

EQUITY CONFERENCE 2024 REPORT

Equity Conference 2024 - Birmingham - 18-20 May

Equity members from across the UK came together in Birmingham's majestic Town Hall from Saturday 18 - Monday 20 May for our 2024 annual conference. The event was the best attended Equity conference ever, with the largest number of women and non-binary speakers and the most diversity of speakers and attendees yet seen at an Equity conference. As well as 109 reps, 22 Equity councillors and 30 other members, guests had travelled from 15 countries across six continents, including visitors from Colombia, Cuba, Mexico, and Palestine. Members left conference feeling enthused and emboldened for the work ahead. Conference was a time to celebrate the many victories that our members have achieved over the past year, but also to reflect on the struggles to come as we continue to make the entertainment industry a better place to work for everyone.

Saturday

Conference began on Saturday afternoon with welcome addresses from our President, Lynda Rooke, and General Secretary, Paul W Fleming. The General Secretary gave his unbiased assessment that this was "the conference of the best union in the best city in the best region in the world".

Shadow Culture Secretary Thangam Debbonaire MP was the first guest speaker of the weekend, she delivered a rousing speech to conference telling delegates that "You tell the story of who we are as a country. You bring us face to face with our contradictions. You document our successes".

On Saturday afternoon the important work of conference business got underway. The first motion was submitted by the Race Equality Committee and related to Arts Council England's (ACE) warning that 'political statements' made by individuals linked to organisations can cause 'reputational risk', breaching funding agreements.

Conference carried the motion which asked Council to call upon national arts funding bodies, and the Charity Commission, to make it conditional that funded arts institutions, and individuals working within them, are allowed full range of political expression. The motion was particularly timely considering recent revelations that ACE's risk guidelines were formulated in relation to the Israel-Gaza conflict.

We then saw a motion from the LGBT+ Committee which was carried following an excellent speech in favour. The motion detailed instances of harassment at work, such as the menacing actions aimed at Drag Queen Story Hour. The motion called on Council to develop political education resources for Equity members and consider how Equity can contribute to the wider anti-far-right movement.

On Saturday evening we honoured our overseas guests at an International Reception in the Town Hall. We welcomed guests from Belgium, Canada, Colombia, Croatia, Cuba, Estonia, France, Germany, Mexico, New Zealand, Palestine, Poland, South Africa, Turkey, and USA.

Al Vincent Jr., Executive Director of Actors Equity from the USA, told us how workers in Disneyland were balloting to join a union

for the first time, delegates sent solidarity greetings to our sisters and brothers in the USA and were delighted to learn later that the ballot was overwhelmingly successful. The most moving speech of the night was from Alrowwad Cultural and Arts Society's Abdelfattah Abusrour, who called on artists to stand in solidarity with Palestinians facing injustice. Abdelfattah asked "How many more lives should disappear, how many artists should disappear, before we realise...Not in our name. Not under our watch as artists".

Sunday

The second day kicked off with a speech from Coventry South MP Zarah Sultana. Zarah's inspirational words resonated with our members as she told the hall: "Let's build a better brighter world where arts and entertainment are accessible to all, and every single person has the opportunity to reach their potential".

We were then privileged to hear from Marie Kelly from ACTRA National, which represents 30,000 recorded media performers in Canada, on their successful battle for collective agreements in commercials.

An emergency motion to provide all support that is required for a campaign to stop cuts and redundancies to the Welsh National Opera (WNO) chorus passed unanimously. The motion also reiterated that the union 'will not accept compulsory redundancies, or the desire by WNO management to have the flexibility of a full-time contract with all the precarity of an unsustainable cut to their basic earnings'.

Conference then considered a motion to be taken to the 2024 TUC Congress. The motion noted that whilst it is illegal to charge upfront fees for work-seekers in most industries, the performing arts and entertainment industries are exempted from this ban. Equity delegates will call on the TUC to support the repeal of this unfair exemption and call for casting directory fees to be borne by producers, not workers.

The fringe

On Saturday afternoon 14 fringe events took place, making this the largest ever fringe programme.

Highlights included hearing how trade unionists are fighting for Justice in Colombia, a discussion on building union and student power, and the General Secretary's guide to Equity's radical history.

Honorary Life Memberships

One of the highlights of conference is the awarding of Honorary Life Memberships, the union's highest honour. This year awards went to Abdelfattah Abusrour, director of Alrowwad; Vivien Parry, Equity Stage Committee; Yukiko Masui, dance activist; and Tonia Daley-Campbell, Equity Midlands Councillor.

Monday

The final day of conference saw further motions and powerful speeches. It was particularly inspiring to hear from so many young members and first-time delegates.

A motion carried from the Student Deputies Committee asked Council to actively

campaign for the abolition of student tuition fees, a return of maintenance grants and more funding opportunities for lifelong learning. This resonated with delegates given the devastating lack of working-class representation in the creative industries.

Conference also passed a motion from the West End Deputies Committee which called on Council to campaign for a change in the law so that those who work six days a week accrue extra leave for that sixth day, pro rata. This change will benefit workers across the UK, furthering the cause of a just work-life balance for all.

Delegates left Birmingham tired but inspired. We left with hope in our hearts that together we will build better performing arts and entertainment industries and, with our international comrades, we will create a world in which art and social justice can thrive for all.

EQUITY MINUTES

EQUITY CONFERENCE 2024

HELD AT THE TOWN HALL,
BIRMINGHAM, 18-20 MAY 2024



Present:

**Lynda Rooke (President – in the Chair)
Members of the Equity Council
2022-2024**

**Paul W Fleming (General Secretary)
Equity representatives and observers**

**Maximum attendance: 244 including
109 representatives, 5 Officers and 18
Councillors.**

SATURDAY 18 MAY

Conference was formally convened at 14:00.

The President welcomed everyone to Birmingham, provided some housekeeping notes and welcomed our guests. She reiterated the Safe Spaces statement and introduced those on the top table. She also introduced a short film about members fighting cuts across the UK.

1. REPORT FROM THE CONFERENCE BUSINESS COMMITTEE (CBC)

Ian Barritt introduced himself as Vice-Chair of the CBC. He gave a few house-keeping announcements and outlined some points of procedure. Apologies were noted from Julia Carson Sims (Chair of the CBC).

2. OBITUARIES

David John (Honorary Treasurer) and Mary Lane (Councillor) read out the obituaries. This was followed by a minute's silence and a final ovation in honour of those who had died in 2023.

3. PRESIDENT'S ADDRESS, LYNDA ROOKE

The President said she was delighted to address Equity conference here in Birmingham, the second largest city in the UK and outside of London one of the most diverse. Birmingham, at one time the home of the British Motor Industry, the centre of cocoa production, the birthplace of Ozzy Osbourne as well as our current General Secretary Paul Fleming, both being two of its famous sons. We had mentioned a couple of Birmingham's sons but what about the daughters of Birmingham? For those who had watched Peaky Blinders the character of Jessie Eden might be familiar, in fact Jessie Eden was for real, a daughter of Birmingham and certainly a leading force in this city. A true trade unionist who in 1926 convinced her all-female section of workers at the Joseph Lucas motor components factory here in Birmingham to down tools as part of the general strike. In 1931, Jessie noticed the factory management monitoring her work, her production. Why? Because the company planned to link pay to production outputs and chose Jessie as the benchmark, because she was the fastest worker. There was an outcry amongst the women who were already having their toilet breaks timed and Jessie led 10,000 women on a week-long walkout. The women did win and the system was dropped but Jessie paid the price, she found herself singled out at work and eventually lost her job. She received victimisation pay from what was then the TGWU and received a gold medal from its then leader, Ernest Bevin. Jessie didn't stop there, she went on to lead between 40,000 to 50,000 households during the Birmingham rent strike of 1939.

As trade unionists we all followed in her footsteps, we should never ever doubt our combined strength as 50,000 strong. We were the 12th largest trade union in the UK and the second largest union for creative workers in the world. Here in the Midlands, membership was currently 3,895 and she was absolutely certain that members based here would continue to voice their demands for more TV drama production in the Midlands after the loss of Doctors, and they would also continue to challenge cuts to arts funding across the region, funding which was often seen as an easy target in council budgetary decisions. We had recently seen this twice in the Midlands, in Birmingham and Nottingham, both of which were now local arts funding deserts. But there was hope – things could change.

We had recently had local government elections in some areas of England and Wales and at some point this year there would be a General Election. That was our opportunity to make the case for culture and the performing arts and that was something we could all do right across the UK. Funders and politicians constantly said how the creative industries were vital to the economy of the UK. The question was why did they not invest in it more? After all, we were a powerhouse industry bigger than life sciences and the aerospace and the automotive industries combined. We knew that we played a vital role in the night-time economies of towns, cities and rural areas across the UK. We made a place a good place to live, an attractive, vibrant place to live, we supported health and wellbeing in the community and for a good number of years we had bolstered and supplemented the beleaguered state of performing arts

education in state schools. There was no reason not to invest in our sector. So when they came knocking for your vote, ask them would they commit to investing in culture and the performing arts, and the UK film and TV industry, including protecting public sector broadcasting.

In her own city of Bristol 80 miles down the road from here, Bristol City Council had received £20 million last year from film and TV production in the city, which had buoyed up the council budget and contributed towards the cost of social care and housing, and yet they cut the culture budget by 40%. Culture budgets were minute compared to any council's overall budget, it was almost cutting for the sake of cutting. There just didn't seem to be any joined up thinking, we knew that those who often started their career in the performing arts went on to work in film and TV, it was part of the talent pipeline. Added to which cuts made at the local level affected those from marginalised communities considering the performing arts as a career. Cutting back on cultural investment closed the door on the next generation of talent.

Investment in our industry paid back – invest in us and we could help pay for the caring sector and the other demands made on local councils. It was not either/or.

Back in the 1980s, Roy Shaw (then Secretary-General of Arts Council England) described the cultural landscape as "under-subsidised, under-patronised, undervalued and...under distributed" and let's face it since then very little had changed – in fact it had got worse. English local authorities had been forced to cut in real terms £987m

in arts spending since 2009-10. Equity was demanding that the next government set a road map for bringing UK arts funding up to the European average of 0.5% of GDP.

It was not just in England, Roisin McDonough, Chief Executive of ACNI, recently said that for too long N Ireland had been poorly served by public funding. In NI the arts received £5.07 per capita, Wales received over twice as much and in the Republic of Ireland they received the equivalent of £21.90 per capita. ACNI's budget from over a decade ago was £14.1m; today it stood at £9.7m.

Across the border from here, in Wales, the Chief Executive of Arts Council Wales recently announced that funding investment in Wales had been cut by 23% since 2010, but in real terms the cut was 37%. From £35m in 2010 to just under £27m 2024/25, when in effect it should be nearer to £55m. These were jobs we are talking about.

Only this week, Equity had announced it was challenging the management decisions of WNO to reduce chorus full-time contracts to 45 weeks and the associated salary to be cut by 15%, plus a cut to the size of the chorus which would realistically only lead to compulsory redundancies, none of which were acceptable to Equity nor to Equity's Deputy and Chorus Committee, who were working at the WNO. So it was up to the funders (both ACW and ACE) and the bosses of WNO to sort this mess out and for them to know Equity would not accept an attack on our members' pay and conditions.

