the world to include sustainability standards for theatre productions.

The house agreements with Ardent Theatre and Aequitas Theatre commit the organisations to policies such as making sure the budget and schedule are set to support sustainable working; 100% of all plastics used reusable, recyclable or compostable; technical teams reduce energy through switch-off routines; and more.

The agreements also include provisions for maximum five-day working weeks either across the board or at least during rehearsal periods, curbing the creeping-norm of six-day weeks in theatre and live performance – and therefore reducing emissions.

“Every single sector in the country must play its part to avoid the catastrophic consequences of climate breakdown and provide dignified conditions to workers,” says Karrim Jalali, Equity Industrial Official for Fringe Theatre, who led the negotiations. “This work should help pave the way for workers to demand more of producers and to make informed decisions as to who they are going to work for.”

By agreeing to sustainability provisions, organisations can prove their commitment to the fight against the climate crisis and are made accountable for this to their workforce. Equity intends for the agreements to influence other companies to voluntarily improve their practices, and ensure that sustainability and a better work-life balance forms the basis of other collective agreements world-wide – including in industries beyond theatre and the performing arts.

The two companies who have already committed to sustainability provisions must not only ensure they have sustainability policies, but also – and importantly – produce work to Theatre Green Book Sustainable Production standards. Theatre Green Book is a theatre-led initiative working alongside sustainability experts to make the industry sustainable, and encompasses three books focused on Sustainable Productions, Buildings and Operations.

This follows on from the pivotal work of union members who form the Equity for a Green New Deal Network. The Network has led the switch of default funds in the Equity Pension Scheme to a new lower carbon fund, taking investment largely away from fossil fuel companies and high polluting industries, and putting it into those that are more sustainable.

“Building sustainability into productions and operations shouldn’t be seen as an extra cost to producers,” says Helena Wilson, Vice-Chair of the Equity for a Green New Deal Network. “If it’s done right, it means more money spent on people and less money spent on stuff. A key ingredient which is encapsulated in these agreements, is also providing better work-life balance, which means less emissions and more opportunity for workers to be part of their communities. It’s a win-win. We hope the sustainability clauses in these agreements will be emulated across the UK and worldwide.”

*If you’d like to get involved with Equity’s fight against the climate crisis, visit [linktr.ee/equitygnd](https://linktr.ee/equitygnd) to find out contact and social media account details for the Equity for a Green New Deal Network*

## NEWS

### Major UK and international media organisations pledge to tackle bullying and harassment in TV



In August, Equity launched a landmark 'Statement of Commitment Against Bullying, Harassment and Inappropriate Behaviour in TV'. Bringing together 22 major organisations, signatories have pledged to tackle workplace bullying, harassment and inappropriate behaviour in the TV industry.

The organisations that developed the Statement of Commitment are: AMC, Apple TV+, BBC, The Casting Directors' Guild, Channel 4, Channel 5, The Co-operative Personal Management Association, Disney, Equity, HBO, Intimacy Directors & Coordinators, ITV Studios, Northern Ireland Screen, Pact, Paramount, Personal Managers Association, S4C, Screen Scotland, Sky, TAC, and Warner Bros.

This follows a ground-breaking first meeting of representatives from these organisations, called by Equity. The group have agreed to:

- Safe casting and audition spaces: professional recruitment standards to be adopted and auditions undertaken in appropriate workspaces.
- Policies: producers to have clear respect at work policies which include a process for making and addressing concerns and complaints of bullying and harassment.
- Accessible information: information shared with cast and crew about how concerns can be raised either if they are the victim of or see inappropriate behaviour (e.g. information on call sheets and displayed in communal

areas, access to support and whistleblowing helplines, details of the safeguarding contact for each production).

- Anti-bullying and harassment training: to be completed by cast and crew before they start work.
- Safeguarding contact: a suitably trained, senior member of the production team who can be contacted and who can proactively make any necessary adjustments.
- Nudity and simulated sex acts: notification to be given in advance and in writing about the scope and extent of nudity and/or simulated sex requested, followed by discussion and agreement with the artist. For scenes of an intimate nature an intimacy co-ordinator to be engaged if acceptable to the actors involved.

However, the Statement of Commitment does not signal the end of work to tackle bullying, harassment and inappropriate behaviour, but that of work to be done: as the Commitment sets out, "to move towards a culture in which everyone working in the TV industry feels able to call out unacceptable behaviour and that nobody is above being challenged".

Read the 'Statement of Commitment Against Bullying, Harassment and Inappropriate Behaviour in TV' at [equity.org.uk/media/6386/statement-of-commitment-english.pdf](https://equity.org.uk/media/6386/statement-of-commitment-english.pdf)

## VIEWS

**“Our union has marched out of the depths of the pandemic with a different mission: to move from resilience to resistance”**



General Secretary **Paul W Fleming**  
on the why the time to take a stand is now



It has become popular in our industries over the last decade to talk about 'resilience'. This might be to describe our institutions surviving during the cold, long winter of austerity which started over a decade ago. It might be in praise of freelancers who had little or nothing from furlough or the Self-Employment Income Support Scheme during Covid. Now, governments, funders, and organisations are talking about resilience in the face of the so-called 'cost of living crisis'.

The rhetoric of resilience, however, is toxic and oppressive – because at its heart there is an implication of passivity. It views our members as 'springing back' from the inevitabilities of poor support and a precarious industry, much like an oak tree standing in a storm over which it has no power.

However, our members do have power against many of these forces. They are not inevitabilities. The ability to find cash for tax cuts for billionaires or dodgy Covid procurement puts into sharp relief that the biggest storms of our age come from political choices. Low pay and precarious work are precisely the choices of the bosses, funders, bookers, and venues who want to marvel at Equity members' ability to withstand them.

Our union has marched out of the depths of the pandemic with a different mission: to move from resilience to resistance. Rather than 'springing back' from the forces of precarious work, we need to 'stand against' them. We should not just accept the current creaking structures of funding, casting, payment, or portrayal, but fight to tear them down and rebuild them anew.

In live performance, whether actor, stage management, creative team member, singer or dance artist, we're looking to pay claims and negotiations which make a meaningful blow against the creaking framework of low pay. This magazine talks of the efforts being made across the sectors we bargain in, and across the professions we organise.

For all members, but especially entertainers and variety artistes, we're launching a new package of legal services from the 1st January. There's nothing more vital for variety members working alone and often at night to know that if payment isn't met, health and safety is breached or the booker cancels then their union is on their side. We're commencing a major review of our insurance packages too, so that by the end of 2023 we can ensure that every member has confidence in their union's services to support them when work goes wrong for reasons beyond their control.

Equity has never before offered a comprehensive package of legal services for life beyond the workplace, and with Pattinson & Brewer, our solicitors since 1930, we have agreed support from them on everything from discounts on defamation, conveyancing and family law to free wills. To take on the structures in society which hold our members back, Equity should be empowering resistance from cradle to grave in every area.

Critically, too, Pattinson & Brewer will take on our personal injury claims work. Uniting all of our at-work legal services with one firm, and using a new centralised reporting system will mean we can more easily identify where bosses and venues fail our members. This will make us more able to tackle problems

(from harassment to health and safety) not just as one legal claim, but collectively too. Taking one claim as the starting point, we can unite others who've worked with a producer or at a venue and facilitate collective action-resistance to kick-start systemic change.

Our campaigning works, too. It is in no small part due to this union's activism that the government has been forced to park not only Channel 4 privatisation, but also the BBC licence fee review. Constant vigilance is required – we haven't won the war for public service broadcasting yet, but the creeping neoliberal privatisation of the last 30 years is not the inevitability that we've been led to believe.

Resistance isn't just reactive either – we now have record levels of collective agreements in Scotland, nearly a doubling from two years ago. The same is true in Northern Ireland, where membership is at a record high and our recently established Belfast office is reaching new members like never before. Meanwhile, Mayor of West Yorkshire and Equity member Tracy Brabin has put a union voice at the heart of her cultural strategy, and in the Midlands we've finally seen the beginning of long awaited film and TV studios. A new media hub in Birmingham must precipitate a better Equity presence in the heart of England, and a new union base here alongside extra resources from Equity will meet that challenge in the 18 months to come.

I am remarkably proud of the achievements of our union over the last two years since I became general secretary – achievements which have been rooted in the hard work of every single staff member, every Equity councillor, every dep, and the countless efforts of hundreds of branch and committee members. Our hardworking members need an industry that is worthy of their aspirations – and a union that is fit to fight for them. It is only with a union that is structurally sound, outward looking, and industrial action-ready, can the membership's demands for equity (and Equity) everywhere be realised.

To be that outward looking and fighting union, we must have a rulebook which is transparent, progressive, and grounded in our fight for better access to the best terms and conditions. With this magazine is your ballot to vote in the rulebook referendum – and I would urge you in the strongest terms to support your Council and the activists who have worked hard to write a new rulebook with a framework that will ensure Equity can fight harder in the next 92 years than we have the last.

Stood at a rally of over 10,000 trades unionists in London this October, all united for a fair deal in every workplace, including ours, some of the loudest cries were in solidarity with our sister union in Canada, currently 5 months into a dispute with TV commercial producers. Such impressive resistance from actors, rail workers, posties, lecturers, teachers, nurses, dockers speaks directly to the needs of our members everywhere: the age of resilience is over, the time for resistance is long overdue.

## VIEWS

**“My vision is for Equity to grow within the trade union movement”**



In her first column as Equity President, **Lynda Rooke** introduces herself and sets out her hopes for the union.

I grew up in Lancaster in a working-class family with an Irish background – my dad was a nurse and my mum was a school dinner lady. No one in my family had ever gone to university, and I remember my headmistress laughing at me when I told her I wanted to go to drama school. I thought, “I’ll show you,” and went down to the local careers office, applied to East15 Acting School in London and got in – and the rest is history.

I want that opportunity for other people. I was supported at university with a grant, but for students needing financial help today it would have to be a loan. It’s just one of the many barriers people from marginalised communities – which includes those who are marginalised due to their socio-economic background – face when trying to enter the industry. What we see on our stages and screens needs to reflect what we see in society, but the cutting back of performing arts subjects in our schools, colleges and universities means that the opportunity to consider an arts career will be restricted for many people, while low pay in the industry means that it’s difficult for those already working as artists to maintain the longevity needed for a career.

I ran for the position of Equity President because I’m a passionate trade unionist; I really do believe in the movement. I joined Equity, which was a closed shop at the time, straight out of drama school and it was around then that I worked in the 7:84 Theatre Company – the name came from a 1966 statistic on wealth distribution in the UK, which was that 7% of the population owned 84% of the country’s wealth. 7:84 was one of my first introductions to political theatre and it really spurred me on; I never really stopped working among those small scale or touring theatre companies that were prolific at that time. So it was theatre that first linked me to activism and trade unionism, and for me the two went hand in hand.

**“It was theatre that first linked me to activism and trade unionism, and for me the two went hand in hand”**

I was a founding member of Equity’s North & East London General Branch, which formed in the 1970s before the union officially recognised branches outside of those set up for variety members. I then moved to the South & South West London Branch before taking time off from activism to have children. But as I emerged from the early years of motherhood, I could see the tunnel of opportunities narrowing as I started to move through my 40s as a woman, and that’s when I rediscovered my activism, coming back on board to Equity’s Women’s Committee, which I chaired for two terms. Following an Equity campaign to stop the closure of the Bristol Old Vic Theatre, I was a founding member of the Bristol & West General Branch in 2007, which I am still involved with today. I then went onto serve on Council, the Screen & New Media Committee, and was elected Vice-President two years ago.

Because I’ve been an activist within the union for so long, being President feels like an extension of that work and I feel a great responsibility to represent Equity members. My vision is for Equity to grow within the trade union movement and to fight back against the issues that affect both our members and workers across society alongside our allies. For instance,

being part of FIA (the International Federation of Actors; the global federation of performers’ trade unions) and the FEU (the Federation of Entertainment Unions, in the UK) connects us to similar workers, while showing up for unions engaged in disputes such as the CWU, RMT and UCU, means that they will show up for us too.