In recent times, the Scottish government had a track record of standstill funding, cuts and then u-turning on funding promises. It didn't take a crystal ball to predict that Winter 2024 could be grim for the Scottish Cultural Landscape. Creative Scotland had said that they had no set/guaranteed budget from the Scottish government but were working on the assumption that it would be £40m. Creative Scotland would announce in October multi-year funding and those through to round 2 had been informed. CS received £87.5m worth of funding bids with a proposed but not guaranteed budget of £40m – that was a £47.5m deficit. So it was up in the air, with no culture minister in post since the re-shuffle and whilst the first minister had announced £100m in additional funding for culture, it was suspected that £25m would be given to culture in 2025/26 but how much would go to the arts was very uncertain.

Things needed to change. Whilst we believed that local arts funding should be restored by giving a £1bn uplift in national arts spending, we also recognised that the current funding model was failing and should be transformed into a new federalised, regionalised structure, one with a democratic, community focus voice at its heart.

Our recent successes had been many. Equity's Northern Ireland Office had opened in Belfast just over two years ago and she was very pleased to say that it had hit the ground running. Since it had opened, there were nine new companies working on Equity House Agreements.

Success in Scotland, 26 organisations had now moved on to Equity House

Agreements and here in the Midlands, Equity was about to open a new regional office. The Midlands was a large area geographically and demographically and up until now had been overlooked and undervalued by the union but that would no longer be the case. She looked forward to updates on what she was sure would be increased activism and campaigning.

Our international work continued, we were now affiliated to the Burma Campaign and the Cuban Solidarity Movement, and offered financial support through our International Committee for Artists' Freedom (ICAF). Last June, the General Secretary and herself had sat in on the SAG-AFTRA negotiations and marched in solidarity with SAG-AFTRA members, WGA and the Teamsters Union from La Brea Park to the Netflix building in downtown LA. When Sag-AFTRA had called for strike action, we had held rallies in London and Manchester in support and we now looked to build on the back of their wins.

Whilst in LA, they had met with the Alliance of Canadian Cinema, Television, and Radio Artists (ACTRA) regarding their ongoing commercials dispute. She was delighted that Marie Kelly, the National Executive Director of ACTRA, and Eleanor Noble, President of ACTRA, would be joining us tonight at the International Reception.

After LA, the General Secretary had then travelled to New York and had constructive discussions with Actors' Equity Association (US) and again she was very pleased to say that Alvin Vincent Jr, the Executive Director, and Calandra Hackney, Assistant Director of Actors' Equity Association (US), would also join us tonight.

FIA, the International Federation of Actors, a global federation of artists' unions, had been founded in 1952 by Equity and the French Union, Syndicate Francois des Artistes-Interpretes. In September 2023, Officers and staff had attended the EuroFIA meeting in Istanbul, with discussions focused on AI, Intimacy Co-ordination, homophobia, harassment and bullying, the rise of the far-right, as well as issues around self-tapes, casting and casting directories. The next EuroFIA meeting would be held in Ljubljana, Slovenia in early June and Officers and staff would be there. FIA Future Now (FIA's Young Members Committee), had been formed as a result of a motion proposed by Equity and was made up of young trade unionists from FIA unions worldwide. She was delighted to welcome to our conference 12 representatives from FIA Future Now. They would be with us this afternoon and tonight, as well as at the conference fringe, where they would be holding their own event entitled 'Being a Young Performer and a Young Trade Unionist: A Global Conversation'. They would also have their own separate meeting and Equity staff members had been invited to present Equity's campaigns at the meeting, to facilitate mutual learning and to help establish an international network of young union activists.

In December, some Officers and staff had travelled as a small delegation to Colombia, arranged by Justice For Colombia to which we are affiliated, and some positive connections had been made to offer support and advice around trade unions and activism. Tonight at the International Reception we would welcome Her Excellency Ismara M. Vargas

Walter, Cuban Ambassador to the UK, accompanied by Nick MacWilliam from Justice For Colombia.

It was important to mention our branch network. Across the UK we had fantastic new branches like the Foyle and West Branch in Derry and the Highlands and North of Scotland Branch in Scotland. Certainly some branches were thriving, but not all. We still had reserve branches in some areas. She reminded conference that the branch structure was hard fought for in this union, there had been great resistance to general branches being allowed to be formed historically. Some would remember raucous Equity AGMs in West End theatres, and the ongoing arguments, with frustrations leading eventually to unofficial branches being created. It had been a long, old slog but we had got there. We stood on the shoulders of those who had fought for the democratic structure of branches, and she urged everyone to commit to ensuring the survival of their branches and in so doing take responsibility for succession planning. No one individual was expected to carry the entire load of running a branch, it had to be shared and the baton passed on. That was the spirit of activism. She had been the first treasurer of the Bristol and West Branch, so she had been there on this. Branches had been leading the way on resisting arts funding cuts, that local activism was vital for our industry, our union and its members, we had to build on that.

Members would be aware of the extremely successful campaigns Equity had run over this last year, Stand Up For 17, Dignity in Digs, Stop AI Stealing the Show, arts funding campaigns opposing cuts, the ENO

campaign and now we had the WNO campaign. These campaigns were borne from members' activism but had been formulated and promoted by the dedicated staff of our union, their support and guidance had been invaluable. Every staff member worked together to help create and sustain these campaigns. It was Team Equity and that was what we the members benefitted from, making our working lives better. To every staff member, to every single one of you across our four nations, she wanted to thank them for their efforts and support, it was both recognised and appreciated.

To my fellow Officers, Jackie Clune, Nick Fletcher, David John and Paul Fleming, she thanked them for their support and steadfast dedication. It had been a pleasure to work alongside the Officers and what had been a wonderfully progressive Council of 33 committed activists. It made her proud to lead the union as President. We had Council elections soon and she hoped everyone will encourage fellow members to vote and let their voice be heard. She made this promise to all her fellow activists, that she would strive to continue the good work that had been started with the help and support of the next Council, which the membership would choose.

Most important of all, she wanted to thank all the activists, for their engagement and clear collective voice in calling out and challenging the employers who treated our workforce badly, the employers who did not pay fair wages or sometimes no wages at all, who avoided their responsibilities and obligations and undermined the livelihoods of our members, often leaving

them financially bereft and mentally and emotionally damaged. Thank you for calling out the industry gatekeepers who prevented women, Deaf and Disabled members, LGBTQ+ members, those from marginalised communities and working class backgrounds from entering and surviving in the industry. Everyone should be proud of what they had achieved, very proud. Don't ever give up, we were going in the right direction and united we would make things better for us all.

Not far from this building in Margaret Street there was a Grade 1 listed building, which at one time housed the Royal Birmingham Society of Artists. This was a quote from a lecture given in that building on 19 February 1879 by its then President, William Morris:

"Who can say how little we should know of many periods, but for their art? History, (so called) has remembered the Kings and warriors, because they destroyed; Art has remembered the people, because they created."

You create, you are the creatives, stand together united, be proud of your union, and believe in your direction of travel. Have a great conference, explore the fringe events, enjoy the debate and leave rejuvenated and encouraged to defend our industry, our jobs, improve our pay, terms and conditions and make our workplaces safer places to be.

In solidarity!

4. THANGAM DEBBONAIRE MP (SHADOW DCMS SECRETARY)

Thangam Debbonaire expressed gratitude and discussed the importance of arts in culture, education, and economic growth. She highlighted Labour's plans for the creative industries, criticised Tory cuts, and emphasised the importance of diversity and inclusion in the arts.

On the importance of the arts, she spoke of the creative industries' role and highlighted the arts' importance in making sense of the world and telling the country's story, and of actors' roles in promoting progressive causes and fostering empathy, citing examples like "It's a Sin" and "I May Destroy You." She also spoke of her background as a professional cellist.

On Labour's plan, she recognised the impact of Tory-directed cuts on the arts and emphasised Labour's focus on quality creative education, support for self-employed individuals, and economic growth through creative industries. She promised a review of the Arts Council for future planning and emphasised the need for diverse representation in the arts, including women, working-class individuals, people of colour, disabled, young, and LGBTQ+ communities.

In conclusion, she committed to making arts and culture central to Labour's policy and ensuring accessibility and opportunities for all.

5. GENERAL SECRETARY'S ADDRESS, PAUL W FLEMING

The General Secretary welcome conference to Birmingham; the greatest city at the heart of the greatest region in the world. Synonymous with confectionary and custard, cars, concrete – it was also a crucible of culture.

We may think of the Black Country, the textile mills of the East Mids, or the city of 1,000 trades when we referred to the Midlands – but did we think of a cultural world without this place and its people? No Shakespeare, Elgar, Zephaniah, or Tolkien. No Julie Walters, no David Harewood, no Nolly. Without the Midlands there would not be the tales of Robin Hood, nor the glittering beaches of Skegvegas. There would be no Black Sabbath, no Bhangra, no Byron.

This incredible building told the story of a city built on fire, steel, and culture too. The Town Hall was where Charles Dickens had first read a Christmas Carol in public yet it was also a platform for the greatest orators in our history – from the Chamberlains to Churchill, Lloyd George, the Pankhursts, Fawcett, and the 4,000 strong solidarity rally with Birmingham's most beloved son: Red Robbo. But this place had been built not for rallies nor recitals, but for the Birmingham triennial festival, the longest running classical music festival in the world.

That festival was not art for arts sake: despite hosting Mendelssohn and Dvorak. It was to raise funds for the Birmingham General Hospital. It was art and culture which enabled Birmingham to have one of the first free modern hospitals in the world in 1768.

It was fitting then that the theme of our conference this year was the motto of the Birmingham Corporation: Forward. A word that embodied the unstoppable march of this incredible place, built on industry, immigration, and imagination.

Equity was in the best place to push forward from. Only 25% of British workers were in a union, but in TV, film, and theatre, it was over 75% of performers and stage management who were members of our union. 2023 saw us with the highest year end membership in our history – the 12th largest union in the country.

What did this membership density do? What could 50,000 members achieve? Let me tell you conference: better pay, better conditions.

Average pay in the UK was 15% lower than in 2004, a figure driven by public sector austerity. But Equity's Independent Theatre Agreement reversed that trend- its rates formed the basis for public funding in all four nations. On that agreement, pay wasn't 15% lower, but 15% higher in real terms since 2004. That was your union marching forward, not just fighting back.

At the conference last year, he had said that Council had established a new strike fund: £1 million set aside for a dispute in the middle of the West End negotiations. Our members had rallied to 'Stand Up for 17', and were strike ready for the first time. We wanted a 17% rise in pay and we had won 16.7% - that was a compromise he could live with.

As important, however, were our wins for swings, for dance captains, for understudies

and for stage management. Wins which pushed up pay for the lowest earning in the global centre for commercial theatre. In the first six months of our pay deal, overall West End wages had risen by over 22%, faster than the inflation over the preceding four years.

If we thought we did well for performers and stage management, we had fought harder for directors and designers than ever before. Pay for directors would rise by at least 25% on the West End and over 20% on commercial tours by 2027, rates were already 15% up since 2022 in independent theatre. As a union we knew that there was a lot more to be done to ensure that the creative team knew Equity was their home: new resources, and creative team specific advice was now available on our revamped website. A new insurance and discount package would be announced this autumn, with directors and designers' needs at the forefront of its design. As an illustrious predecessor of mine had once said '1% of f all is f all' – we knew those groundbreaking percentages were just a step on the way to ensuring minimum rates were driving industry rates, and not the other way around.

Unions could not just be willed into being, they were there to serve a function: the negotiation and advancement of collective terms. Without agreements a union was nothing but a well-meaning pressure group, confined by draconian legislation. That was why we had a new drive to fight for agreements wherever we could.

Nowhere had this been more effective than in Scotland and the North of Ireland – both

nations seeing record levels of membership. We had more than tripled the number of agreements in each nation since 2019, and our new Belfast office had delivered our first circus agreement amongst them.

Our revitalised activism in Northern Ireland had given us a new branch, and a record breaking attendance at a rally to oppose Stormont cuts in March this year. We had run incredible campaigns with wins to fight back against austerity in Suffolk, in Bristol, in Scotland and in Nottingham. We had had some wins, and we had had some losses, but it had been Equity banners on the front page of the BBC protesting the fire sale in the wake of Birmingham's bankruptcy.

Equity had been long criticised for being London-centric; and as a Brummie, he was incredibly proud that this year we would be delivering a Birmingham office for the first time. The Midlands had more Equity members than anywhere else outside London and the South East, and it was about time we got stuck in. There was no better way to push back against the loss of Doctors – a vital part of the acting ecology – than a Midlands staff team in Digbeth. He was incredibly proud to announce that we were on track to deliver a South West office in 2025: there would be no more fitting tribute to our campaigning President than an Equity base in her home of Bristol. This would mean Wales and the South West would have dedicated staff teams for the first time – as we had established in every nation and region since 2020, effectively doubling our organising and negotiating resource in each area.

He couldn't mention cuts and our work in Wales without talking about the Welsh National Opera. He said, loud and clear for the funders at Arts Council Wales and Arts Council England: all options were on the table to stop an attack on our members' terms, conditions, and employment. Every member should be signing and sharing our petitions to the funders to restore the cash which the WNO richly deserved. But WNO had to make no mistake: the chorus was what made their company. Reducing their number, and undermining their terms would be met by the strongest resistance from Equity. When we said 'Achub Opera Cenedlaethol Cymru' we meant it: save *our* WNO, the WNO of the workers, of good jobs, and opportunities for working class artists.

And if we needed inspiration, last year conference had seen us award Honorary Life Membership to the Deputies of the English National Opera – a workforce who had spent the following year facing down the transplanting of their lives, the gutting of their company, and the slashing of their terms and conditions. And there the union had won: won a London base, won a rollback on pay cuts, won union contracts at the second Manchester base.

Nobody cared more about that forward push than your President, Lynda Rooke. The thunderous round of applause she received when we attended the SAG-AFTRA negotiations in Los Angeles last year showed that the whole world knew it. Our trip to California last year wasn't just hollow words and rosé by a pool, it was pragmatic, detailed, hard work. Whether meeting the US bosses who were behind 80% of the cash in UK TV and film, or planning our

response to last year's actors and writers strikes across the pond, Lynda was working around the clock to keep our union strong.

Key to SAG-AFTRA's demands last year had been key provisions around casting, self-tapes, and AI. These demands didn't come from nowhere – they were grounded in our work on Stop AI Stealing the Show and our self-tape guidelines. SAG-AFTRA negotiators were clear that it was our work that made their claim possible and galvanised their members: we repaid that compliment with solidarity. Not a single show, not a single casting, came to these shores around the action by our American comrades. At a rally of over 500 people in Leicester Square – we told the bosses whose side we were on.

This year, it was our turn. After our first ever comprehensive pay audit and industrial survey of the TV and film workforce, he could announce the five priorities for those negotiations:

- Minimum pay
- Modern royalty structures for the age of streaming
- Casting guidelines on enforceable agreements
- Hurdles for special stops to stop American style buy-outs
- Protections against the abuse of Artificial Intelligence

95% of scripted content in the UK was on our collective agreements: from Barbie to Game of Thrones. They were as strong as SAG-AFTRA Agreements, their royalty structures were better, and the bosses must know: we wanted what SAG had got and a little bit more as well.

There was no greater testament to the power of those agreements than the royalties members received from them. Equity had sent out £20 million to our members through the Equity Distribution Service since this time last year. 2023 had been a record year, and 2024 was set to be even higher.

In TV and film we were strike ready: For decades, however, we had been afraid, afraid because of the scarring we had suffered from the TV Commercials strike at the start of this century. The scale of the defeat was so damaging that our union had been changed forever. That was why he was incredibly heartened to welcome our comrades from ACTRA, the Canadian screen union to conference this year, who would be speaking tomorrow morning. The tricks they had tried on us 30 years ago were being played out in Canada right now – and not just the tricks, it was literally the same personnel as well. Capital was behaving globally: trade unions had to as well. There was a critical difference between ACTRA and us: ACTRA was winning. From a starting point of losing almost every commercial from the agreement, after a gruelling three years, ACTRA had won back almost half of Canadian commercials back onto an agreement.

That was why we did international work as a union. It was not separate to our power, it was our power. It was not a distraction, it was part of our core work. That was why we had brought the globe to Birmingham this conference: proving that Birmingham really was the centre of the world. We had representatives from Belgium, Canada, Colombia, Croatia, Cuba, Estonia,

France, Germany, Mexico, New Zealand, Palestine, Poland, South Africa, Turkey, and the United States of America, all of whom would be giving us their advice, showing their solidarity, at a special reception celebrating our international work this evening.

It was in that tradition that Equity had raised our voice to condemn workplaces for our members becoming sites of death and terror. Whether it be the bombing of the Mariupol Theatre in Donetsk, Ukraine, or the murder and hostage taking at the Supernova festival by Hamas, these should be sites of freedom and expression, not blood and terror. But the demand to release hostages by Hamas must be matched by a demand to release political prisoners in Israeli gaols, in particular our friend, Mustafa Sheta, producer at the Freedom Theatre in Jenin, held since December last year without charge or trial.

There was apartheid in the West Bank, there was genocide in Gaza, and prisoners must be freed. As in South Africa, Argentina, and Chile we would stand up for artists wherever they were, without fear or favour.

These things were not distant to us and our members. He was pleased to be part of a working group convened by the Film and TV charity to tackle the appalling rise in antisemitism, Islamophobia, and anti-Arab sentiment since October last year. Together with broadcast bosses and the other entertainment unions we would stand together against wicked and dehumanising prejudices which had intensified, even in our industries, in this country, since last year.

Our exclusive story in this morning's Guardian newspaper had shown the other effect that turmoil at home and abroad had led to. Led by Equity's Race Equality Committee, it was our intervention in February which had caused the Arts Council of England to revoke and revise their Relationship Framework Guidance, guidance which warned companies of the risk of taking on overly political work. Darren Henley, the Chief Executive told us that this was entirely unrelated to the situation in the Middle East. However, as the Guardian reports, our Freedom of Information request has revealed that Gaza was at the heart of a meeting with government a few weeks before. Their defence was that this was a regular meeting, and it was just another item. So let's be clear: Dazza's defence is that they regularly discuss the granular detail of government policy – which is not the approach of an arms-length arts council. We know it from the cuts to Oldham Coliseum, the home of 'I Daniel Blake', we know it from gutting culture from the capital by Dorries' dictat – we know from hysteria about rainbow lanyards and the abuse trans people daily receive.

Working with the Guardian shows another success of the last five years: our communications revolution. Hits to our website had grown from 8,000 a month in 2022 to 40,000 a month in 2023. Two thirds of our members opened our fortnightly emails. Being loud as a union was bringing results, we were not just shouting, we were being listened to.

That Equity's intervention had led to the reversal of the guidance in February was one example of the renewed power of our

lobbying and our political influence. The Tory chair of the DCMS select committee had wanted Equity's views on tax credits and film production. When we complained about the lack of a union voice in a review of arts education, we had a call within the hour. Angela Rayner, Thangam Debbonnaire, and Justin Madders were working with us to put our industry concerns at the heart of the New Deal for Working People proposed by Labour. That deal must protect our members like other workers – and it must end the legal carve out which allowed Spotlight and other casting directories to charge our members a fee to join. It was immoral, it was outdated, and it should be illegal – just like in any other industry. As Equity's Vice President Jackie Clune described it: it was a tax on hope.

Our policy work wasn't just theoretical but practical too. Almost half a million pounds had been delivered through our social security team over the last year into the pockets of members – money they were entitled to, but the system wanted to make as hard as possible to get. This was a unique service provided by a trades union, for a workforce who needed a safety net when often unemployed. Its work was so vital and groundbreaking, that our staff team had been invited to give evidence to the United Nations alongside the Chair of our Deaf and Disabled Members Committee. The attacks on social security had become so bad that yes, the United Nations themselves were investigating the impact on working people in the UK – and it was Equity at the forefront giving that evidence.

He owed everything he had to the trades union movement. His parents had got not just their pay, terms, and conditions from their union, but it had also given them their dignity. From a working class background, it was the trade union movement that had encouraged his parents to take him to the ballet, the theatre, to read to him at night. That was the trade union movement giving him exposure to our members, their work, and their art. It was an incredible privilege to be General Secretary of this union, to pay back that debt he owed to the workforce that had helped him, and his parents, and that had given his community their voice. And he was humbled to say that next year he would be asking for members' support as he stood for election for five more years.

One last thing remained to be said: 'to all artists, good work; to all workers, good art; to all people, Equity.' Forward!

6. RICHARD PARKER (MAYOR OF THE WEST MIDLANDS)

The General Secretary introduced Richard Parker, newly elected Mayor of the West Midlands. He thanked Andy Street, Richard's predecessor as mayor, for his support during the pandemic. He emphasised the importance of the arts sector, highlighted promises made by Richard Parker, and discussed the role of the arts in job creation and economic development.

Richard Parker thanked the General Secretary and the voters in the West Midlands. He spoke about the rich cultural heritage and future plans for Birmingham and the region. He addressed the impact of

the cost-of-living crisis and cuts to the arts sector, emphasised fair pay and working conditions, and outlined his manifesto for job creation, skills development, and economic support for the arts, including 150,000 new jobs and apprenticeships. He committed to collaborating with all stakeholders to build a thriving industry in the region.

The speech was followed by the debates on motions 1-5 (Equality and Inclusion) and 6-7 (Internal Union Business).

Conference was adjourned at 17:30.

SUNDAY 19 MAY

Conference was formally re-convened at 09:30.

7. ZARAH SULTANA MP (COVENTRY SOUTH)

Zarah Sultana thanked everyone at Equity for inviting her to speak this morning.

Whilst she was the MP for Coventry South, the home of 2-tone music and the 2021 City of Culture, she had grown up and attended university in Birmingham, a city synonymous with innovation, resilience and rich cultural heritage. From the iconic Birmingham Royal Ballet, Museum and Art Gallery and Repertory Theatre to the legendary Benjamin Zephaniah, Balti Triangle, Black Sabbath and yes, of course, the Peaky Blinders, so it was lovely to welcome everyone here.

She had been a Member of Parliament for four and a half years now. In the chamber, she had sat opposite Boris Johnson, Liz Truss, Suella Braverman, Rishi Sunak, and the rest of them. She had heard them give speech after speech scapegoating migrants and refugees, insulting public sector workers and mocking trans people. After sitting through their speeches, she didn't know she would manage without getting home and binging on a Netflix series, or catching a film at the BFI, or going to a show at one of our fantastic theatres in Coventry. She thanked everyone here today for providing her with respite and escapism from having to listen to Tory MPs!