Right now, of all times, we really do need our allies. Recent governments have made it a habit to attack the cultural sector, whether it be to try and take public service broadcasting out of our ownership, or by making cuts to the arts. This is despite the fact that the creative industries bring in so much money for this country – £104bn in 2021, according to DCMS’ own figures. Although we are still a buoyant sector, that is not reflected in what’s paid to our workforce and it needs to change. We also need to call on employers and engagers to pay us a decent wage: it’s not good enough for productions to have budgets where the material costs are covered, but the workers’ pay is squeezed. Be it in live or recorded media, engagers have to realise that if they want to a workforce that is diverse and inclusive, then they need to actually pay proper wages and properly support artists.

Ours is not a side issue and the performing arts and culture are not hobbies, but a way of making a living for us. The reality is that we have roofs over our heads to keep and bills to pay, and Equity members deserve good pay, and proper terms and conditions as much as any working person does. So let’s look to the wider trade union movement and fight back as a united front, because that is what gives us strength.

# Northern Ireland

## A new Official, house agreements, social media accounts and more – it's been a busy year for Equity in Northern Ireland.

There has been a flurry of union activity in Northern Ireland over the last 12 months. With the introduction of Equity's first-ever Official based in Northern Ireland, Alice Adams Lemon, in January, two new Equity house agreements have been signed off in Northern Ireland. Now, members will be paid at least the Equity minimums and work on set terms and conditions when engaged by Green Room Productions NI and Tinderbox Theatre Company, with several more agreements in the pipeline.

Members have been busy showing solidarity at Pride events; attending cost of living rallies; and joining picket lines in support of other trade unions. The Northern Ireland General Branch has also set up brand new Twitter and Instagram accounts – give them a follow @EquityNIBranch, and if you're an Equity member based in Northern Ireland who wants to get involved with the union and address the issues facing the industry, the branch is the place for you (contact details are on page 44).

Meanwhile, a survey of members in Northern Ireland was conducted over the summer, with a focus on members' experience of unpaid work. Of the respondents, 69% indicated that they had provided Equity-status work for free at some point during their careers. The biggest reason for doing so was participating in charity work with 90% of respondents having experience of this, although 28% had also worked for engagers who simply stipulated that there would be no payment.

This issue was explored in depth at an Equity Northern Ireland event held in Derry/Londonderry called 'Your Role, Your Value'. Featuring a panel of representatives from across the industry, the event was a chance for performing artists to talk about what they can do to protect the value of their art, and to understand their rights and pay. It's an



The Your Role, Your Value event

issue that has relevance in the area, with attendees discussing the lack of arts infrastructure in the area when compared to a city like Belfast.

Niamh Flanagan, director of industry support organisation Theatre and Dance NI, spoke about the importance of lobbying political representatives: "Speak, write to or email your MLAs and your local MP. Get to know them and build positive relationships with them. They want to hear from you as their constituents; they want to work on your behalf and will look forward to your vote in the next election. These are the people that are making decisions that affect you. Lobby them and tell them about what your life and your professional life is like." Also on the panel at the event was actress and Equity member Roisin Gallagher who encouraged artists to be "bold and strong in numbers... the more people saying, 'We're all collectively not going to do that for free then the less it's going to happen."

Finally, Alice Lemon urged attendees to get involved with the union's activities: "If the activism in the community is thriving then we get to hear what you need, and we can best serve you here as well. So come along and please show up. Show up for us, show up for yourselves, and show up for your trade union brothers and sisters up and down Northern Ireland."

*If you're an Equity member based in Northern Ireland who has questions about low and no pay work, or other workplace issues, contact Northern Ireland Official Alice Adams Lemon [alemon@equity.org.uk](mailto:alemon@equity.org.uk).*

# Scotland

## Access provisions in Equity house agreements commit theatres to working inclusively.

Since the last issue of this magazine, Equity has picked up six more house agreements with theatres in Scotland. This brings the total of new Equity agreements successfully negotiated in Scotland this year up to 14, with the latest organisations coming on board being The Gaiety Theatre (Ayr), Beacon Arts Centre (Greenock), Folksy Theatre (Lanarkshire), Traverse Theatre (Edinburgh), Solar Bear (Glasgow) and Birds of Paradise Theatre Company (Glasgow).

That means more Scottish theatres than ever are ensuring the performing artists they work with receive at least the Equity minimum rates of pay, and are entitled to set terms and conditions such as holiday and sick pay, paid overtime, and an Equity pension. These agreements also allow the union to include access provisions, which are not only beneficial across the board, but are of particular relevance for artists who identify as d/Deaf, disabled and neurodivergent.

These access provisions are built into Equity's house agreement with Birds of Paradise, a Scottish theatre company that focuses on telling disabled people's stories and getting better representation on stage. "It's about people knowing that our contracts have been signed off by Equity – a union that is there to best support them," says Birds of Paradise's producer Michelle Rolfe, speaking about the benefits of an Equity agreement. "It gives people who are coming to work with us the confidence that they have the union's support if they need it."

Being a disability-led theatre company, Birds of Paradise's access provisions were already strong and included stipulations to discuss access needs from the outset of a project, collaborate with access providers such as BSL interpreters and personal assistants, and work flexibly with team members.



Birds of Paradise's production of 'Don't Make Tea.'  
(Image Credit: Andy Callin)

These provisions were reviewed by Equity, who gave feedback and put forward a change to make the terms around ill health dismissal more expansive, which includes exhausting every opportunity to engage with the worker in recognition of the fact that this issue is more likely to affect people with disabilities and access needs.

"That's something that we would have done anyway, but it's about stating it very clearly," says Michelle. "Birds of Paradise have worked with artists about whom other people have said, 'Oh, they never complete a project'. But we know that if we provide them with everything that they need, they can deliver. And we've been proven right."

Equity's house agreement with Solar Bear, a theatre company that works inclusively with d/Deaf artists, has also meant that the union is able to put forward its 'Guide to Good Practice with BSL in the Arts' to the company to incorporate. The union is also working towards adding access provisions to their house agreement with Solar Bear.

"If we have Equity recognition in a workplace, we can then continuously work to improve their provisions," says Adam Adnyana, Equity's Official for Scotland. "These new house agreements also allow us to work closer with employers on their other policies such as dignity at work and disciplinary procedures. The wider goal of establishing Equity house agreements is to promote and embed Fair Work principles, in our members' workplaces and across the sector in Scotland."



# Cymru

## Wrth i S4C ddathlu ei phen-blwydd yn 40 oed, edrychwn yn ôl ar ddyfodiad y sianel deledu Gymraeg – ac ymlaen i'w dyfodol.

Gyda gyrfa yn ymestyn dros 52 mlynedd, mae gan yr actores Sharon Morgan berthynas hirsefydlog ag S4C. Mae Sharon, sydd hefyd yn aelod o Bwyllgor Cenedlaethol Cymreig Equity, wedi perfformio mewn nifer o sioeau sydd wedi darlledu ar y sianel ddarlledu gyhoeddus Gymraeg – o'r gyfres sebon flaenllaw *Pobol y Cwm* i ddrama drosedd *Yr Heliwr*.

Yn wir, y tro cyntaf erioed i Sharon weithio i S4C oedd 40 mlynedd yn ôl yn 1982, sef y flwyddyn y sefydlwyd y sianel. Ond hyd yn oed cyn hynny, bu Sharon yn ymgyrchu'n frwd dros greu S4C, ochr yn ochr â llawer o aelodau Equity eraill yng Nghymru. "Pan oeddwn yn fyfyrwraig ym 1969, ymunais ag ymgyrchwyr i gyflwyno deiseb i bencadlys BBC Cymru yn galw am sefydlu sianel Gymraeg," meddai wrth golwg360.

"Roedd yr ymgyrch yn cynnwys eistedd mewn stiwdios teledu, dringo mastiau, a gwrthod talu trwyddedau – ac aeth pobl i'r carchar amdano," meddai Sharon. Yna ym 1979, gwrthdrodd y llywodraeth Geidwadol ar addewid maniffesto i sefydlu sianel ddarlledu gyhoeddus Gymraeg. "Yr hyn mae'n debyg a newidiodd pethau yn 1980 oedd pan ddywedodd Gwynfor Evans, arweinydd Plaid Cymru ar y pryd, ei fod yn mynd i fynd ar streic newyn os nad oedd y sianel yn cael ei sefydlu."

Fel Channel 4, nid yw S4C yn cynhyrchu ei rhaglenni ei hun, ond mae'n eu comisiynu gan rai fel y BBC a chynhyrchwyr annibynnol. Mae hyn yn golygu bod y sianel yn cefnogi ecosystem o gynhyrchwyr Cymraeg eu hiaith, yn ogystal ag actorion. Mae perfformwyr sy'n ymddangos mewn sioeau hefyd yn elwa ar gytundebau Equity, fel y rhai sydd gan TAC, y sefydliad sy'n cynrychioli cynhyrchwyr annibynnol yng Nghymru, ac yn wir fe arweiniodd ddyfodiad y sianel at greu swyddfa Equity yng Nghaerdydd.

Fodd bynnag, nid yw S4C wedi bod heb ei phroblemau. Ar adegau mae wedi dioddef o ffigurau gwyllo isel (er ei fod wedi gweld cynnydd yn y blynyddoedd diwethaf) a nawr



Sharon Morgan

**"Mae S4C wedi gwneud gwahaniaeth anhygoel i ddyfodol yr iaith a'r diwylliant yng Nghymru"**

mae'n rhaid iddo gystadlu nid yn unig â sianeli eraill, ond hefyd â llwyfannau ffrydio. Mae'r rhain yn faterion sydd wedi'u defnyddio gan lywodraethau diweddar i gyfiawnhau toriadau cyllid sylweddol i S4C ers 2010. Mae'r mwyafrif helaeth o gyllid y sianel bellach yn dod o ffi'r drwydded, sydd ei hun dan fygythiad – er bod ei dyfodol yn ddiogel tan 2028 o dan y cytundeb ffi'r drwydded presennol.

I'r rhai sydd am warchod bodolaeth unig sianel deledu Gymraeg y DU, mae dadl barhaus wedi bod ynghylch a ddylai darlledu gael ei ddatganoli i Gymru: mae cefnogwyr hyn yn dweud mai dyma'r unig ffordd i sicrhau cyllid a chynrychiolaeth briodol, tra mae beirniaid yn dadlau bod gormod o ansicrwydd ynghylch o ble y byddai'r arian hwn yn dod. Mae'n fater mae Swyddog Cenedlaethol Cymru Equity, ar

y cyd â Phwyllgor Cenedlaethol Cymru, yn ymchwilio ac yn trafod. Blaenoriaethau'r undeb yw diogelu lefelau priodol o gyllid i alluogi'r cytundebau cyfunol gorau ar gyfer y rhai sy'n gweithio i S4C, ochr yn ochr â diogelu'r hunaniaeth genedlaethol a pwysigrwydd y Gymraeg i'w haelodau.

"Mae S4C wedi gwneud gwahaniaeth anhygoel i ddyfodol yr iaith a'r diwylliant yng Nghymru, ac mae'n anhygoel," meddai Sharon, gan bwysleisio pwysigrwydd y sianel. "Mae hefyd yn hawl sifil i allu gweld eich hun yn cael ei adlewyrchu yn ôl i chi ar sgrin."

# Wales

## As S4C celebrates its 40th anniversary, we look back at the Welsh-language TV channel's beginnings – and forwards to its future.

With a career spanning 52 years, actress Sharon Morgan has a long-standing relationship with S4C. Sharon, who is also a member of Equity's Welsh National Committee, has performed in numerous shows that have aired on the Welsh-language public broadcast channel – from the flagship soap *Pobol y Cwm* to crime drama *Yr Heliwr*.

In fact, the first time Sharon ever worked for S4C was 40 years ago in 1982, the year the channel was founded. Yet even prior to that, Sharon actively campaigned for the creation of S4C, alongside many other Equity members in Wales. "When I was a student in 1969, I joined campaigners in presenting a petition to the BBC Wales headquarters calling for the establishment of a Welsh language channel," she tells us.