The performing arts and entertainment industries were special. They gave joy and

value to our lives. They explored what it was to be human, and expressed our hopes and fears, our dreams and nightmares. They helped us to understand the world around us and pointed us to new futures.

"Logic will take you from A to B" Einstein said, "but imagination will take you everywhere." Her politics, her socialism, was about everyone having these opportunities, everyone being able to develop their creativity, and everyone having access to the arts and entertainment.

At the moment, that world only existed in our imagination. Because access to the arts and entertainment was increasingly restricted. Whether you were a performer or a punter, it was becoming a more exclusive world.

A report published this week found that in film, TV, and radio just 8% of creatives were from working class backgrounds. In music and the performing arts, it was 16%. And across the sector Black, Asian and minority ethnic communities were consistently under-represented. And these were not just accidents. They were the result of political choices.

It was what happened when low pay and insecure contracts became rife, with performers often expected to give their time and energy for nothing. It was what happened when funding decisions were too centralised, made behind closed doors and with little or no transparency or accountability. And it was what happened when governments cut budgets and left industries fighting over fewer and fewer resources.

And this was exactly what had happened: Since the Conservatives came to power in 2010, funding for the Department for Culture, Media and Sport had been slashed. Arts Council England had seen cut after cut and, facing massive cuts in central government funding, local authorities in England had slashed nearly £1 billion in arts funding. Here in Birmingham, almost all arts funding was set to go. And these cuts drove low pay and insecurity.

And that was why Equity and trade unionism had never been more important. But it was not just the arts and entertainment industries where workers were being squeezed. It was across the board.

Ordinary people had seen food prices rocket. The cost of energy had gone through the roof. Mortgage payments and rents kept going up and up. Living standards were set to take the biggest hit on record but not everyone was feeling the pinch. Today, the Sunday Times published its annual Rich List. And it was good news for Rishi Sunak: His fortune was up £120 million. He and his wife were now worth more than £650 million. And he was not alone. The wealth of the richest 100 people had doubled since the Tories came to power in 2010. It was nearly £600 billion in total.

This was not a cost-of-living crisis because there wasn't enough wealth. It was a cost-of-living crisis because the super-rich had hoarded all the wealth! And in the last few years, as so often, trade unions had led the way.

From actors to academics, posties to performers, working people deserved a better deal, but power conceded nothing

without demand, and so had to keep on demanding better. We could not be complacent, but she believed we were on the tail-end of 14 years of Conservative rule.

Next year's Equity conference she hoped would take place after we had finally booted the Tories out of Downing Street. It was not the prevailing view in the Parliamentary Labour Party, but she wanted them to be bolder going into the next election. She wanted them to respond to the crises we faced with a policy platform that recognised the scale of the challenges: from the climate crisis to the poverty crisis, from the crisis facing our public services, to the crisis in arts and entertainment.

And that meant everything from a Green New Deal, rapidly decarbonising and investing in green jobs, to scrapping the two-child limit and introducing universal free school meals. And it means bold policies for Equity's industries too: after 14 years of Conservative cuts, we needed a plan of public investment in arts and entertainment taking us to the European average of 0.5% of GDP.

And for those in government who knew the price of everything but the value of nothing, they should remember that this was an investment in an industry that contributed over £100 billion to the UK economy annually, employing more than two million people, and that every £1 spent generated an additional 6% extra for the economy.

We needed to decentralise funding decisions, making them more democratic and more transparent. And we needed a better deal for workers in these industries...

just as we needed a better deal for workers across the economy.

When wages were lower than they had been in 2008 and living standards were taking their biggest hit on record, it was clear we needed to roll back the 40-year assault on workers' rights and empower our trade unions to fight for their members.

And for that, Labour had the New Deal for Working People which promised to end poverty pay, crackdown on insecure work, and repeal some of the anti-union laws.

Members may have read about a renewed big business attempt to get this watered-down, with a crunch meeting happening at Labour HQ last Tuesday. She was pleased to say the affiliated unions had held firm, but it would not be the last fight. And if they got into government, the lobbying would only grow.

Like the late great Tony Benn said "there is no final victory, just as there is no final defeat, there are the same battles to be fought over and over again."

So, from the ballot box to the picket line, let's get ready for that fight, let's stand together against those who try to divide us and let's build that better brighter world where the arts are accessible to all, and everyone has the opportunity to reach their potential.

Thank you and solidarity.

8. MARIE KELLY, ACTRA (ALLIANCE OF CANADIAN CINEMA, TELEVISION AND RADIO ARTISTS)

The President introduced Marie Kelly, a veteran lawyer with a long history of mobilising Canada's labour movement, previously with the Ontario Nurses' Association and more recently becoming the first woman in North America to be appointed Assistant Director of the United Steelworkers. She represented ACTRA's 30,000 members who worked in Canada's screen industry, leading the charge for government policies and collective agreements that demanded fairness, safety, and respect for performers across the country. Marie was also a great ally of Equity.

Marie Kelly said it was great to be here in Birmingham, the birthplace of Equity's General Secretary and modern-day manufacturing. The heartbeat of industrial unions and the iron fist of the working class. It was a pleasure to be here with Eleanor Noble, proud President of ACTRA representing 30,000 performers from coast to coast to coast in Canada.

She started by thanking Equity members, not just for being here at this conference, but for being open and honest with them when they had started their negotiations in the commercial sector about what Equity had gone through. This had informed them about what they needed to do to fight back. She thanked Equity for the longstanding relationship between our two unions: the information we shared, and the solidarity to share, meant a great deal to ACTRA.

She was sad to say they shared Equity's grief as well, after 60 years of working under their commercial agreement, the ad agencies had locked them out and walked away. Their commercial negotiations had ended with Scott Knox, the vile mastermind behind this union busting scheme, essentially telling their members stand by your phone, we're still going to use you but only when we want to and we'll pay as little as we choose to. The commercial sector provided an important source of income for performers who often had to weave together a living in various types of creative work. The sudden loss of the commercial work was devastating for many of their members. What they hadn't counted on was the resolve of actor performers who had stood their ground for two years refusing to work for these union busting agencies. It was not a secret that she was fuming over the treatment by these agencies of their workers. Their story was a David and Goliath story, it was a senseless and a cruel battle. But it was also a story of when we linked our arms together, we raised our fists, we fought back.

She told the story of a Rogers commercial that had taken place in Toronto in a restaurant. About 15-20 members had decided to disrupt that commercial set. They had waited on a side street in Toronto and practiced marching up and down and had someone watching that commercial set until they had all of their lighting set up. When they got the word it was all set up, they had marched down that street like they were the Labour Day parade in Toronto. They had horns, whistles, music, they had everything and had marched with pride. And they had marched up and down outside that restaurant making as much noise as

possible and the first thing they had to do was make it SOC (silent on camera). Why? Because they had lights set up outside and so they had to have cords coming out of the windows which they couldn't close. And then they had to change the camera angles because they were constantly in front of the windows. And they kept sending people out trying to convince us to just give up. And it was a 12-hour battle of attrition on that pavement outside that restaurant.

When it looked like they were moving one way, they would move with them and got mirrors and aimed them inside so the sunshine was hitting the performers, and they couldn't get their shots. And they pissed them off like you wouldn't believe. And then night-time came, and they turned on all their big outside lights so that they could continue to shoot. So their placards became strobe lights. For 12 hours, they kept at them.

They had cost them money that day and gave their members just a little bit of vengeance. But mostly they let the ad industry know that they would not walk away unscathed from this battle, and the union would keep on them in every way they could until the agencies capitulated. Their hard work had driven some of the agencies back into their collective agreement.

Last year they had looked at the numbers and their members had actually made 23 million dollars from the commercial sector. Which was only half of what they had originally, and they would be going after the other half. But their members had that 23 million dollars in their pockets and they were very proud of that fact.

They had also learnt that they needed union density in the commercial sector if they were going to keep their hands on it. They were going to get that as well. As a union, they had changed their membership rules, they had reduced permits for non-union workers and they had hired organisers. They wanted to make it easier to join the union and they wanted the non-union performers to know that they were welcome in their family. The lockout had forever changed the union, it had elevated their collective understanding that member involvement and engagement must drive the union forward, not just in the commercial sector but in everything they did.

Their TV and Film agreement and negotiations were up this year as well and she was the chief negotiator for the union. It was her favourite part of the job. It was the one time every three years they got a seat at the dinner table and she relished being the unwelcome guest.

She gave a nod to their sister union across the border, SAG-AFTRA, and the US unions in the entertainment industry for the fight they had had last year. They had stood their ground to achieve fundamental change to their collective agreement. It was our turn now.

Back home, the Writers Guild of Canada had just inked an agreement with the industry. They needed the power of a 96.5% strike vote – the first time the writers in Canada had ever taken a strike vote. They needed that just to make a deal with the industry this year.

So, they had much to do to take back what had been taken from them. While many

performers liked self-tapes, nobody liked all the additional jobs they'd taken on: sound technician, camera, lighting, director, editor... all for free. Plus, more pages to learn and less time to do it in. Were they really watching all the audition tapes that members sent in? She didn't know but she was sure they saved a lot of money by offloading the work onto them.

And the new streaming business model, how was that working over here? Back home, they had found a noticeable drop in the amount of cheques that were going out. Decades ago, they had fought for a piece of the pie when their productions actually brought in loads of money. And they were going to fight this year to get that back.

They often talked about AI, and the responsibility of our industry to protect the magical creative element that was the core of our work and their business. As AI grew, they had been busy in Canada talking to their parliament about much needed protections that they needed around it and they would combine that with bargaining proposals this year. Much like workers across the globe, Canadian workers had felt the loss of buying power with record inflation.

In North America, public approval for unions was up at 70%. They hadn't had that level of support in a very long time. What did that mean? It meant the fight for fairness was coming back, and union support along with it. All of that was to say the battle for labour fairness and its many facets was not unique to our industry. The struggle for artists was one that intersected with all workers who fought for universal guaranteed income, tenants'

rights, environmental protections and so many more causes that shaped the fabric of our society. And once again, despite the wide array of concerns, a common thread through all of this was the power of collective action.

She so proud to work with Equity and the incredible brain trust and talent here in the UK. Shoulder to shoulder we fought against greed and worker exploitation. After all, what was the only thing standing in the way of billion-dollar studios, media giants, corporate interests running roughshod over creators? Their unions.

So as a union member it was your job, and her job, to feed the power of your union through engagement and solidarity. The elite in our society owned the wealth, they had the ear of government and chairs at every dinner table. We on the other hand, had no personal power or wealth, and often we had to fight with our governments to simply do the right thing. But when workers came together, when we linked our arms, that was real solidarity. And solidarity was all we would ever need. Solidarity everyone!

9. ASSISTANT GENERAL SECRETARY (LIVE PERFORMANCE), ADAM ADNYANA

Adam Adnyana introduced himself as Equity's new Assistant General Secretary for Live Performance from March of this year. His previous service with Equity began in 2017 as the National Official for Scotland and Northern Ireland. He looked forward to meeting everyone and hearing all the contributions here at Conference.

His role was of course previously held by Hilary Hadley, who retired earlier this year. In preparing this report, he was reminded that the substantial member wins delivered over the last year were a testament to Hilary's commitment to positive industrial relations and her leadership of the live performance department.