"The campaign involved sit-ins in TV studios, climbing up masts, and refusing to pay licenses – and people went to jail for it," says Sharon. Then in 1979, the Conservative government of the time U-turned on a manifesto pledge to set up a Welsh-language public broadcast channel. "What probably changed things in 1980 was when Gwynfor Evans, the then-leader of Plaid Cymru, said he was going to go on a hunger strike if the channel wasn't established."

Like Channel 4, S4C doesn't produce its own programmes, but commissions them from the likes of the BBC and independent producers. This means that the channel supports an ecosystem of Welsh-language producers, as well as actors. Performers appearing in shows also benefit from Equity agreements, such as those held with TAC, the organisation that represents independent producers in Wales, and the creation of the channel helped to usher in Equity's own Cardiff office.

However, S4C has not been without its problems. It has at times suffered from low viewing figures (although it has seen increases in recent years) and now must compete not just with other channels, but also with streaming platforms.

These are issues that have been used by recent governments to justify considerable funding cuts to S4C since 2010. The large majority of the channel's funding now comes from the licence fee, which is itself under threat – although its future is secure until 2028 under the current licence fee agreement.

For those who want to protect the existence of the UK's only Welsh-language TV channel, there has been a long running debate over whether broadcasting should be devolved to Wales: proponents of this say it's the only way to ensure proper funding and representation, while critics argue that there is too much uncertainty over where this money would come from. It's a matter Equity's Wales National Official, in conjunction with the Welsh National Committee, are investigating and discussing, with the union's priorities being to safeguard appropriate levels of funding to enable the best collective agreements for those working for S4C, alongside protecting the national identity and importance of the Welsh language for its members.

**"S4C has made an incredible difference to the future of the language and the culture in Wales"**

"S4C has made an incredible difference to the future of the language and the culture in Wales, and it's incredible," says Sharon, emphasising the importance of the channel. "It's also just a civil right to be able to see yourself reflected back to you on a screen."





# “Equity will fight for you. I’m proof of that.”



Joanne Bernard



Rehearsal director **Joanne Bernard** (whose Equity name is Jay Bee) was among the employees who joined forces with Equity to save jobs at Phoenix Dance Theatre, and talks about the outcome of the fight back.

In 1987, 17-year-old dance student Joanne Bernard went to see a performance by the Phoenix Dance Company in Leeds and fell instantly in love.

“Phoenix came from Chapeltown, a predominantly Black, Caribbean community in Leeds. It’s got a really strong, rich heritage,” says Joanne. “That first time I saw them, what I loved was that they were using reggae music. I’d never seen anything like that before. I thought, ‘Whoah! So there is space for me. This isn’t just a white sector.’ Looking back, that Phoenix performance really anchored me in my determination to be a dancer.

Teenage Joanne would have been bursting with pride to think of her future self working for what’s now known as Phoenix Dance Theatre. She joined the company as Rehearsal Director in April 2020. What does her role involve?

“The choreographers come into the studio and create work with the dancers,” says Joanne. “After that, it’s my job to make sure the work stays as the choreographer

intended, and that the dancers grow in performance as we take the show on tour. I take care of the dancers’ wellbeing, setting up physio appointments and everything in between. I liaise with the marketing person, the education team and the office staff. I’m a bit like an island with lots of tentacles going off in different directions.”

## Dancing through the pandemic

Starting her new job during the first lockdown meant that Joanne initially had to get to know the dancers over Zoom and WhatsApp.

Later, when she began commuting to the studio from her home in Manchester, Leeds ‘was like a ghost town. I was often the only person in the train carriage.’ She and the dancers were often alone at Phoenix HQ – the rest of the company mainly worked from home.

Joanne worked all through the pandemic and played a key role in Phoenix’s 40th birthday tour, which kicked off in late 2021. So she was shocked and angry when, in



Equity members protest outside Phoenix Dance



Dominic Bascombe (right) at the protest



May 2022, she was told that she and the dancers were going to be 'laid off' while the company took an eight month break from performances so that it could 'restructure and strategise'.

### **£100 a month**

Joanne and her colleagues were not being made redundant during this 'creative pause'. She reports that they were offered £100 per month (£50 statutory pay from the government and an extra £50 from Phoenix as a 'gesture of goodwill'). They would be able to go and work with other organisations, but they would still be contracted to Phoenix.

"If they needed me to come back at any point, for example to hold auditions for new dancers, that would have to be my priority," says Joanne. "So whatever else I'd be doing to pay my bills and so forth, I'd have to let that go and return to Phoenix."

How did that feel? "My grandmother used to say, 'It's not what you say, it's how you say it. It's not what you do, it's how you do it.' And the way it was done was really hurtful and inconsiderate. We were given less than a month's notice."

It was at this point that Joanne became a member of Equity, which several Phoenix staff were already part of. "I wish I'd joined sooner," Joanne says. "Equity was amazing."

### **Support from the union**

Equity swung into action, with North East Regional Official Dominic Bascombe joining meetings between staff and management and North East Regional Organiser Ellie Drake getting together with the dancers to discuss tactics.

A social media campaign raised public awareness of the dispute, with over 2,000 people signing a Megaphone petition in support of Joanne and her colleagues. Many of the signatories were in the creative sector or were locals who knew and loved Phoenix.

On May 23rd, around 100 delegates and staff at Equity's Annual Representative Conference in Leeds marched from their hotel to Phoenix HQ. Waving purple Equity banners and placards emblazoned with 'Save Phoenix dancers' jobs!', they staged a noisy protest on the steps, calling for Joanne and her colleagues to be given their jobs back.

Chants of 'Hey hey, ho ho, don't let the dancers go!' rang out across the street, grabbing the attention of passers-by while Dominic handed the petition in at reception.

That afternoon, management reversed its decision to 'lay off' Jay and three colleagues. But for Joanne, victory hasn't tasted particularly sweet.

"Yes, I'm getting my salary and I'm not ungrateful," she says. "But it should never have reached the point where public embarrassment was the reason they took us back. We should never have been treated that way."

### **Standing up and speaking out**

She's now on a mission to get more people to join the union.

"I'm telling young dancers, 'Equity will fight for you.' I'm proof of that. The result is that one of the biggest dance companies outside London had to retract because Equity stood with us, loudly and proudly."

*Words by Alex Vernon of Mile 91. Since this article was written, Joanne has resigned from her role at Phoenix Dance Theatre and is looking forward to starting a Masters in Dramaturgy.*

*The 'Save Phoenix Dance Theatre jobs' campaign included an online petition on the TUC's free campaign platform Megaphone. You can find and support other unions' campaigns at [megaphone.org.uk](https://megaphone.org.uk).*

**“My body is full of options and creativity, like everyone”**



Image Credits: Camilla Greenwell; Nicolas Lelièvre; Caroline Minjolle

Dance artist **Annie Hanauer** is the author behind Equity’s recently released **Casting Guide for Deaf, Disabled & Neurodivergent Dancers**. She tells us about the inclusionary principles at the heart of the guide and the joy of working with other disabled dancers.



Image Credit: Camilla Greenwell

I started dancing when I was around six; I had quite a strong imagination and just liked to move my body to music. Growing up in a really small town in the Midwest of the US, I took classes at the local studio and joined the dance team in high school, before going on to study dance at university.

Unlike a lot of other disabled artists, I didn't experience direct discrimination in my education. Many disabled artists are denied access to education in dance; they're not allowed to study because people aren't willing to teach them. They think it's not possible to teach disabled artists or they don't want to try to teach them, which is just a disaster. There's no reason for that, it's just holding onto old fashioned ideas about how to do things and it creates barriers.

Not that studying is the only way to become a professional. Lots of people make their own route in and are very successful, but I feel very lucky that I got to study. I was also fortunate to be hired by a dance company straight out of training and moved to London in 2008, which launched me into the professional world in an amazing way.

The company that I worked for, Candoco, engages both disabled and non-disabled artists. It was a huge learning curve for me because I'd never really worked with other disabled artists before; what I really appreciate is the openness to finding out how to work best together. When you acknowledge that a group of people in a room have very distinct differences

**“If we get together, we can work collectively to tackle exploitation”**

from each other – for example, different backgrounds, physicalities, or the way they process information – then it's very explicit that they must find a way to function together and no assumptions can be made.

We can't, for instance, assume that a particular way of lifting a partner can just be done. We have to go deeper into the movement and discover things together. I find this really exciting, because you discover something that perhaps you didn't expect, and you make up new things.

It was also around this time that I joined Equity, but it wasn't until 2019 that I joined the union's Dance Committee, on the suggestion of a Committee member. I just wanted to do something positive for the

industry and its workers, in the company of others who felt the same way. There's still a lot of exploitation but if we get together, we can work collectively to tackle it.

I occupy a specialist place where I'm a dancer, but I'm also disabled, and I wanted to be a bridge between Equity's Deaf and

Disabled Members Committee (DDMC) and the Dance Committee. I was so impressed when I went to one of the DDMC's meetings; they're all so active in the union, and it was through my conversations with them that the idea for the Casting Guide for Deaf, Disabled & Neurodivergent Dancers was born.

While overall progress has been made in the dance world to work more inclusively and accessibly, there are still massive barriers and we are far from equality. But it is possible to create a way of working that does let people in.

What the casting guide does is provide step-by-step advice for anyone who hires dancers – employers, choreographers, dance companies, and so on – on working with d/Deaf, disabled and neurodivergent dance artists. It takes you through the timeline of supporting access needs, from the

proposal of a project, to an audition call out, hiring someone, working in the studio, and in the performance space.

The working practices in the guide were informed by both existing practical guidance - drawing from the excellent work and advice of organisations such as Candoco, Graeae, Disability Arts Online, Unlimited and others - and the responses to a survey we put out. This survey was conducted in conjunction with Cathy Waller, a disabled choreographer and the artistic director of dance company Cathy Waller Co., and Disability Arts Online, a website covering disability arts and culture. The survey participants really took care and shared a lot with us, and we received some amazing responses.

If people read what d/Deaf, disabled and neurodivergent dance artists have experienced, they would be so angry. They would be like, "We need to change everything." Not one person should have to experience that; not one person should be told something as silly as "We don't have an accessible changing room so you're not going to be able to audition for this university course." If someone knows that person is coming in, then they need to sort out something for them and work to make access better in their institution in the long run.

A big message of the guide is that every disabled person is different and you have to figure out how they work best. For example, if someone works with me with my prosthetic arm, and they work with someone else with a prosthetic arm, we will be different. I think people are looking for a magic solution sometimes, like "How do I work with all wheelchair users?" But you have to speak to each person. The guide contains some practical steps to help people think about how to do that, because it can be intimidating if you've not done it before. I want to also stress that there is no one way

to do things 'correctly,' in terms of creative practice - the guide is a starting point for people to also create their own solutions. Overall, it's about employers and leaders engaging honestly with the people they're working with.

The guide works from the social model of disability, which is in a different vein to the medical model of disability. The medical model is about diagnosing and fixing people so that they fit into this mould of what we consider 'normal'. But the social model says that none of the ways that we are, are problems. They're not positive or negative, or anything, they just are. And there's a multitude of ways that human beings are - infinite. What creates the problems is the environment that we've created as a society and the ingrained attitudes that limit people, which are barriers that can often be changed.

**"It is possible to create a way of working that does let people in"**

So if I'm engaging in dance techniques that are based on a normative idea of a body that has two arms and hands made of flesh and bone - which is not how I am - I'm going to have to adapt certain things and make it my own,

because some of that doesn't make any sense for my body. And that's fine, unless somebody says, "No, that's not the right way to do it - nothing is acceptable, except this idea," or "We won't hire you unless you can do it in this particular way." My body is not a problem: my body is full of options and creativity, like everyone. The barrier comes from people's thinking, and people's narrow mindedness.

There will be some people out there who don't want to do that, whose work is not about tailoring it to individuals but everyone executing the same thing. That's fine, but then you need to recognise that you're looking for something very particular that will exclude lots of people, and not only disabled people. Just own it a little bit more.

People assume that it's only going to be



difficult to work with d/Deaf, disabled and neurodivergent dancers. It is difficult to learn how to work with people you haven't worked with before outside of your own experience, but it actually opens up a lot of things too. That's something I really love about working with other disabled folks; it keeps me learning and stretching my understanding of moving and choreography.