The department was made up of a staff team of skilled and dedicated industrial officials, organisers and assistant organisers. He wanted to take this opportunity to particularly recognise the work of the industrial officials, Lottie Stables, Charlotte Bence, Hannah Plant, Karrim Jalali and Mike Day who had worked with our incredible workplace depts and committees to deliver important industrial outcomes.

He updated on some of the results achieved over the last year in live performance. In the West End, Equity had negotiated a guaranteed 16.7% increase to minimums. This package also included improvements in stage management, dance captain and swing fees and increases in the relocation allowance. In addition to the boost to minimum rates of pay, these

features recognised the true value of our hardworking understudies, swings and stage management and their vital role in saving so many shows from cancellation.

When the negotiated deal was put to members, the turnout was more than 80% with an acceptance rate in excess of 94%. This result would not have been possible without the hard work of the West End deps, Equity members and everyone who supported the Stand Up for 17 campaign.

In addition to significant improvements to members pay, terms and conditions in the commercial and subsidised theatre agreements, Equity had secured a working party with SOLT/UK Theatre to develop a trial of five-day working weeks in the rehearsal period. The scope of this trial included the West End, commercial theatre and the subsidised sector. Crucially, a five-day working week would not mean that the usual rate of pay would decrease. The ongoing working party represented a member led challenge to accepted ways of working and a commitment to developing solutions that offered real world impacts, improving the working lives of our members.

Another area of work across the commercial and subsidised sector was accommodation and allowances. Commercial and subsidised managers agreed to Equity's request to undertake joint work to address the problems our members experienced with the digs system. Measures included the development of a code of conduct for minimum standards on digs, a requirement on venues to adhere to our minimum standards and producers and engagers taking more responsibility for the vetting of digs providers, and supporting

members in the event of any issues. A key development would be the introduction of a new complaints procedure, enabling the removal of hosts from digs lists if they did not offer accommodation of a standard that met our code of conduct or if they demonstrated inappropriate behaviour.

Our Dignity in Digs campaign showed us that members' main concerns with accommodation were the lack of oversight, and the lack of support when things went wrong. These initiatives changed that, and provided people working away from home with much better protection.

Again, in conjunction with improvements in payments for understudy, swing and stage management colleagues, changes in allowances formed a key part of negotiations. The adoption of four-week advance payment of touring and subsistence monies enabled people to build up sums for deposits, secure accommodation earlier and get a cheaper rate.

In addition to negotiated increases in rates for Designers and Choreographers, a collection of new four-year agreements for Directors working in theatre emerged from claims to management in the West End, Commercial and Subsidised sectors. This process secured guaranteed increases for Directors, delivering major uplifts to the minimum rates, and further reinforcing Equity's position as the trade union for directors.

In the Independent theatre sector, extensive member consultation saw a new agreement deliver major improvements to members. These included increases of over 10% to

the minimum weekly salary and over 20% to minimum daily fees for performers and stage managers, and an over 10% increase to fees for choreographers, designers and directors. In addition to these rises, significant uplifts to meal, accommodation and touring allowances were agreed.

As with our negotiations in other parts of the theatre industry, in discussions with the Independent Theatre Council, Equity made it clear that the principal responsibility for finding and providing accommodation lay with producers. We also confirmed in the agreement a shortened maximum working week in the rehearsal stage and a reduction in maximum weekly hours during production week. These features were significant steps in Equity's Work, Rest and Pay Campaign which was set on substantively improving holiday and work/life balance provisions, touring and accommodation allowances and minimum pay levels.

An additional key initiative was the inclusion of the requirement for producers to have an environmental sustainability policy, demonstrating the range of impacts that could be achieved through Equity's industrial levers.

Underpinning this work to drive up industry standards was a strong record of holding bosses to account by utilising instruments such as employment tribunal action to enact change. Most notably, producers of smaller scale panto had experienced first-hand the union's willingness to exhaust all available legal processes to fight for our members on issues of holiday pay, pensions and worker status.

Industrial and negotiation activities with standing companies in areas such as ballet and opera continued across the UK.

Funding cuts imposed on the English National Opera were characterised by management's decision to reduce the ENO workforce's contracts by reducing their ten month a year contracts to just six months, with a raft of devastating contractual changes which would destroy work-life balance and significantly reduce choristers' hourly rates. The reduced opera season would also impact the many actors, dancers, directors, designers, stage management and freelance singers ENO engaged around the opera season. After negotiations failed to produce sufficient progress, Equity wrote to management notifying them of our intent to ballot our members for industrial action.

ENO chorus returned a 100% yes vote to strike action on a 94% turnout. Following the ballot, increased leverage in negotiations enabled the union to push back on the detrimental proposals and, after revision, management improved the offer and all choristers kept their jobs.

In other significant developments, Equity launched a choreographers and movement directors' network with 200 attendees at the first meeting and solid ongoing interest in building industrial power to improve working conditions. Work also commenced on organising projects in greenfield areas in employment for singers and dancers, where atypical and precarious work models were a reality for our members. This included building an active working group of members to tackle low pay and poor conditions in freelance opera festival work.

This work demonstrated the importance of a strong trade union presence in the sector, and the concerning recent developments at the Welsh National Opera were a reminder that the fight against crippling arts cuts and their detrimental impact on workers went on.

In the variety sector, members continued to engage with their union through their local branches and branch variety officers, through the Variety, Circus and Entertainment Committee and through our member led, staff supported networks.

Networks were in place for comedians, storytellers, puppeteers, drag artists, circus performers and wrestlers and continued to work to deliver meaningful improvements in the workplace.

The Comedians' Network had produced resources including a guide for members considering taking shows to the Edinburgh Festival Fringe, the Storytellers' Network had surveyed members on rates of pay across the UK and the Puppeteers' Network was investigating health and safety issues such as the instances of injury to performers working in physically demanding conditions.

Our Circus Network group had created a standard contract template for cabaret in non-standard circus venues such as nightclubs, restaurants and festivals, our Drag Network meetings were held in multiple locations across the UK and our Wrestlers' Network was reviewing the findings of their pay audit to determine what reward structures were best suited to the work they did on multiple platforms.

As always, our work on claims and legal support continued to deliver money into the pockets of variety members, with a total of 140 cases in 2023 and over £115,000 recovered.

Our theatre organiser Steffan Blayney worked with colleagues to design and deliver structured, nationwide training to Equity's deps, further developing the skills of our committed and effective live performance workplace representatives.

All of the work outlined was supported by colleagues in the nations and regions, who continued to conduct their own cast visits, establish and promote Equity house agreements with specific focus on employers in receipt of public funding, and lobbied devolved governments and local authorities on issues such as cuts to arts funding.

Whether it was a new Equity agreement with independent producer Esk Theatre company in England, a fringe agreement with startup Bohemians Theatre in Wales, the establishment of new Equity contracts with publicly funded Perth Horsecross Arts in Scotland or a groundbreaking formal agreement with In Your Space circus in Northern Ireland, Equity's industrial footprint was expanding.

A coordinated plan to establish Equity agreements for producers in receipt of public funding across the UK was a key shared project for the live performance department and colleagues in the nations and regions. He believed it was fair and reasonable to approach organisations and producers in receipt of public funding, outline the appropriate Equity rates,

terms and conditions and seek to establish industrial agreements on that basis. It was also reasonable that, if that process failed to produce a meaningful outcome, we engaged with the funders themselves to object to the flow of public money to employers not paying decent wages to workers and failing to deliver quality terms of employment and fair work. Vague commitments to general industry rates of pay and management led employment charters were no substitute for collectively bargained industrial agreements crafted through negotiation with a recognised trade union, and that was the standard we demanded of our publicly funded arts employers and funding bodies.

Attacks on public arts funding continued to threaten employment opportunities for our members. Shrinking budgets, precarity of employment and a devaluation of the arts and creative industries jobs were challenges, but we stood firm in campaigning against any deterioration of hard-won gains.

With over 500 individual cast visits conducted by live performance department staff in 2023, our team would continue to engage with members and non-members wherever they worked, seeking new opportunities for establishing robust industrial agreements and expanding the presence of our trade union across all areas of employment across the sector.

Members' commitment and energy as activists was an invaluable resource for the department and he thanked everyone for supporting his team and their work, and playing a key role in delivering for Equity members working in live performance. Thank you.

The speech was followed by the debates on motions 8-13 (Live Performance), motion 14 (Variety), the emergency motion and motion 15 (Equity Motion to TUC).

10. HONORARY TREASURER'S SUBMISSION OF 2023 ACCOUNTS

David John, Honorary Treasurer, said it was wonderful to have so many guests from around the world with us this year. He was a great believer in international cooperation between the trade unions in our industry.

One of his duties as Honorary Treasurer was to submit Equity's annual accounts to conference and he was delighted to be able to do so with our beloved union in a stable financial position. Before looking at the headline figures he wanted us all to remember our recent history. The Covid pandemic had cost our union £1.25 million in benevolent payments alone, because 40% of our members had received no support from the government. Our industry had been virtually closed down overnight. There were members who had been forced out of the industry and had not been able to return. And we should never forget that, tragically, a number of our members had lost their lives to Covid-19.

We had also had a large staff pension deficit to face up to. That had cost the union £2 million. Guild House had been in urgent need of refurbishment which was carried out at a significant cost. However, it was now a wonderful place to work which was the least that our wonderful, hard-working staff deserved. And on top of all of that we had had the disaster of the Liz Truss administration. This had caused many of

our members to fall into financial hardship because of such high inflation and high mortgage rates, high rents and high energy bills in a post pandemic period.

What we had to accept was that these rises in the cost of living would never be reversed. Inflation was coming down but this would not mean that the cost of living was coming down...just going up at a slower pace. Wages all over the UK including in many areas in our industry had not kept pace over the last 14 years with the rises in the cost of living. The General Secretary had mentioned yesterday the good work Equity had done on rates since 2004, but we had further to go. It was a fact that it was now harder to make a living in our industry than it had been 14 years ago. So what was crucial for us as a union was to take our wonderful Stand Up For 17 campaign as a glorious example of what we could achieve if members stood together in solidarity behind our staff. The main ambition of this group of Officers was to achieve better terms and conditions and better pay for our hard-working members. If we could achieve this it would attract more new members and rejoiners which was of paramount importance to us because membership subscriptions were our core income. The more members we had, the stronger we became – financially and industrially.

So on to his report on the accounts. He wanted to draw attention to a few key figures.

There were two main areas of the accounts he wanted everyone to understand by the time they left this hall. These were the Statement of Comprehensive Income on

page 8 in the accounts, and the Statement of Financial Position on page 9.

Our operating surplus for 2023 was a healthy £482,703. This was good news and broadly in line with what we had planned for in our budget. So what led us to this figure? We took our total income which was £9,760,248. This was actual money that had come in to the union during 2023. Then we subtract our total expenditure, that's money that we actually spent which was £9,277,545. That left us with our operating surplus of £482,703.

Regarding membership subscriptions, recruitment and retention were incredibly important. It was brilliant to see that our membership now stood at just under 50,000. That showed that we were moving in the right direction as a union but we had to work hard together for the rest of the year to get it up to 50,000. That would be a fine day.