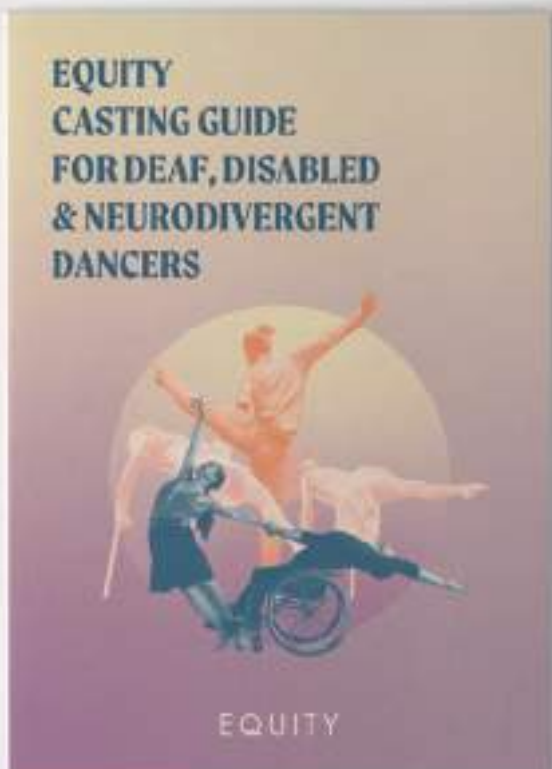
Working on this guide during the pandemic meant that I had empty time, and I was dying to do something that made a difference. Once I'd written something, there were lots of edits and read throughs from different people and organisations, such as Cathy Waller; Trish Wheatley, the CEO of Disability Arts Online; Jo Verrent, director of Unlimited, the world's largest commissions programme for disabled artists; Equity's Equalities Officer Ian Manborde; Candoco, and more. I was very grateful that knowledgeable people were able to read through and give really useful feedback – it was vital that the approach to writing

the guide was one of collaboration and harnessing this feedback.

The guide launched at the Edinburgh Fringe Festival this year, which felt really brilliant but also a bit surreal as it's been such a long and slow process. Now it's out there in the world, the next steps are making sure it's widely adopted, and continuing to improve it based on feedback from professionals and our own experiences. We want it to give d/Deaf, disabled and neurodivergent artists the words to talk about what they need in the workplace. I hope people take it and use it to insist on things being better.

#### **Principles from the Casting Guide for Deaf, Disabled & Neurodivergent Dancers include:**

- Checking intention: why do you want to work with a disabled artist? Is it only about visual representation/performance inclusivity/"optics"? Treat each artist with respect, and do not employ people as a tokenistic gesture.
- Making call outs available in different accessible formats: Video with British Sign Language (BSL) and captioning, Audio Description, Large Print, Easy Read.
- Holding auditions and rehearsals in an accessible space.
- Open choreography: create movement tasks which give space for the dancer's interpretation and movement, rather than copying and executing given movement. If using set material, offer options and be open to each artist's translation, for example, the material could be done at different speeds, levels, etc
- Hiring access workers to support projects, for example BSL interpreters, mental health support, touring assistants. Remember that the Access to Work fund exists to cover some of or all of the costs of providing access to work.



**You can read the guide in full at**  
[equity.org.uk/ddn-dancers-casting-guide](https://equity.org.uk/ddn-dancers-casting-guide)



# TAKING A STAND

Journalist **Sarah Woolley** on Equity's newly released **Comedians' Charter** and improving the lives of performers.

COMEDIANS'  
**CHARTER**  
EQUITY



STELLA GRAHAM

"Anybody can set up a comedy gig. But it doesn't mean they know how to do it," says comedian Stella Graham. "You're lucky if you get a green room. There are so many gigs that are literally the back room of a pub basement and in that case, you'll probably get the toilets."

Knowing what kind of changing facilities are available at venues, and whether you'll need to share them, is just one, basic standard that would improve the working lives of comedians – a topic that made headlines at the Edinburgh Fringe Festival this year. Working at the first full Fringe since Covid-19 shut down live events in early 2020, artists were hit by extortionate accommodation fees, travel and refuse strikes, and a cost of living crisis. Alongside a 27% slump in ticket sales compared to 2019, this has all led to wider discussions about the challenges of a career in comedy.

"I think for a long time, there has been a feeling that it's easy for the typical sort of Oxbridge types, and the Edinburgh Fringe itself is insanely expensive," says Stella. "This year, accommodation alone has just been astronomical and it's kept a few people away. You're lucky if you break even during the Fringe; it's a nightmare."

It was against this backdrop at the Fringe that Equity launched their Comedians' Charter: a set of basic standards for venues and promoters to sign up to. Developed by the union's Comedians' Network, the Charter includes measures to ensure pay transparency, a safe working environment, late night safety, and anti-harassment and discrimination policies. The launch took

**"You're lucky if you break even during the Fringe; it's a nightmare"**

place at The Stand's New Town Theatre in Edinburgh – the Charter has been adopted across The Stand's three venues in Edinburgh, Glasgow and Newcastle, alongside their Fringe venues – and was covered widely by the press, including The Guardian, The Times, Chortle, and more.

For Stella, a six-time Edinburgh Fringe veteran, the day was a watershed moment for the union. "In all honesty, Equity didn't have the best reputation in the comedy world," she explains. "But the launch of the Comedian's Charter was a really nice move. It just felt like there was more of a concentrated effort from Equity to be more of a presence. There's a new member of staff. It felt like Equity were saying 'We're serious about being a stronger presence in the comedy world this year.'"

Rob Lugg, Equity's organiser for comedians, says that the Comedians' Charter is just the start of activism to come. "For me, this Charter is very much a tool to organise around. It can be easy for unions to go, 'Here's a new thing that we've written' and then fire it into the world and just hope that it gets magically adopted. It's only going to work if comedians come together collectively to fight for these basic standards, and then build upon them."

### A right to safety

One of the comedians fighting the good fight is Eddy Hare, whose deadpan delivery scored him a nomination at last year's BBC New Comedy Awards. As a regular attendee of his Equity branch meetings, Eddy is buzzing about access



EDDY HARE



**ROB LUGG, EQUITY'S VARIETY ORGANISER, AT THE COMEDIANS' CHARTER LAUNCH**

to "achievable, tangible things that aren't actually dependent on a political party". He's especially keen to organise against harassment. "Sexual harassment in particular is still a really big problem," says Eddy. "I hear a lot about that from my friends. I was glad to see that mentioned in the Charter because there's a culture of not wanting to make a fuss about things.

You'll be like, 'That guy assaulted someone I know,' and then the response would be, 'Oh, okay, I won't book them on the same line-up as that person.' But why book them at all?"

Tackling safety issues demands concerted, collective effort. Earlier this year, Nish Kumar and other comedians reported a post-lockdown spike in harassment from audience members, including racist abuse. Rob Lugg says it's time for venues to step up and take responsibility. "Many of these venues won't have a harassment or discrimination policy for their own in-house bar staff. The Comedian's Charter can help put basic stuff like that in place and protect their own interests because they are liable if stuff happens to people on the premises."

Rob also stresses the need for workplace issues to be reported to Equity. "Tell us which are the bad venues, so that we can then start to apply pressure to them," he says. "It will take comedians doing that collectively, plus audiences backing them up with how they spend their money, to actually organise around the industry."

Another safety issue is that of travelling to and from venues, especially when many

comedy gigs take place late at night. The Comedians' Charter is clear that "late night safety should be an important consideration in scheduling" and that acts should be provided with information about public transport options – alongside clear directions on how to walk through well-lit/well-populated streets to reach them. Where public transport is not an option, the Charter stipulates that promoters should discuss other arrangements with acts on a case-by-case basis.

Establishing a safe and dignified workplace doesn't mean that venues and promoters need to start from scratch. Equity has recently issued a pack with comprehensive guidance on adopting the Charter, including template policies. Comedians' Network members can also join a Facebook group that includes advice on late-night safety and car shares to gigs.

### **Professional pay for a professional service**

Pay transparency also gets a top billing on the Charter, due to feedback from the Comedians' Network's outreach, open meetings and surveys. Venues and promoters that sign up to the Charter commit to making sure any door, bucket or bar splits at gigs are agreed in writing, in advance, with figures detailing the

money made available to acts on request after the performance. Performances where comedians have to pay to play, or bring audience members in order to get paid, are also condemned. Meanwhile charity gigs should be paid, unless all artists are performing for free and the venue is not taking a cut, with the charity or cause agreed clearly in advance, along with an agreement to cover the artist's expenses.

Pay is an important issue for early-career comics like Eddy and his comedy partner Will Rowland. When they perform as Crizards they're dressed in Wild West hats and boots, but they've managed to avoid cowboy antics offstage when it comes to pay. "I've been lucky," says Eddy, "but there is an issue with [some] comedy competitions. They charge for the tickets but don't actually pay the acts on the bill. You'll get to the final and they're still not paying. And then they'll say 'It's good, because we're giving exposure.'"

**"We need many more members to be active within the union, for us to be able to really change things"**

Exposure doesn't pay the bills and neither does wage stagnation. Comedian Alistair Barrie has seen this first hand across his 20-year career. "I'm earning much the same as I was 10 to 15 years ago, but everything is twice as expensive. I used to be able to go to a gig two hours down the road and it would cost me 30 quid in petrol and now it's 90. Austerity and a truly criminal, dreadful government has ruined this country over the last 15 years. And then Brexit came along. Then Covid came along. So it's not just comedy; we're all in huge trouble. I think comedy clubs need to fairly adjust their wages."

Alistair says the pressure is "ridiculously difficult" on comedians with young families and he doesn't expect to do a full run of gigs at the next Fringe. "My income at the festival in 2022 was 50% down. 10 years ago if somebody said, 'Can you come to Northampton for 150 quid I'd probably have said yes. Whereas now I can't because the petrol will be 50 quid. And if I have a bite to eat, that's another tenner. And then I've got maybe a drink. That's a fiver. And then my tax is gone. And then suddenly, I've left my family alone for eight hours and I'm counting profit which is less than £50.

The way forward? "The industry will only change through the collective action of performers," says Alistair. He wants to see more comedians joining Equity, but says the public can also play their part. "There's so many great circuit comics who haven't made the leap to being a household name because there's only a finite number of seats on Mock the Week. Go to your local comedy club. You might not see a comedy



ALISTAIR BARRIE

panel show contestant, but you may very well see a better stand up comedian."

### Coming together

Raising public awareness is high up on Rob's agenda. "Ultimately, what we want is for this Comedians' Charter to become the gold standard of comedy so that customers can go, 'I'm going to go make an ethical choice.' You're choosing a venue that is not anti-worker or anti-union, and is embracing basic standards."

But it all comes down to strength in numbers. "The reality is that at the moment Equity's membership amongst comedians is low," says Rob. "The strength of a union comes from the industrial strength of its members. We need far more comedians to be members of the union. And we need many more members to be active within the union, for us to be able to really change things."

**"The industry will only change through the collective action of performers"**

Comedy workers don't clock into a fixed workplace, but it's a tight knit industry with enormous, untapped potential for organising, especially online. Stella's especially keen to see more organising online. "As silly as it sounds, that's where a lot of the messaging happens. That's where a lot of gigs

get posted. I once overheard a 22-year old telling someone, 'Yeah, comedy is run by boomers. They all use Facebook.'

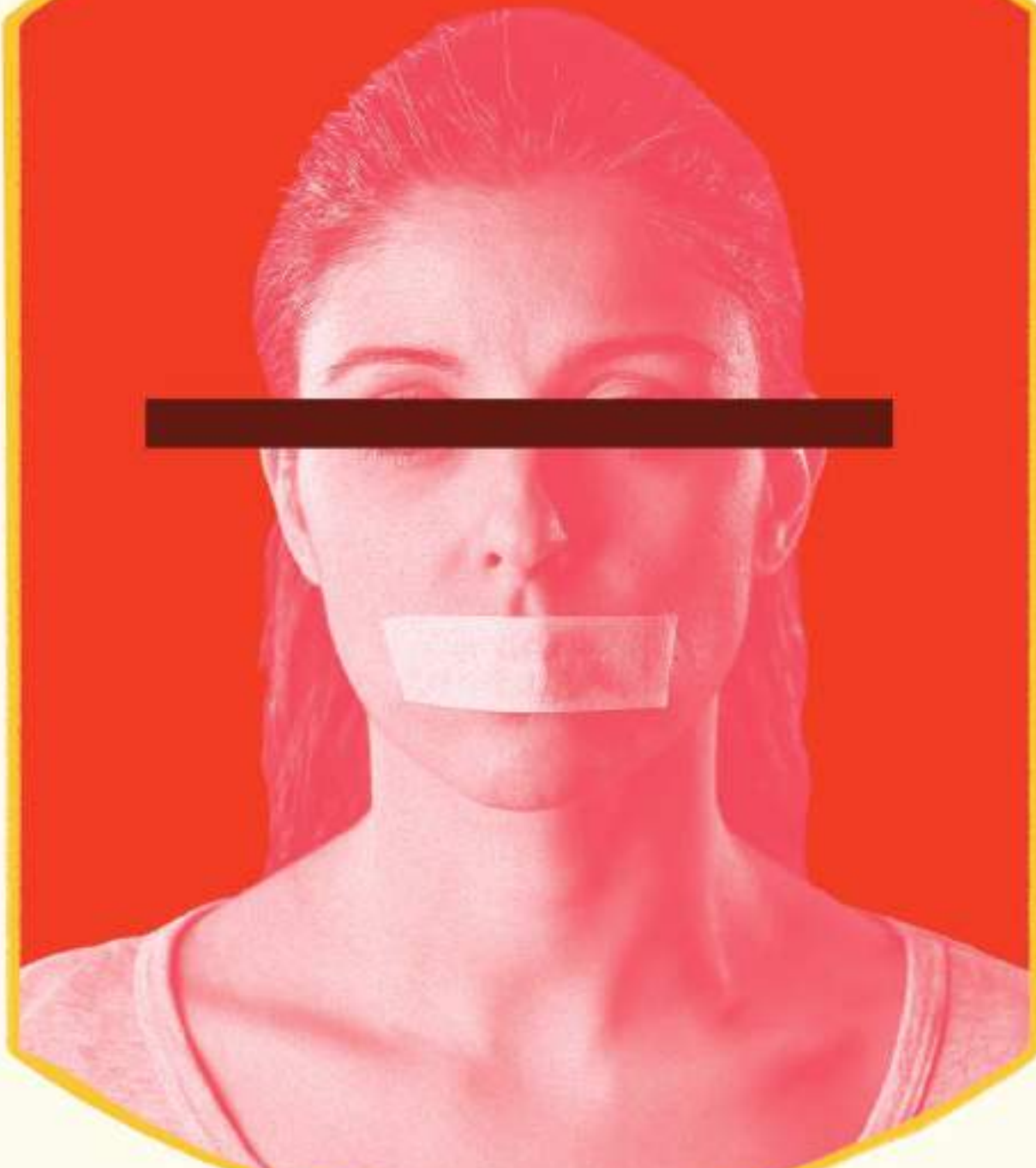
Since joining Equity, Eddy says he no longer feels like "just one person" up against the odds. "It's good to know that an organisation has your back about whatever kind of grievances you're having," he says. "The more solidarity the better."

*If you're interested in becoming more active in the union and working to build the collective power of comedians, or have a workplace issue to report, contact Equity's Variety Organiser Rob Lugg [rlugg@equity.org.uk](mailto:rlugg@equity.org.uk).*

*You can read the Comedians' Charter in full at [equity.org.uk/media/6354/equity-comedians-charter.pdf](https://equity.org.uk/media/6354/equity-comedians-charter.pdf)*



# BREAKING THE SILENCE



The use (and misuse) of NDAs is on the rise in the entertainment industry. Journalist **Elena Cresci** finds out how the worrying trend is impacting performers and details Equity's new guidance.



JASSA AHLUWALIA

When Jassa Ahluwalia started his career in acting, non-disclosure agreements, known as NDAs, were few and far between, reserved for high-profile projects guarded with a swirl of secrecy. But as his career progressed, so too did requests for his signature on strict documents demanding his sworn silence.

At first, they would make sense. The Equity Councillor and Race Equality Committee member recalls auditioning for a major film franchise in the mid-2010s and having to sign an NDA without really knowing what the role or the storyline would be. “That seemed slightly ridiculous,” he says. “But it was a highly anticipated film, so I thought, OK, I guess there’s a need to be a bit secretive about this. But then almost every other self-tape I was doing, I would have to sign something.”

Last year, one franchise took it to another level. Reading for a part in a new TV series, Jassa was, again, hit by an NDA. But in a bid for to further ensure secrecy, the production company made his audition process very difficult to manage. Sent over an online platform, Jassa’s sides (audition script) came alongside a big warning, saying that if he tried to print, copy or take a screenshot of the file, it would be deactivated. Then, as soon as he accessed the sides, he was notified that they would self-destruct in three days, like something out of an action film.

“I had to figure out what time I actually clicked on them in order to access them, use them, learn the lines, work on it and then also do the self-tape. Bearing in mind that to do the self-tape, somebody else needs to

be able to read in what else is going on. So I was also having to figure out, when do I do the self-tape? What if that person cancels?”

“That really, for me, was the straw that broke my back. Because I was like, right, I’m done with this. This is ridiculous.”

The misuse of NDAs in the casting process is an issue that Equity’s recently published guidance for performers and the entertainment industry sets out to challenge. Titled the ‘Use and Misuse of Non-Disclosure Agreements (NDAs) in the UK Film, Television and Games Industries’, the guidance outlines the legal remit of NDAs – what they can and can’t do – alongside a set of standards for their use.

This includes a call on the entertainment industry to “remove the duress under which the

Performers are placed, whereby a Performer is obliged to sign an NDA as a pre-condition of their being auditioned or cast.” The guidance highlights the absurdity of performers being asked to sign NDAs when they do not know any information about the production, such as its title, script or the details about characters, stating:

**“Even if an NDA is effective, it cannot be used to prevent the reporting of a crime”**

“This is not a legitimate and proportional use of NDAs to protect a production against inappropriate use of confidential information.” Indeed the use of NDAs in such instances begs the question, what is it that needs to be protected?

“It feels like the technology is being used in order to further disempower performers,” says Jassa. “And it just seems entirely unnecessary, because these are not state secrets or nuclear access codes we’re dealing with.”

### Gagging performers

While the growing use of NDAs during the casting process is a relatively recent development in the entertainment industry, they famously came under the spotlight back in 2017 for a different reason. Investigations into Harvey Weinstein revealed that the disgraced film producer used NDAs liberally to silence women he had attacked, leading

to debates about the ethics of their use in the workplace.

Though the covering up of bullying, harassment and inappropriate behaviour in the entertainment industry through NDAs may give the impression that these incidents can't be reported, this is far from the truth. As Equity's NDA guidance states: "Even if an NDA is effective, it cannot be used to prevent the reporting of a crime".

Likewise, an NDA cannot stop anyone from disclosing information to professional advisors, such as their trade union, agent, legal or tax advisors, and medical professionals, who are bound by a duty of confidentiality. Jassa says that he once had an experience where he needed Equity's advice on an incident that happened on a project he had signed an NDA for.

"Initially, I was concerned, I didn't know what I could share or what I couldn't share because of the NDA," he says. "But I learned you can 100% approach Equity or a legal representative. And you can tell them everything."

Furthermore, an NDA should not be used to waive a performers' intellectual property rights – for instance, allowing a production company to take royalties from the reuse of a performance. As explained in Equity's guidance, "Any assignment or abandonment of such rights should be by way of an express agreement or clearly specified contractual provisions and not bound up with the issue of confidentiality, which is confusing and misleading."

And it's not solely screen actors who are having to navigate this tricky legalese. Alice\*, an Equity member who works as a voice actor, says NDAs are "pernicious" in the voice industry, and particularly the games industry: "What's happening is that somebody makes this decision at the top, then says, we need to slap an NDA on this because we don't want our competitors knowing about our engine."

But being hassled into signing an NDA before even knowing the full details of a project leaves performers vulnerable, Alice argues. "If you aren't able to find out what the project is even about before signing an NDA, you might end up agreeing to do a job that contains material you find upsetting

or uncomfortable, and it's then too late to back out."

In fact, signing a blanket NDA for a company led Alice to a situation where she felt cornered into a scene she was uncomfortable with. "I showed up at the studio and was told, you have a job. I was not told what it was, who it was for. I walked in and was told it was a sex scene in real time. It was the most humiliating thing I



JOHN BARCLAY

have ever had to voice, and I thought I had no choice because I'd signed this NDA. I've been in the industry for a while, and even I was shaking. What if that had been somebody fresh out of school or early in their career?"

### Crossing the Atlantic

What's led to this rise in secrecy? In part, it's thanks to practices used by US-based streaming services. "The US streamers are here, which is great," says John Barclay, Equity's Assistant General Secretary for Recorded Media. "But what they have brought with them is their idea of non-disclosure agreements that they use in the States, which are way too much."

"Often these NDAs will include all sorts of US legal jargon that don't bear any relation outside of the States. What does the Federal Communications Act have to do with a production in the UK? Nothing."

John says that the union began receiving calls from members who would be handed 40-page legal documents either upon arriving at an audition or, sometimes, just before production starts. "And they'll be told, sign this or you won't be paid," he says.

Even just on an administrative level, actors and their agents are united in their frustration with non-disclosure agreements, particularly as they often force an unnecessary block between performers and the people representing them. Bill Petrie, the co-chair of the Personal Managers' Association (PMA), raised the alarm on BBC Radio 4's Front Row programme earlier this year, saying that NDAs can often prevent agents from figuring out if roles their clients are auditioning for are even right in the first place.

He said: "The NDA goes straight out to the actor, the actor signs it, and the sides are sadly sent sometimes straight to the actor. That denies the agent the opportunity to read the sides to find out whether or not this side, and that project, is something that we feel is correct for the actor to be doing, but more importantly, to offer our experience and advice."

#### **A power imbalance**

Post-lockdown and with a cost of living crisis looming, many performers feel they have no choice but to sign these NDAs if it means they can get paid. Jassa believes it's part of a wider trend where actors feel they must go above and beyond for a crumb of opportunity.

"Frankly, it's an abusive practice which is essentially employers asserting their dominance and control over performers," he says. "I don't think it was a surprise when all the Weinstein stuff came out, that NDAs were a large part of that. I'm sure the people who are sending out these NDAs aren't necessarily thinking of it in those terms, but

I do think there is such a hierarchical power imbalance between employers and workers in our industry.

"And I think this really goes to the heart of it: it's saying what we know and the information we hold is more valuable than you."

Speaking about the creation of Equity's NDA guidance, John says that he wants it to help performers feel empowered to challenge inappropriate NDAs. "At a time when the industry must work to eradicate bullying, harassment and inappropriate

behaviour, performers are being gagged by the growing use of NDAs containing provisions that are far too over-reaching."

"We want members and performers to be able to say 'No, I won't sign an NDA until I've read it, or until I can get my professional representatives to read it.'"

You can read Equity's full guidance for performers on the 'Use and Misuse

of Non-Disclosure Agreements (NDAs) in the UK Film, Television and Games Industries' at [equity.org.uk/nda-guidance](https://equity.org.uk/nda-guidance)

If you're an Equity member with questions about an NDA you're being asked to sign or have already signed, you can contact [jbarclay@equity.org.uk](mailto:jbarclay@equity.org.uk) for advice.

\*name has been changed

**"There is such a hierarchical power imbalance between employers and workers in our industry"**



# PAY UP!



With every collective agreement the union holds in theatre up for renewal, **Equity's Live Performance Officials** set out how and why the union's members are demanding better.

Against a backdrop of rising inflation, with energy prices, food and housing costs all increasing, theatre workers deserve decent and substantial increases to the minimum rates of pay, and improvements to the wider terms and conditions the union's agreements deliver – and with our members' support, that's precisely what Equity are going to deliver.