Moving on to the second area of the accounts that he wanted everyone to understand, the Statement of Financial Position (page 9). This was basically what the union was worth. Our assets. This included our tangible fixed assets, actual things that we owned, a figure of £8,147,287 which included our buildings in Glasgow and London. We added to that our investment portfolio which had recovered well from the Truss debacle and stood at £16,083,276 at the end of 2023. It was great to see that, having divested from fossil fuels, the value of our investments had nonetheless risen, proving that you did not have to invest in fossil fuels for your investments to grow. As he had announced at last year's conference, he was very

proud to say that in Equity's investment portfolio there were now no bombs, no baccy and no fossil fuels!

Back to the Statement of Financial Position. What we as a union were worth. We had to account for current assets, which was mostly money that would be distributed to members and non-members from residuals and royalties. These were accounted for as current liabilities. Money that we held but would be distributing. We also had to account for the provision for other possible liabilities including staff pension liabilities, but without going into complicated details, our net assets stood at £22,597,461. That was a healthy rise from 2022.

So the headlines from the Equity Accounts 2023 were that we had achieved a healthy operating surplus and we were now worth around £700,000 more than last year, at just over £22.5 million. All very positive news and he commended these accounts to conference.

The financial stability of the union was of course incredibly important. We could never risk losing our independence as other unions had in the past. He didn't believe that would happen and we were not at any risk as things stood. But if the recent past taught us anything, it was that things could change quickly and we had to look after our assets very carefully as we didn't know what might be around the corner. We most certainly couldn't have predicted the last five years, the Covid pandemic, the virtual closing down of our industry and the crashing of the economy by our own government which put our pension funds and investments at risk. We didn't know what the future held but we would certainly

be campaigning hard against these latest draconian arts cuts. Whatever else did come during the rest of this year, be it an expensive court case on behalf of our members or something else, he was confident that we were in a strong enough financial position to face up to it.

He thanked his fellow Officers. It had been a real privilege to serve this union with such a hard-working and dedicated team of lay-officers. They were all busy and experienced working members and he would very much like them to carry on for another term as Officers. That would of course be determined by our upcoming Council elections.

And also huge thanks to our bureaucrat in chief, our excellent General Secretary Paul W Fleming. We were extremely fortunate at this time to have such a dedicated and passionate leader who fully understood our industry, fighting the good fight on our behalf. It was great news that he would be standing to serve another five years.

He also thanked the membership department for administrating the Benevolent Fund and in particular Nusrat Raahi and Lacy Featherstone. Activists should be aware that the Benevolent Fund was in great demand. Many of our members were still struggling in this cost of living crisis and were in need our help and advice.

And finally, a heartfelt vote of thanks went to our fantastic financial department. These accounts were put together by them and they were a great team. Daniel Fryer, Gareth Rawlings and our Assistant General Secretary for Finance and Operations, Beccy Reese.

Conference. In what would most likely be a General Election year it was incredibly important for us as trade unionists in this industry to put pressure on people standing to be MPs in our local constituencies. Whatever happened there would be significant change. We had to try to use our growing power to influence those who may be elected to the next UK government. Get in touch with your prospective MPs and ask them: 'will you protect and improve arts funding or not?' Do they understand the importance of arts and culture to jobs, to the UK economy and to our communities. To quote our President, Lynda Rooke "have no doubts, we are an economic powerhouse." Make sure they understand that the arts aren't a 'nice to have', they are a 'need to have'. Help make our voice strong at the General Election and speak out loudly and clearly against these horrendous cuts in arts and culture funding and arts education which had been decimated over the past 14 years particularly for working class communities. It was much harder now to get educated in the arts if you came from a lower socio economic background than it had been when he was training and received a government grant. And the result of this was clear. As Zarah Sultana had said, recent research by the Creative Industries Policy and Evidence Centre had revealed that 8% of Film and TV creatives are from working class backgrounds, the lowest level in a decade. Just think about that. There was a scandalous lack of opportunities for working class creatives and if this was allowed to continue we would witness a lost generation of working class voices and talent. As we said at the Equity Class Network, talent is everywhere, opportunity was not. This was why Equity had joined the Arts Apocalypse Campaign

alongside 14 other organisations including sister trade unions.

So, whoever formed the next government, let them be in no doubt of what was required for our wonderful industry to thrive and let them know that we would hold their feet to the fire. Let them hear our voice. Tell them that we're moving "from resilience to resistance". Tell them that they must "stop the cuts and save the arts." Thank you conference.

He commended the 2023 Annual Accounts to Conference.

11. ASSISTANT GENERAL SECRETARY (FINANCE AND OPERATIONS), BECCY REESE

Beccy Reese thanked David John, Honorary Treasurer, the Officers and Council for their healthy scrutiny of the finances.

The focus of the year for her department had been taking a strategic look at how we could improve our systems and processes. From processing new member forms and subscription payments to monitoring our cash flow and budget on a monthly basis. From improving engagement with our suppliers to understanding and developing an intentional and considered approach to the use of IT infrastructure safely.

A lot of our ways of working had been added to piecemeal over time. 2023 had been about taking a step back and re-evaluating what we were doing – continuing to try and understand what we did and why, where we'd like to be and how to get there.

Our different types of membership and the different subscription rates were a very concrete example of this. Our membership structure had developed over years – responding to changing requests and demands from Council, committees and staff. We had ended up with a complex structure for the number of members we had, with 21 membership categories and 22 different subscription fees (that's officially – we had over 100 different amounts recorded on our system when she had first attempted to model future incomes!)

The membership team had taken time to unpack why we had the structure we had and had undertaken a full scale review to help arrive at what we thought was a simplified, improved and fairer approach.

Why? From a finance point of view, it was difficult to model future cash flows and manage the system in general with so many different categories. For potential and existing members, it was difficult to navigate and to know which was the correct membership type to apply for. There were also variable benefits applicable to different types of membership.

This complex structure had been a burden on membership team resources and had created additional elements within our membership system which required bespoke elements adding further complexity – increasing support costs and reducing flexibility within the system.

To address all of this, we had conducted a full scale review. We had used insights from a membership wide survey and discussions with staff as well as benchmarking

against similar unions, and then taken a comprehensive paper to Council detailing potential reforms, including the rationale & risks. Once changes had been approved at Council, it had taken more hard work by the membership team and our website providers to deliver all the necessary changes.

We were now in a much better place. All members who paid subscriptions were now included in one of three categories based on whether they paid a full rate, a subsidised rate (50%) or a reduced rate (25%, mainly for those in education or training). This was much easier to understand and administer, and much more flexible for future changes.

In addition, all members now had access to the same benefits from the day they joined. Full insurance cover and industrial support, and full participation in the democracy of the union for all members – whatever rate they paid.

We now provided a 50% membership rate to all over 66s earning under £40,000. Previously there had been a requirement for 21 years unbroken service to be demonstrated – affecting women and others with caring responsibilities who were more likely to come in and out of the workforce. The new system also allowed members to move between membership types.

We had improved access to reduced membership by increasing the range of courses accepted (we had previously only accepted courses which had been accredited by Spotlight). This was now open to more members on a wider range of courses including on the job training. These

potential members were disproportionately working class and from diverse backgrounds. And we had removed a step in the process which was difficult to administer.

We were now better able to balance the need for financial stability with offering subsidised rates more consistently, and keeping rates below those of many other comparable unions.

These changes had ensured that our membership rates and types were clearer and more easily understood by current and future members and all staff. We had a more effective administration function making better use of our resources. And membership benefits were more focused on supporting performers and creative professionals in work or actively seeking work, in-line with our mission, vision and values.

She had spoken to conference last year about how we were taking a broader approach to supporting staff in their use of technology at work. We could no longer rely on a single staff member providing IT support as part of their job, so we were increasing the staff resource and establishing a wider staff network involving those who were responsible for managing key systems – such as the distribution and membership databases. This allowed us to plan for better services and move beyond firefighting problems. We had had a successful year of being more engaged with our suppliers.

When it came to cyber security, we were at risk to be targeted for the data we held and for what we represented politically. We

held personal data on our members – and were more enticing due to the perception that we held data on lots of high profile celebrities. We knew that trades unions in liberal democracies were being targeted – generally at a rate of one a month in 2023 – one Boston-based union had a theft through a cyber attack of \$6.4million dollars from its welfare fund. Closer to home, CWU and Aslef faced serious attacks in March this year. Our IT team was tightening up every area to reduce the methods of attack, including increased security internally.

When reviewing these processes and structures the main purpose is to make sure that the systems we have work for us as a union and for the rest of the staff. It was absolutely crucial that every member of the department was connected to the wider industrial agenda of the union and understood our mission, vision and values.

In 2021/22 we refurbished Guild House – making our head office a space capable of providing effective office and meeting room space for staff and members, as well as projecting our power and strength as a union. We were just about to sign a lease for a new office in Birmingham and we would also be reviewing and refreshing our office spaces in Glasgow, Manchester and Cardiff – with the same team who worked on the successful refurb in Guild House.

We would be launching our new insurance for members in October. For many members this was a vital provision – from a recent membership survey, it was the second most valued benefit of membership, after negotiating workplace pay and conditions.

The survey also showed a lack of understanding of what insurances were being provided and confusion around the basic offer and what was being offered as a top-up or additional purchase cover. Since then, we had questioned whether the provision was the best cover for Equity members – how was the cover tailored to the entertainment industry; were the products technically and financially sound and were the benefits as good as they could be, etc.?

We had taken the decision to tender for all our key high value contracts. We hadn't done this for a long time, leading to the risk that the service was no longer aligned with the values and direction of the union and was uncompetitive. In April 2023 we had tendered for our insurance broker service. We engaged an insurance broker who sourced insurance providers for the members' insurance we provided as a benefit of union membership. The tender had set out what we wanted from an insurance broker: did they have an understanding of what Equity was and its membership?; could they provide a good administration service to answer queries?; could they provide documentation, assist members making claims and provide clear materials explaining the insurance products, cover and limitations?; could they demonstrate a collaborative approach to working with the Equity staff team and the selected underwriter in a tripartite way?; and did they have a transparent, clear & competitive cost structure?

The panel had felt that Verlingue were the best fit. We had now been working with Verlingue over the past 12 months. Our aim was to improve the benefits and to

simplify the cover. We had asked to look at removing all top-up/additional benefits to provide a single product – most importantly to look at the cost of providing 24 hour accident cover for all members. So they were always covered whether or not they could demonstrate paid employment. We always wanted to improve the temporary total disablement benefit – which was currently £150 per week, improve the sums insured for property cover – currently £500 maximum or £100 for a single article and investigate whether professional indemnity could be included.

Verlingue were currently taking our requests out to the insurance markets and shortlisting the insurers who were able to provide a good product for members. The benefits had not been changed since 2013 and the premium (the price we paid per member) had not changed since 2019 – when the insurance market had looked very different to the present. So – the insurance would cost more – the challenge was for us to get a good offer for all members that was affordable. The new offer would be in place on 1 October and when we had finalised the details, we would be able to provide firm information on the benefits. She introduced the team from Verlingue – some of whom were here for the rest of the day at conference, and she encouraged members to speak to them.

12. APPEAL ON BEHALF OF THE INTERNATIONAL COMMITTEE FOR ARTISTS' FREEDOM (ICAF)

Rosamund Shelley, Chair of ICAF, said that the International Reception the previous evening had been amazing. She was so glad to see the union platforming our international work.