This year is a major negotiations year for the union. By the time this journal arrives on your doorstep, Equity's Live Performance department will have submitted claims for revisions to the agreements we hold with SOLT/UK Theatre for directors, designers and choreographers.

In addition, we will have submitted claims on the Equity industry standard agreements for performers and stage managers working in the West End, in Subsidised and Commercial Theatre, and in the Independent sector. Negotiations are also taking place on the many house agreements we hold with theatres such as the National Theatre, Scottish Ballet, Welsh National Opera, the Royal Opera House, Rambert and the Royal Shakespeare Company.

In the run-up to preparing our claims for the industry standard agreements, campaign groups were formed, comprised of the relevant Equity official, deputies who had worked under the agreement since it was last negotiated and members of our industrial committees, such as the Stage Committee and Stage Management Committee. These campaign groups set out the union's priorities for improvements on the agreements and then consulted every

member who had worked under them to find out what else you want us to deliver – and every consultation exercise showed us that right now, pay is our members' top concern.

Given that our recent cost of living survey revealed that 60% of Equity members anticipate difficulty in meeting essential costs such as rent, food, utility bills and childcare, this focus on pay is unsurprising, and shows the need for these negotiations to deliver strong uplifts in minimum rates and fees across the sector so we can ensure that every member – irrespective of their job role or how early on in their career they might be – can earn enough to live on, and can put money aside if they want to do so.

**“Our members expect better, both in terms of the hours they work and the pay they receive”**

Equity agreements set the floor below which no member must fall, and not the ceiling through which no member must rise. Producers can and should pay more than the minima in the agreements but our consultations in Commercial and Subsidised theatre showed us that, at the moment, this just isn't

happening. Members told us repeatedly about the strong link between low pay and the current inability to take some time in between jobs to rest and recover from the demanding work you do. When rates of pay are too low, theatre workers are always looking to line up the next job as soon as possible and have limited ability to build up savings. This means that at their heart, all of these claims are as much about the right to rest – to take some down time, to have a life outside of the job – as they are about decent pay for the work you do in theatre.

For our directors and designers agreements



we have submitted ambitious claims for significant increases in the fees due to creative team members. Our aim is not just to increase minimum fees on productions where union agreements are in place but also to raise the market rate for what a director or designer is paid, as even where Equity agreements are not used they are referenced in applications for funding from the Arts Councils. Our claims for the creative team seek better recognition of the ‘hidden labour’ that is so central to the job of a director or designer, by bringing into focus those parts of the job that happen away from the rehearsal room or production meetings, without which the show simply couldn’t go on. Whether that’s the director’s pre-rehearsal prep time or the hours a designer spends in the studio, this vital work is too often not adequately acknowledged by engagers – and that needs to change.

For performers and stage management team members on the West End, a significant body of work had already been undertaken in advance of the campaign group being set up, with our West End deputies working hard on compiling an audit of West End workers’ take home pay this summer. The pay audit received over 400 detailed responses and was the first of its kind to be undertaken by the union, with the results usefully informing the current negotiations. For the first time, Equity can evidence something crucial about rates of pay in the West End that most members have always

**“The theatre workforce were told that they were valuable, important and treasured, and promised that the return to work after lockdown would be better”**

known – producers are engaging workers at or just above union minimums, with the average member in the West End taking home little above £700 a week gross. We can finally lay to rest the myth that our members are working for thousands and thousands of pounds a week, except for in diminishingly rare instances.

What’s important about this is that if producers aren’t paying much above the union-negotiated minimums, it’s even more

imperative for the new claim to ensure that the floor is high enough to guarantee liveable (not just survivable!) rates of pay in one of the most expensive cities in the world, not to mention one that reflects the increase in ticket prices over the last year. And given that the nature of working in the West End means most must use the money they make from in-work periods to tide them over during out-of-work-periods, the current average weekly pay is not enough to cover this.

Members have also fed into an important consultative survey designed by the

campaign group to capture the experiences of every single Equity member who has worked on the current West End agreement since April 2019. In this, respondents have spoken with a single voice to flag pay as their top priority to improve, with lack of meaningful time off coming second. Our message to producers is clear as we enter into negotiations – our members expect better, both in terms of the hours they work

and the pay they receive. Above all, West End workers want to feel they can work to live rather than live to work.

In Commercial Theatre, our Commercial touring deputies network had already consulted members who work away from home about accommodation, as part of the work they led to secure a rise in touring allowances from £265 to £300 in June of this year. In 2018 when the Commercial Theatre Agreement was last renegotiated, Equity claimed for a single living away allowance of £300 – but this was four years and a pandemic ago. Although we have now achieved a £300 touring allowance under the current Commercial Theatre Agreement, there is work to do on increasing this rate to where it needs to be now so members can be safe and comfortable in accommodation that is accessible, close to the venue they are working in and suitable for their needs when working away from home.

In both Commercial and Subsidised theatre, we have once again claimed for a single allowance rather than one amount for touring and a lower amount for subsistence, with a clear separation in the allowance between the amount that workers are given for finding somewhere to stay and the amount they receive as a contribution towards the additional costs of being away from home. Too often, when the allowances rise under our agreements, digs providers up their rates accordingly and our members are left with nothing for food and other expenses. This claim is about stopping that, and making sure that our members are not left in the position of paying to be at work.

Throughout the pandemic, the work of

Equity members engaged as swings and understudies saved shows in the West End and beyond. Members active on social media will have seen the stories of performers going on stage for the first time after an hour’s rehearsal, or no rehearsal at all, with their bravery and hard work meaning the difference between a show being cancelled, or it being able to go ahead. In each of our claims under the agreements for performers and stage management, we have argued for better responsibility and performance payments for swings and understudies, and for better recognition for the role these – often younger, often underpaid – vital members of our workforce do.

**“Additional work must mean additional payment”**

Similarly on stage management teams across the country, our members have repeatedly stepped up to cover the duties of another stage manager at short notice and have not received the financial compensation or recognition they deserve for taking on the additional, often

safety-critical responsibilities the production has demanded of them. It’s worth spelling it out clearly: each time a swing goes on, each time an understudy takes their position, each time a stage manager steps in at short notice, they are the difference between a cancelled performance costing the producers thousands upon thousands of pounds or a successful night at the theatre for their audience, and it’s time these pivotal contributions were properly recognised.

In Subsidised theatre our consultation uncovered the frustrations members have felt about the distribution of Cultural Recovery Fund money and how it has been





spent. From refurbished cafes to new office furniture, time again members excluded from the Self-Employment Income Support Scheme or furlough have seen public money – your own taxes – not reach your pockets, whilst at the same time reading the think-pieces and attending the Zoom meetings with producers and venues up and down the country, in which the theatre workforce were told that they were valuable, important and treasured, and promised that the return to work after lockdown would be better.

For too many of our people, the re-opening of theatres saw a return to work that was not better – it was the same, or it was worse, with excessive working hours being cited as a major factor in this. This has been particularly keenly felt by stage management team members working across Subsidised theatre, with many members reporting that the understaffing of stage management teams has caused significant workload problems, with all the corresponding physical and mental health issues that come with systemic overwork. Theatre hours are too long, and the sheer physical demand of doing eight shows a week as a performer or a stage manager is punishing on the body. Under the ITC Ethical Manager Agreement, we have claimed for a general reduction in hours and a maximum working week of 35 hours over five days during the rehearsal period. We are pushing for similar reductions in working time with no corresponding loss in pay and an increase in holiday entitlement in pay across all of the industry standard agreements for performers and stage managers.

The development of the Theatre Green Book has begun to deliver positive changes

around the UK as the sector plays its part in tackling the climate emergency. Our campaign group working on the ITC Ethical Manager Agreement has claimed that each ITC Ethical Manager member should have a sustainability policy in place to continue driving this change forward – but we are also clear that the work of tackling the climate emergency must not result in additional burdens on the workforce. Increasingly, our set and costume designer membership report that the practical impact of the drive to create more sustainable theatre results in an increased and unremunerated workload for set and costume designers. Additional work must mean additional payment, which our claims on the designers' agreements seek to quantify.

All of our claims are ambitious, and the negotiations your campaign groups, committees and officials will lead to deliver the changes you want to see will likely be difficult. Over the coming weeks and months, you will receive regular updates from your campaign groups about how you can be involved in this process, and lend your support to your union's work to deliver better for the theatre workforce.

Together, we can win what we deserve.



# Equity members' messages to the industry



"Stage managers are being pressed to do more and more work for no more money. The industry has been decimated and workers are hitting the ground running after almost two years of trauma, both financially and emotionally, due to Covid and the cost of living crisis. Increasingly, I see stage managers being asked to step up in emergency circumstances with no additional fee.

It's so important, now more than ever,

that the minimum rates go up as people are leaving because they simply can't afford to continue in this way. Terms and conditions must also be at the forefront of our negotiations – with more and more people working Sundays, our work-life balance is constantly in flux. We must fight to make things better for our workers. We can't go on like this."

**Saf Horrocks, Stage Management Committee member**



"Many performers are working two jobs at the moment. I'm currently in a West End production and although company members receive above the minimum rate, many of them continue their side hustle to stay afloat.

This is my second round of working on negotiations with SOLT, specifically on the terms and conditions for the West End – I do it because I believe in collective bargaining.

On the back of the pandemic and many members agreeing to transitional agreements on contracts, it is time that management acknowledge the sacrifices made to keep shows afloat. And surely, unless you've been living under a rock, or have a private trust fund, minimum terms and conditions need to reflect the rise in practically every other area of life."

**Vivien Parry, Stage Committee member**



"I've been an active member of the discussions around negotiations, as well as being a dep (Equity workplace representative) for my show on tour. No professional should be asked to live with a host who sets rules on when they can return home, cook, shower, and so on – no other industry would expect their workers to stay with Betty and her cat whilst working professionally.

We should be able to afford self-contained, clean and local accommodation, which is not too far from the show we're working on so we can return safely at night. The digs allowance must go up now so we don't have to make decisions that compromise our safety and wellbeing in order to keep within the constraints of the allowance."

**Matthew Rowland, Equity theatre dep**



"Our pay and conditions have been stagnating for too long, and that was before Covid kicked in. Many directors have a full work diary, but still do not earn enough to pay their essential bills.

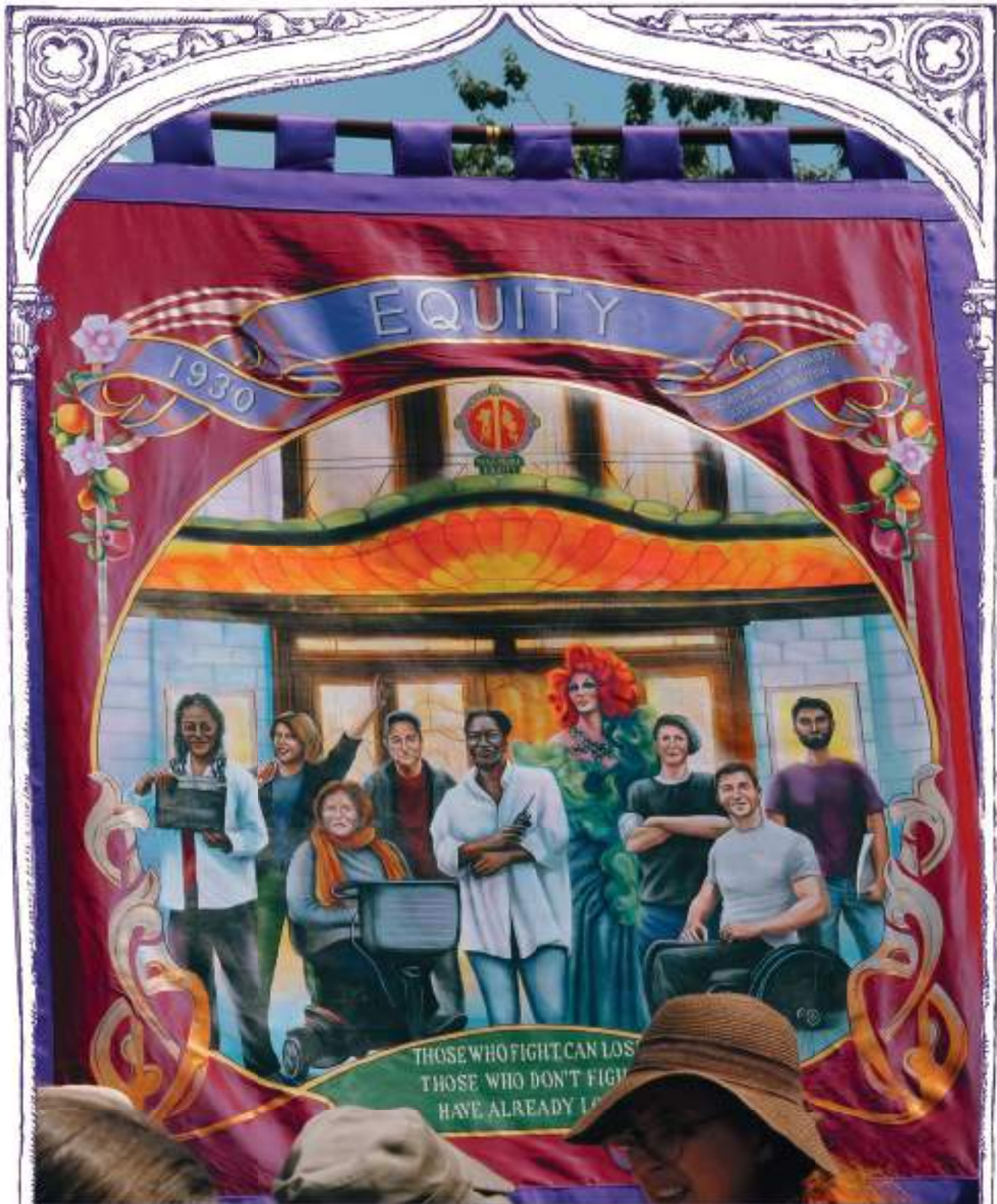
The Directors and Designers Committee has been preparing for these negotiations for over a year, gathering feedback from our members with surveys. We know what we need to get closer to fairness in pay, and we've done a considerable amount of work around clarifying roles and responsibilities. We need to end the culture of being given

additional tasks, such as a re-casting or a press event, without being paid for it.

I'm hugely confident that we are speaking with a strong mandate. New directors are applying to join the union in unprecedented numbers and that has given us the confidence to enter these negotiations knowing what is essential to our members, in all their diversity."

**Kerry Kyriacos Michael MBE, Equity Councillor (Creative Team – Directors)**





# RAISING OUR BANNER

**Zoe Ellsmore** finds out about the symbolism behind the new national Equity banner

A traditional trade union banner is more than the fabric it's painted on. It encapsulates, in silk and paint, what a union is and what it stands for. It's held high by members at marches and pickets, acting as a rallying point and visual extension of the union's legacy and objectives.

The new national Equity banner – created earlier this year by the renowned Durham Bannermakers in close collaboration with Equity General Secretary Paul W Fleming and Design & Content Co-ordinator Tom Greenwood – is no exception.

Layered with meaning and symbolism, the new banner depicts Equity's history on the back and its future on the front, as is traditional with trade union banners. "We are not here to conserve the way things are," explains Paul. "[When we carry the banner] we're gathered behind the history, but we're marching towards a future we've envisaged."

"On the side that's about the future, we wanted every member to see themselves," he continues. "So it's based on the diversity of professions that we represent, and the diversity of the performing arts and entertainment workforce that we want to see. That is our vision of the future: it is our diverse membership, diverse professions, and diverse backgrounds".

The other side of the banner tells Equity's story since it was founded over 90 years ago, with events framed by a film reel. "It's important that the banner reflects a union's history as it works to tell a story, as much as it sets out future aims" says Emma Shankland who, alongside her husband Edgar Ameti, is one half of the artistic duo that is Durham Bannermakers. "It's a way of engaging people who don't know anything about your trade union. I wanted to show Equity's activism in a way that was full of movement and which referenced both the theatre and film."

In each corner of the banner are flourishes inspired by the Arts and Crafts aesthetic movement of the late 19th and early 20th centuries. "These hark back to the original inspiration behind the union being founded," explains Paul. "It was William Morris and that movement of people, who talked about the importance of artists being unionised into guilds. Robert Young, our first political adviser, and Alfred M. Wall, our first general secretary, were working class people who were inspired by people like Walter Crane, the Arts and Crafts artist and socialist. Wall was also the Chair of the London Trades Council during the General strike in 1926. It harks back to this idea that, in the biggest moments of unionisation in British history, it has been artists who've been at the forefront."

### Making history

From their studio Emma and Edgar use traditional and modern materials together with their own unique processes. Emma learnt the art of banner making from her mum, who began making replica banners for mining unions and communities in the 1980s. Emma then took over the business in 2010, bringing on

board her husband Edgar who is also a trained fine artist.

"We work closely with the union representatives on a design, then recreate it on strong silk" says Emma. "Silk is a traditional background for banners, moving with the light and contributing to the overall design. The painting has numerous layers, so you get a lot of depth. It's working with a lot of different processes to get something which is going to look amazing from a distance and have visual impact when you're close too."

Making something that Equity's creative membership could be proud of was essential for the union. "It's important that we have something that's beautiful and artistic" says Paul. "Because the trade union movement is not just about pay, and terms and conditions. It's about the dignity of having a voice, and flourishing as human beings and as artists. The banner is a very physical representation of that."

### More than material

Since the start of the movement, marching and banners have been an integral part of trade unions' identities. "Trade unionism is about coming together" says Paul. "And having a focal point to come together around is important. Banners are something that you force in front when you're stood on a picket line or protest; there is an intention that the banner looms over those who would undermine us and drive our pay down. It's inclusive of our members and exclusive of those who would harm them. It is something that is raised up by us."

The new banner joins an army of branch and regional Equity banners, which have long been carried with pride by members across the UK. Equity's previous national banner was

created in 2010-11 and depicts the same design as the union's stained-glass window at the Mechanics Institute in Manchester, the birthplace of the TUC. Fittingly, this banner is now housed in Equity's Manchester office to be deployed by members on marches in Northern England.

**"The new banner depicts Equity's history on the back and its future on the front"**







## Who's who on the new banner?

The film reel on the Equity banner depicts key moments from the union's history and our most influential members.



The Variety Artistes' Federation (VAF), which became part of Equity in 1966, led a UK-wide music hall strike in 1907 to demand better pay and working conditions. Popular performer Marie Lloyd was a prominent supporter of the strike and gave generously to the strike fund, helping the VAF to win. The quote here was spoken by VAF founding member Harry Mouniford at the arbitration which ended the dispute.



Equity was founded in 1930 around the actress May Whitty's dining table. Five years later, actors including Sybil Thorndike masterminded Equity's closed shop, which held until Margaret Thatcher banned it in 1988. The quote is from the 1935 Savoy Grill Declaration, the pledge signed by members to adhere to the closed shop.



Alfred M. Wall, Equity's first general secretary, was also a compositor (print worker) and a Communist Party councillor. He chaired the London Trades Council during the 1926 General Strike and negotiated Equity's first ever agreement. He's shown with a placard from a campaign in the 1930s.



General Secretary Gerald Croasdell led TV unionisation, famously with action that left Coronation Street the only drama showing on ITV in the early 1960s (and with a reduced cast at that). He co-founded the International Federation of Actors (FIA), whose badge he wears on the banner.



From 1964, Equity variety members picketed working men's clubs with colour bars (a ban on non-white artists or audiences). The tide turned when the TGWU – now Unite – instructed their members who delivered beer not to cross our picket lines. After they joined in solidarity, we won within weeks.



Member and activist Miriam Karlin had a vision to turn Equity into a fighting, anti-fascist trade union. In art, as in life, she fought for social justice. She's depicted here as her most famous character – Paddy, a militant shop steward in the sitcom *The Rag Trade*.



Vice President Louis Mahoney drove forward the campaign to block Equity members' work from being shown in apartheid South Africa, from 1976 up until the 1990s. He was also our first Black officer and challenged the union to face up to racism in the UK.



The top row shows three pantomime dames from our protest with Bectu in 2020, when we called for more government support for the performing arts and entertainment workforce during the Covid-19 pandemic. "We've not won that battle yet," says Paul. "But Equity is marching out of the devastation with purpose."

# Obituaries

Remembering Equity's Council  
and founding members

## Harry Landis



*Remembered by Natasha Gerson*

It was with great sadness that I learned of the death of the amazing Harry Landis. I'm proud to say that I knew him as a colleague and during his time as Equity President while I served alongside him on Council. I'm even more proud to have known him as a wonderful friend.

Most of our members will know that Harry had a long and illustrious career over of 60 years as an actor and a director in theatre, film and television. His many credits would take far too long to list in full here. Suffice it to say that he was still being recognised with great enthusiasm at Equity's ARC by the youthful staff of the Marriott Hotel in Leeds this year, for his roles in *EastEnders* and *Friday Night Dinner*. He treated them all with warmth, wit and humour.

Harry was a real East Ender, born in Stepney. He attended Stepney Jewish School, and after various jobs, joined Unity Theatre, a company closely allied with the trade union movement. He rejoined Unity after his national service, before being awarded a grant by London County Council to study at the Central School of Speech and Drama.

One of his early appearances with Unity was in Ewan MacColl's play *Uranium 235*, a most suitable production for a socialist. As well as serving on the Equity Council, Harry was a board member of the Equity Charitable Trust and Chairman of the Unity Theatre Trust.

Another distinguished member of our profession and of the Unity Theatre Trust, Ann Mitchell, who lived with her parents near Harry in the East End when she was a girl, remembers him as well loved in the community. She described him to me as a man of honour, wit and generosity; firm, a good listener, and fair; a real mensch. I couldn't agree with her more.

As I mentioned earlier, Harry's professional achievements are too many to be listed here. They would fill a book.

I'm happy to say that fellow Equity member, Kate McCall, and I managed to spend most of this year's Equity conference in his company. He was a true friend and a real socialist. We'll miss him sorely.

*Harry Landis was the President of Equity 2002-2008; he was an Equity Councillor from 1994-2002 and 2008-2010.*

## William 'Bill' Maxwell



*Remembered by John Gillett*

Bill was an enthusiastic, ebullient, principled and warm-hearted colleague who was equally committed to the union and to his work as an actor, which gave him much happiness, fulfilment and material to talk about.

A founder of the branch movement, successfully ushering in Equity's branch organising structure that exists to the current day, Bill established the North & East London General Branch in 1973 with Peter Powell. I joined the branch in that year, and although Bill was in the faction that became Centre Forward and I was in what became the Equity Left Alliance, we found a common cause in furthering the democracy of the union. He was branch secretary and chair on numerous occasions, and served on Council for many years. In recent years, he became an enthusiastic member of Equity's International Committee for Artists' Freedom (ICAF), espousing the rights of performers abroad.

Bill was born into an Irish Catholic family in Liverpool on May 8, 1937. Bombed out in the wartime blitz, he was evacuated to Oldham where he lived with little heating, wore clogs to school and faced the threat of German bombs over the town. He had disturbed sleep for the rest of his life – but it prepared him for the vicissitudes of the entertainment industry! He left school at 15 and wanted to be a journalist, but passed through a number of jobs in law and public health before National Service in the RAF. Narrowly avoiding the Suez debacle, he instead got his first taste of theatrics

performing for his squadron at Station HQ in Shropshire, and then took up an RAF Drama Course at Nottingham University.

Out of the forces, he joined both Equity and the Oldham Coliseum in 1957 as an Assistant Stage Manager. His first professional appearance was as Snug the joiner in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. He set off for London in the early 60s and lived in Soho, from where he began his varied career in theatre, television, commercials, and film, including a role in *Witchfinder General*. Over the years he played three parts in *Coronation Street*, the reviled Mr Hammond in *EastEnders*, and Jack Sullivan in many episodes of *Brookside*. He worked on many productions in the UK, Germany, Austria, the West End and Broadway, and was particularly proud of being part of the RSC's epic *Nicholas Nickleby*. Bill described his eventful life in numerous stories, and in 1993 won an LBC radio playwriting competition, telling the tale of a large family through the years.