She appealed to conference for their donations to enable them to continue their wonderful work. She was delighted to say that the union would be contributing an annual budget to the committee from July this year, but we needed more to support artists in real hardship, censorship, exile, persecution, imprisonment, torture and death around the world. She said that we were the only performing arts union with an international solidarity committee.

They had allocated £10,000 to Ukrainian artists, as the result of a legacy from Bobby Mill. They had sent money to the Freedom Theatre in Jenin, in Palestine, which had been damaged. She read a letter to one of their workers, who had been detained and remained in prison. No evidence had been presented of any wrongdoing and they were deeply concerned. She read a letter to Mustafa Sheta, expressing ICAF and Equity's unwavering solidarity with him and all artists in Palestine, and calling for his immediate release. They were also supporting a second theatre in Gaza, whose directors had fled to Cairo. She read their letter of response, expressing their thanks for the union's support and friendship.

They had also supported actors from Belarus, some of whom had left and were

now living in Warsaw, and some of whom they were supporting to relocate to the UK.

Meanwhile, they continued to monitor the treatment of artists worldwide, whose creativity and freedom of speech were threatened. Most recently, a Zimbabwean comedian who had been kidnapped and tortured. Members would have read this week about a well-known Iranian filmmaker, sentenced to another eight years in prison because of the content of his films. He had recently fled Iran, but there was a great deal of concern for his crew who remained. She thanked the wonderful Louise McMullan, and Tom Peters, who she had recently handed over to on the staff, and who was working tirelessly on their behalf.

She thanked conference for their contributions and support.

The President everyone to head over to The Rep and engage with the fringe events.

Conference was adjourned at 13:10.

MONDAY 20 MAY

Conference was formally re-convened at 10:00.

13. ASSISTANT GENERAL SECRETARY (RECORDED MEDIA), JOHN BARCLAY

John Barclay introduced himself. He thanked each member of the Recorded Media department for their support. He also thanked the Equity Distributions Service, and celebrated £15m distributed

to members through it. He thanked the Secretariat and the Officers. He also thanked all the Council members, the Screen and New Media Actors Committee and all colleagues in the nations and regions.

He offered his solidarity to ACTRA and to Eleanor Noble and Marie Kelly in their commercials industrial struggle.

He spoke about the strike of Equity's sister union SAG-AFTRA, which had lasted 120 days and was an inspiration to all. SAG-AFTRA inspired Equity in its own negotiations, work on which was ongoing. He said Equity was going to mirror and advance beyond the SAG-AFTRA deal, revolutionising its negotiations and taking everything by storm. He said that Equity would demand the impossible, and get it, with the support of conference. He thanked Industrial Officials Natalie Barker and Dominic Bascombe and members in Coronation Street, Emmerdale and Brookside, who were given a pay offer that they had rejected. The bosses had then come back and offered a better deal, showing that there was power in a union. He thanked members on The Terror who had been steadfast in recovering £1.5m for the cast after the film was shown on UK TV in breach of contract.

The Supporting Artists Network had signed up an astonishing 1,300 members. Industrial Official Shannon Sailing was leading the push on games. He said that the real story should be heard about what the games industry got away with, and it was outrageous that the industry received public money but refused to engage with members and the union. He said that Equity members

were not hobbyists but professional artists and workers, and the industry belonged to them and not the engagers.

He noted that Equity was in the lead-up to PACT negotiations and negotiations with streamers. The union was conducting the most open, transparent and democratic process for these agreements and was almost ready to unveil its claim. The agreement would be revolutionary. He said Equity would be tabling claims to increase fees, overhauling terms and conditions and provisions, including working together with the stunt committee, and overhauling recruitment structures and addressing imputed licence fees. Equity would be codifying the Green Rider into its agreements. Equity would be looking at difficult areas of make-up and hair; improving self-tape provisions; and doing groundbreaking work in relation to AI, going beyond what SAG-AFTRA achieved. He said that Equity would revolutionise its approach and lead the world in AI work, and was already recognising opportunities and changing the tone of how AI was talked about.

He moved on to commercials, commending the work of Industrial Official Yvonne Smith in this area. He said that the industry was bloated with arrogance, elitism and money. They squeezed members' pay and usage and did not consider the union as part of the industry. He called on members to use their voice to tell commercials engagers that the union was here and not going away. He recognised the context of the historical industrial dispute in commercials that Equity had lost. He said that Saatchi and Saatchi had a £57bn turnover and wouldn't reach an agreement with Equity,

and a lot of big TV producers worked with ISBA and wouldn't have an agreement with Equity, and the union was challenging that. He said that when Equity had first approached the IPA for increases on the fees, they hadn't gone up for two decades or more. He quoted the response verbatim: "although Equity may in principle desire or have collectively bargained national agreements for its members in production sectors, no such agreement exists or should be construed to exist in the advertising sector. Nor does Equity seek to get one". He indicated that he found the offer of a £3 increase derisory. He said that the global advertising industry was worth £647 billion and was forecast to reach £975 billion by 2032, and it was necessary to push back. Equity shared the same issue as Canadian colleagues.

He said that Equity had taken legal advice on this. Equity became aware that engagers were issuing their own rates. The union had spoken to a barrister who had confirmed they were opening up the whole industry to investigation by the competitions authority, which had the power to fine companies 10% of their global turnover. Following this, Equity had written to them outlining these problems. He gave the engagers' responses, including "we don't agree with your position" and "I don't know who you are". He offered the reply, "well you soon will!" Their outside counsel had demanded an apology and retraction. He had responded "no!" He said Equity would write to them one more time. If they did not agree to negotiate a collectively bargained agreement, Equity would refer them to the Competition and Markets Authority who would crawl over them for two years.

He invited conference to get involved and join the commercials mailing list. A Commercials Network would be launched. He said we had to help ourselves, we could not wait for engagers.

He ended by exhorting members to get involved and encouraging others to join the union. Be strong, be united, be Equity!

The speech was followed by the debates on motions 16-17 (Recorded Media).

14. DEPUTY GENERAL SECRETARY, LOUISE McMULLAN

Louise McMullan introduced herself. She said she would take attendees through some highlights of Equity's policy, communications and campaigning work and directed members to the Annual Report for details.

She said the Stop the Cuts, Save the Arts campaign had been developed and embraced across the country. Equity was leading opposition to arts cuts and the campaign was starting to make a real difference on the ground. In Suffolk, members and staff had raised the union's profile and got a real win, and the council had backed down on cuts proposals. The campaign had also activated new members. It had evolved into a nationwide campaign.

She highlighted the campaigning led by the Street Performers Network against Westminster Council's draconian licensing plans. Their petition had received overwhelming support from other variety members, arts workers and the general

public. Members had done great work themselves, including broadcast interviews which they did powerfully.

Equity's policy team and others had thrown themselves into preparing for a general election, with work on this ongoing for months. It was not limited to arts funding issues but encompassed many issues including climate change, housing and others.

Equity had been raising its voice louder across the union movement and had shown how invested it was in international solidarity work. Members had a huge appetite for Equity's comms around our international solidarity, and support shown for SAG-AFTRA after the solidarity rally led to an appetite for real industrial change from members. In response to increasing demand for political and international solidarity work, Equity had expanded its staff, giving additional expertise in equalities, discrimination, health and safety and employment rights.

She showed the impressive statistics on how well Equity's comms channels were performing. Equity had over 700 pieces of positive press coverage in 2023. Our mentions had tripled in the past three years. Readership of the newsletter had grown from 50% to 60% on average. The success was testament to the quality of the content coming through from regional, industrial and campaigning colleagues and the hard work of the people in the digital team, who crafted something beautiful and interesting. Equity's stand-alone emails, such as the General Secretary's New Year message or a message on casting policy, had even higher open rates with over 30,000 members

reading them. Equity also got positive messages back, with 200 responses from members saying they backed the union after the casting policy email. Equity had a strong showing on social media also, with 200,000 seeing the casting directories issue. There had been a noticeable change in how people talked about the union in recent years. Cynicism had eroded and confidence had grown.

There had been a fivefold increase in the number of website visits per month, which was achieved through design capacity, regular updates to content and work to ensure the content was interesting. The success of the website had been recognised through a win in the Best Recruitment or Organising category at the 2023 TUC comms awards, at which the journal had also been commended.

She noted the work of the social security and tax team, which had helped 255 members, securing over £425,000 for members. They provided a wealth of guidance on maternity benefits, national insurance and a range of other entitlements. She said it was a unique service and an objective for the union-wide staff team was to make sure members knew about and could access the service. Equity had launched the Not Here to Help report the previous year, raising awareness of the Minimum Income Floor which discriminated against those who weren't permanently employed.

She touched on the many other things that the comms team did, including design and merchandise work. She also recognised the incredible work of the Governance team that could seem invisible, keeping the union running day-to-day.

She thanked the nations and regions teams, which delivered the success featured across our communications. She said she was looking forward to Equity opening its office in Birmingham.

She spoke about Equity's goal in 2024 to strengthen the union across the country, further expanding collective agreements across the nations and regions, targeting variety recruitment more effectively and getting access to new workplaces. She said Equity was putting a new focus on conversations with creative team members and fully supporting the achievement of a new and better PACT agreement through set visits and studio days.

She finished by saying that Birmingham was not quite the centre of the earth, but Equity was going the following year to Derry, which was.

The speech was followed by the debates on motions 18-24 (Policy).

15. FORMAL MOTION TO ADOPT THE 2023 ANNUAL REPORT AND ACCOUNTS

The formal motion to adopt the Annual Report 2023 was proposed by Mary Lane, seconded by Sean Biggerstaff and **CARRIED** unanimously.

The formal motion to adopt the Annual Accounts 2023 was proposed by Marie Kelly, seconded by Joel Heyes and **CARRIED** unanimously.

The President then brought Conference to a close at 13:00 and thanked all those who had been involved in the organisation of the event.

16. AWARDS OF HONORARY LIFE MEMBERSHIP

Four members were presented with Honorary Life Membership throughout the conference:

- Abdelfattah Abusrour, Director of Alrowwad in Bethlehem, was presented with HLM at the international reception on the Saturday evening.
- Vivien Parry, Representative: Stage Actors Committee, was presented with HLM at the conference on the Sunday afternoon, for her long-serving activism within the West End and theatre more generally.
- Yukiko Masui was presented with HLM at the dinner on the Sunday evening, for her many years of activism for dancers and on the Dance Committee.
- Tonia Daley-Campbell, Councillor, was presented with HLM at the dinner on the Sunday evening, for her many years of activism within the Birmingham and West Midlands Branch and on Council.

EQUALITY AND INCLUSION

MOTION 1: Race Equality Committee

In November 2023, Equity's Race Equality Committee submitted an emergency motion to Council around censorship, smear and cancellation of political voices in the arts, particularly in relation to the situation in Gaza. The motion was approved. Since then, Arts Council England has updated its policies, warning that 'political statements' made by individuals linked to an organisation can cause 'reputational risk', breaching funding agreements.

Our cultural institutions are now being actively threatened to 'self-censor' by publicly subsidised funders in a way that is extremely detrimental to artists from global majority backgrounds who also face the fear of individual blacklisting in their careers.

Conference requests that Council calls upon the national arts funding bodies, and the Charity Commission, to make it conditional that funded arts institutions, and individuals working within them, are allowed full range of political expression and that all arts and charities bodies must properly account for any decisions they make in terms of funding, programming, commissioning and employment and illustrate exactly what they define as 'political'.

The motion was proposed by Daniel York Loh and seconded by Frances Rifkin.

There were three further speakers for the motion.

The motion was **CARRIED** nem con, with two abstaining.

MOTION 2: LGBT+ Committee

Conference is increasingly concerned by the growing influence and endorsement of right-wing extremism, facilitated by an increased acceptance of hate narratives in public discourse and the increase in far-right legislative power, facilitated through lobby groups directing public policy.

If members are to be truly safe at work, it is crucial that Equity engages seriously in the wider union movement's efforts to understand and counter this political shift.

While the LGBT+ Committee will persist in countering specific instances of harassment at work, such as the menacing actions aimed at Drag Queen Story Hour UK, we call upon Council to make a clear commitment to addressing the underlying causes of these incidents.

Therefore, Conference calls on Council to – develop political education resources for Equity members and to consider how Equity can contribute to the wider anti-far-right movement; work with the TUC's existing anti-far-right programme to support research and understanding of how trade unions can mitigate the threat posed by right-wing extremism, ensuring the specific risks faced by our members are taken into account when developing cross union strategy; and commit one element of the work plan for the new joint meeting of committee chairs to

focus on the far-right threat, in consultation and collaboration with Equity's equalities committees.

The motion was proposed by Mais Robinson and seconded by Emma Jayne Park.

There were four further speakers for the motion.

The motion was **CARRIED** nem con, with one abstaining.

MOTION 3: Deaf and Disabled Members Committee

Conference believes that the Equity Policy on Casting (last reviewed 2018) needs updating and that the policy needs to ensure all Deaf, Disabled and Neurodivergent Equity members have equal opportunities of employment.

We believe that the position needs to be made clear that casting non-disabled people in disabled roles is not acceptable and that if engagers can't cast someone with the exact disability within the given role, they then cast someone who has a condition or disability similar to that of the character wherever possible.

Conference calls on Council to resolve to – update the wording and attitudes within the policy and to acknowledge within the policy autonomy for DDN artists in line with the social model; include in the policy the principle that as a union we seek to see an end to the acceptability of less than transparent processes when casting any role; provide more weight in the policy to outlining the responsibilities and

accountabilities incumbent on engagers and organisations when casting roles either specific or incidental to artists from the DDN community to ensure that companies have accountability for ensuring any storyline involving DDN performers is given to those with that lived experience; and ensure that the policy is rewritten in consultation with a member or members of the DDMC.

The motion was proposed by Nicholas Barnes and seconded by Stephen Beggs.

There was one further speaker for the motion, two against the motion and one point of procedure.

The motion was **CARRIED** overwhelmingly, with one against and eight abstaining.

MOTION 4: Women's Committee

As an industry that is based on telling the truth in the moment, we must also tell the truth about the potential for abuse of power, bullying and harassment that can happen. This industry relies on authenticity to be always at the forefront. This means that we, the collective and our Union, must take responsibility to inform and guide those who are just starting out in their careers. Everyone should know and understand how to deal with bullying and harassment, on set, on stage, whether you are in front of an audience or behind the scenes. After #MeToo and Time's Up, there are still too many young women unaware of the key reporting processes and support Equity can offer.

Conference calls on Council to support the Women's Committee in ensuring that they are involved in visiting places of training

and potential workshop days in order to - empower women and people of all genders to know their rights working in the industry; highlight key reporting processes of abuses; advise how the Union can support these members in work, thereby increasing recruitment and a future with Equity; and promote the Women's Toolkit resources.

The motion was proposed by Peggy-Ann Fraser and seconded by Emma Jayne Park.

There were two further speakers for the motion.

The motion was **CARRIED** unanimously.

MOTION 5: Kent Branch (selected at the East and South East Regional Meeting)

Conference believes there is a dearth of parts being written for women between 45 and 65 and that they are being underrepresented in film, television and theatre. An interesting age group, having so much wisdom, in reality they juggle and negotiate companies, families and marriages. The roles depicted are mainly cameo roles, still making women the butt of comedy and boxing them in as mums or professionals. Women in this category are less likely to be shy, with greater self-esteem, so surely writers should be inspired to produce interesting stories if engaged with and listening to women of this age group. Conference seeks to address the fact that the varied life experience of this demographic is missing in many films and some TV programmes. Why are stories with women aged 40+ not being told? Conference calls upon Council to survey all

members to explore how widespread this practice is and use the results to campaign for a more accurate reflection of society within TV and film.

The motion was proposed by Theresa Cole and seconded by Marie Kelly.

There were four further speakers for the motion and one point of procedure.

The motion was **CARRIED** nem con, with four abstaining.

INTERNAL UNION BUSINESS

MOTION 6: Birmingham and West Midlands Branch (selected at the Midlands Regional Meeting)

Conference is keen to help ensure that supporting artists are both aware of the full range of services available to them as members and, following the recent membership review exercise, encouraged to join the Union.

Conference calls upon Council to support the costs of an event to be hosted by a branch in each nation and region across the UK over 2024-25 that would seek to organise supporting artists. Each event would seek to draw supporting artists into an active role within the branches (thus strengthening the branch networks) and to map the number of existing members and potential members and invite them to attend a (further) dedicated event.

The overall effect of this proposal would be to make supporting artists feel directly involved in the work of the Union, have their profiles raised, and be better situated to utilise the full range of services available to them as members.

The motion was proposed by Tracey Briggs and seconded by Caron Jane Lyon.

There were two further speakers for the motion.

The motion was **CARRIED** unanimously.

MOTION 7: London North Branch (selected at the London Regional Meeting)

Conference asks that Council conduct a survey of senior artists (definition to be decided by Council) to investigate, among other things, how far they are impacted by the limited professional opportunities available, ensure that their experience and abilities are given the same due attention as other groups in Equity – notwithstanding the health and mobility concerns that come with ageing – and look into how insurance implications can impede the use of older performers.

Further, Conference asks that Council investigates the possibility of setting up a Senior Artists Committee to look after the interests of said artists.

The motion was proposed by Andrew N Hill and seconded by Kentas Brine.

There was one further speaker for the motion, two against the motion and one point of procedure.

The motion was **CARRIED** with 38 in favour, 26 against and 39 abstaining.

LIVE PERFORMANCE

MOTION 8: Opera Deputies Committee

Conference notes that cuts to public arts funding across decades and successive governments have resulted in significant funding challenges for publicly subsidised companies, and that too often company managements respond by seeking to pass these cuts on to their creative and technical workforces.

Contrary to the stated aims of funders and government, the consequences of funding cuts and subsequent attacks on workers' terms and conditions are to make it harder for those with limited means to experience opera, and harder for those without independent sources of wealth to enter and remain in a career in opera.

Conference calls on Council to – campaign for increased public funding of the arts at local, regional and national level, including funding for opera specifically; develop and campaign for a strategy for opera, which includes a clear and proactive workforce plan; lobby major funding bodies to make it a condition of funding that work is produced on an appropriate Equity-negotiated agreement and adheres to employment law; and negotiate and campaign to resist management attempts to pass cuts on to Equity members.

The motion was proposed by David John Newman and seconded by Tim Ochala-Greenough.

There were two further speakers for the motion.

The motion was **CARRIED** unanimously.

MOTION 9: Singers Committee

Conference notes the number of commercial opera festivals which now run each year.

Equity's recent survey on this part of the sector showed members had experienced widespread poor practice from some employers in this area, including regular breaches of their basic rights as workers in employment law.

Conference also notes widespread misunderstanding about these rights from employers and members, with many members unaware of the rights they have as workers in law.

We call on Council to support and prioritise an organising campaign to – educate singers, stage management and opera performers about their rights as workers in law; build membership density in this area, giving us more power to act where employment rights are breached; encourage members to report and take action on bad practice where it occurs; and establish new Equity agreements with producers in this area of the industry.

The motion was proposed by Martyn Harrison and seconded by Marie Kelly.

There was one further speaker for the motion.

The motion was **CARRIED** unanimously.

MOTION 10: Directors and Designers Committee

Conference notes that, like performers and stage management members, directors and designers working for producers or venues who are members of the Society of London Theatre or UK Theatre are engaged on contracts that are underpinned by the collectively bargained agreements Equity negotiates with the industry management associations.

Conference believes that there is greater awareness among Equity's performer and stage management members that they are working on terms and conditions underpinned by an agreement their union has negotiated, because SOLT/UK Theatre issue producers with a contract template that adheres to these terms, includes the Equity logo, and makes reference to the union agreements.

Conference further notes that these contract templates do not exist for creative team contracts, and that it is therefore possible for a director or designer to work extensively across British theatre without ever seeing a direct link between the work of their trade union and their own terms and conditions – and that in consequence, awareness of the rights and entitlements these agreements enshrine and the role of Equity in delivering them is lower amongst the creative team than it is among their performer and stage management counterparts.

Conference therefore requests that Council resolves to – audit the contracts issued to directors and designers by SOLT/UK Theatre member engagers annually to ensure compliance with the collectively

bargained agreements and address any deficits this process may uncover; and work with theatrical management associations on the establishment of a template contract generator for director and designer contracts.

The motion was proposed by Aisling Gallagher and seconded by Max Jones.

The motion was **CARRIED** unanimously.

MOTION 11: Dance Committee

Dance artists work across distinctly different sectors: subsidised, commercial and corporate. Each demands different working agreements and conditions to ensure fair work is being pursued.

Conference recognises that confusion can be a significant barrier to dance artists joining Equity; members being active in the union; and members asserting their rights in the workplace.

Equity-negotiated agreements reflect negotiations with specific employers or trade associations, a point which is often misunderstood by workers and misunderstood/misused by engagers.

Conference calls on Council to develop clear communications via all available channels, laying out what agreements are, how they are negotiated and what situations they apply to in order to empower members with knowledge.

Communications would include but not be limited to –

clearly defining the applications of each agreement on the website; working with the Dance Committee to create a social media campaign that clarifies the use of existing and new agreements; sharing clear examples of where agreements are being misused; and emphasising that agreements are based on minimum terms and should be used as a floor, not a ceiling.

The motion was proposed by Sumi Xiaoméi Cheng and seconded by Emma Jayne Park.

The motion was **CARRIED** unanimously.

MOTION 12 (as amended): Bristol and West of England Branch (selected at the South West Regional Meeting)

Conference notes: there is no legal duty for employers in the UK to advertise job vacancies though there is a broad obligation for employers not to discriminate against potential employees; it is standard practice in the public sector and wherever public money is involved, to be entirely open and accountable about recruitment practices and for jobs to be advertised widely; and most theatres in the UK in receipt of public funding have websites with a jobs and recruitment page – advertising roles from catering staff to marketing managers, to community engagement producers. Very few include casting breakdowns on their websites.

Conference believes that casting in subsidised theatres does not always happen in an open and accountable way.

Conference asks Council – to campaign for publicly subsidised theatres to provide an opportunity for performers to sign up

to receive information about castings and to ensure fully inclusive representation and access for all practitioners; to discuss the principles of the 'Cast it Here' campaign with subsidised theatres and companies; and to lobby arts councils, local authorities and other funding bodies to make local casting commitments a condition of funding.

AMENDMENT: Council

Delete: "advertise all of their casting information on their website jobs and recruitment page, and/or" from point 1).

The motion was proposed by Clifford