Bill is survived by his wife Barbara, from Canada, who lived with him from 1972. She attests to Bill's impressive memory, which enabled him to reel off Shakespeare even on his deathbed, and to his great pride in his work as an actor, his family, Liverpool FC, and his role as a down-to-earth working-class man in improving Equity as a trade union.

*Bill Maxwell served on Equity Council from 1982-1984, 1994-1996, 1998-2002 and 2004-2006.*



## Frank Williams



*Remembered by Jean Rogers*

Frank served on the Equity Council for many years and I was privileged to serve with him from 1994. A man of integrity, courteous, witty and intelligent, he was involved in 1992 with Peter Plouviez, Barbara Hyslop and others in setting up the Equity Trust Fund. Later renamed the Equity Charitable Trust (ECT), it continues to help professionals facing hardship with welfare and education grants, and Frank was a long-standing member of its Board of Trustees.

He had no formal drama training, but during the 50's regularly attended the Watford Palace Repertory Theatre run by Jimmy and Gilda Perry, where he began playing small parts and writing plays – many thrillers – for them. It was in 1969 that he got his big break, from Jimmy Perry who with David Croft created *Dad's Army* – Frank joined the cast at the start of the third series, playing the dithery Reverend Timothy Farthing.

Frank loved it. His total number of episodes was only 39 but the show was regularly repeated. Commenting on this later, he said: "I can't remember what I was paid originally, although the fee would have been pretty standard for the 1960's, but constant repeats meant it has become quite a decent pension – especially as they are linked to inflation. Equity negotiated a good BBC repeats deal so

I'm obviously earning more on them than the original fees."

His long and varied career included roles in *Minder* and *Bergerac*, and it amused him that, having once donned the dog collar, he progressed as an archdeacon in the final episode of the BBC's serialisation of *Vanity Fair*, then as a bishop in *You Rang, My Lord?*, a comedy series also written by the Jimmy Perry and David Croft team. Frank was a life-long Christian and served three terms as a representative of the Diocese of London in the General Synod from 1985 to 2000.

Frank stepped down from the Equity Council in 2010. In recent years he often played the dame in panto and enjoyed putting on a number of 'An Audience with Frank Williams' events.

Born in Edgware an only child, he lived in the area all his life, eventually buying a house less than a mile from where he lived with his parents, and sharing this home with actor friend and carer Ronnie Grainge.

*Frank Williams served on Equity Council from 1984-1988, 1990-1996 and 1998-2010.*

# In Memoriam

Uncle Alf  
 Michael Barnacoat  
 Lynda Baron  
 June Barry  
 Richard Beaumont  
 Jane Blackburn  
 Peter Bowles  
 Patricia Brake  
 Phoebe Frances Brown  
 Alan Byers  
 Rufus Clark  
 James Colclough  
 Steve Condor  
 Sally Cordell  
 Robert Cox  
 Terence Dalton  
 Damian Davey  
 Ann Davies  
 Pamela Ann Davy  
 Anneliese Emmans Dean  
 John Delaney  
 Zulema Dene  
 Maggie Don  
 Gwen Doran  
 Steve Douglas  
 Joe Dunne  
 Anita Elias  
 Sybil Ewbank  
 Leonard Fenton  
 Marnie Francis  
 John Frankau  
 Daniel Godward  
 Eddie Goodall  
 Walter Hall  
 Mona Hammond  
 Leila Hart  
 Pearl Hawkes  
 Tom Hegarty  
 Martha Henry  
 Louise Higgins  
 Karen Hubbard  
 Brian Jackson  
 Jill Johnson  
 David H Johnson  
 Tom Karol  
 Tracy Kashi  
 Peter Kay  
 Valerie Kirkbright

David Kitchen  
 Keith Ladd  
 Harry Landis  
 Margot Lawson  
 Gabriella Licudi  
 Karin MacCarthy  
 Marcello Magni  
 Ronald Mann  
 Andrew Martyn  
 William Maxwell  
 Nick McCluskey  
 Danny McGowan  
 Donald McLeish  
 Kay Mellor  
 Ruth Meyers  
 Wally Michaels  
 Glenys Moore  
 Ivor Morris  
 Daniel Moynihan  
 Michael Munn  
 Gwen Overton  
 Mirain Llwyd Owen  
 Robin Parkinson  
 David Peart  
 Gordon Peters  
 Linda Porter-Robinson  
 Gwyneth Powell  
 Johnny Prenton  
 Arwel Price  
 Larry Rew  
 Thelma Robinson  
 Margaret Rogers  
 Clifford Rose  
 Vanessa Rosenthal  
 Mark Rowlinson  
 Malcolm Seymour  
 Antony Sher  
 Jack Smethurst  
 Simon Snellings  
 Glen South  
 Andy Spiegel  
 Michael Stainton  
 Jane Stevens  
 Keith Stewart  
 Pauline Stroud  
 Lynda Styan  
 Ian Jacob Thompson  
 James Tomlinson

Vercoe  
 Clem Vickery  
 Tony Walsh  
 Frank Williams  
 Sydna Withington  
 Henry Woolf  
 Matt Zimmerman

*In some cases, it may be possible that another member uses the same or a similar name subsequent to the passing of the above members.*

# Getting Involved

*You are the union: together, we can implement real change in the industry. There are many ways you can stand alongside your fellow members and get involved in Equity's work, from getting involved in your local branch to joining a network.*

## BRANCHES

Wherever you are based in the UK, there will be a branch: a community of Equity members who meet as a group to discuss the issues facing the industry, both locally and nationally. Branches hold regular meetings, organise and campaign. Equity has both General Branches, which are open to all members, and Variety Branches, which are specifically for members who work in variety.

## LONDON

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### North West London General Branch

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### South & South East London Branch

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### Thames Variety Branch

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### West & South West London Branch

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## MIDLANDS

### Birmingham & West Midlands General Branch

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### Birmingham Variety Branch

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### Coventry & Leicester Variety Branch

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### East Midlands Variety Branch

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## NORTH EAST, YORKSHIRE & HUMBERSIDE

### Humberside Variety Branch

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### Leeds & Region General Branch

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### North & West Yorkshire Variety Branch

nwyvb@equitybranches.org.uk

### North East of England General Branch

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### North East Variety Branch

north-east-variety@equitybranches.org.uk

### Sheffield & Region General Branch

sheffieldequitybranch@gmail.com

### South Yorkshire Variety Branch

south-yorkshire-variety@equitybranches.org.uk

## NORTHERN IRELAND

### Northern Ireland General Branch

northern-ireland-general@equitybranches.org.uk

## NORTH WEST ENGLAND

### Blackpool Variety Branch

denisaskham@yahoo.com

### Greater Manchester & Region General Branch

greater-manchester-general@equitybranches.org.uk

### Isle of Man General Branch

isle-of-man-general@equitybranches.org.uk

### Liverpool & District General Branch

liverpool-general@equitybranches.org.uk

### Manchester & District Variety Branch

manchester-district-variety@equitybranches.org.uk

### Merseyside Variety Branch

chris.dalebfa@yahoo.co.uk

## ONLINE

### Online Branch

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## SCOTLAND

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### Glasgow General Branch

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### Scotland Variety Branch

scotland-variety@equitybranches.org.uk

## SOUTH EAST

### Brighton & Sussex General Branch

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### East Anglia Variety Branch

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### Essex General Branch

essex-general@equitybranches.org.uk

### Home Counties West General Branch

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### Kent General Branch

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### Oxfordshire General Branch

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## SOUTH WEST

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### Devon & Cornwall General Branch

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### Dorset General Branch

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### West of England Variety Branch

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**WALES****Cardiff & South Wales General Branch**

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**North Wales General Branch**

raisedonrock19@gmail.com

**South Wales Variety Branch**

south-wales-variety@equitybranches.org.uk

**NETWORKS**

*Networks are a space for members with a shared interest to meet and discuss issues affecting their area, from burlesque to storytellers. Through these discussions, problems are identified and solutions offered, which the union can then implement.*

**Burlesque Network**

mday@equity.org.uk

**Circus Network**

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**Class Network**

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**Comedians Network**

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**Dance Network**

sblayney@equity.org.uk

**Drag Artists Network**

drag@equity.org.uk

**Green New Deal**

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**Gypsy, Roma & Traveller Network**

imanborde@equity.org.uk

**LGBT Network**

imanborde@equity.org.uk

**Models Network**

models@equity.org.uk

**Non-UK-Born Artists Network**

nukba@equity.org.uk

**Puppeteers' Network**

puppeteers@equity.org.uk

**Storytellers' Network**

mday@equity.org.uk

**COMMITTEES**

*Members are elected to Equity committees to represent their fellow professionals and to improve their working conditions. Different committees cover the interests of different groups. Committees drive union policy, conduct negotiations and ensure that the needs of all Equity members are heard.*

**Audio Committee**

audio@equity.org.uk

**Dance Committee**

dance@equity.org.uk

**Deaf & Disabled Members Committee**

ddmcommittee@equity.org.uk

**Directors and Designers Committee**

directorsanddesigners@equity.org.uk

**LGBT+ Committee**

lgbtcommittee@equity.org.uk

**Race Equality Committee**

recommittee@equity.org.uk

**Northern Ireland National Committee**

nicommittee@equity.org.uk

**Scottish National Committee**

scottishcommittee@equity.org.uk

**Screen & New Media Committee**

screen@equity.org.uk

**Singers Committee**

singers@equity.org.uk

**Stage Committee**

stage@equity.org.uk

**Stage Management Committee**

stagemanagement@equity.org.uk

**Variety, Circus & Entertainers Committee**

vcec@equity.org.uk

**Welsh National Committee**

pwyllgorcymru@equity.org.uk / welshcommittee@equity.org.uk

**Women's Committee**

womenscommittee@equity.org.uk

**Young Members Committee**

ymcom@equity.org.uk



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020 7670 0207

## Tax & Welfare Rights Helpline

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## Equity Distribution Services

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Nick Fletcher, Vice-President  
David John, Honorary Treasurer

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Louise McMullan, Deputy for the General Secretary  
Hilary Hadley, Assistant General Secretary, Live Performance  
John Barclay, Assistant General Secretary, Recorded Media  
Beccy Reese, Assistant General Secretary, Finance & Operations

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# VOTE IN THE RULEBOOK REFERENDUM 2022

*Voting is now open and closes at 12 noon on Friday 2 December 2022.*

**A modern, accessible rulebook is vital for a progressive, fighting union.**

**The Council (the union's elected governing body) has been reviewing the union's rules and is now putting forward a new rulebook for the membership's approval. Their key aim is to make the union's current rules and practices more accessible and easier to understand, along with some limited changes.**

**Voting papers are included with this magazine, along with details about the changes and how you can vote online.**





**To all artists: good work**

**To all workers: good art**

**To all people: Equity**





# WHY JOIN A UNION?

**Join a union because of who we are, together;  
not just because of what you do.**

**Because together, our voice is loud when we make demands of bosses,  
- whether in theatre, film TV, audio,  
new media, dance or variety.**

**Because together we will build an industry where your class, your gender,  
your sexuality, your race, your disability does not limit what you can do.**

**Because together your lived experience becomes part of our voice too.**

**Because together we can fund insurances, legal support  
and welfare advice - to enable artists to work.**

**Because together we educate each other and the industry.**

**Because together we put the future of our industry's workforce - freelance  
and employed - at the heart of its future.**

**Because together politicians of every party have to hear us - and give our  
industry, its workforce, and all working people the protection we deserve.**

**Because together we defend freedom of expression for artists  
in the United Kingdom, and around the globe.**

**Because together we create the global society working people  
& artists need to flourish - defend the environment,  
fight for new housing, better transport, freedom to move.**

**Because together you are not alone. We are over 46,000 members, and  
part of a global movement of millions, across the UK and the globe.**

**Together, and only together, can we say:**

**To all artists: good work  
To all workers: good art  
To all people: Equity**

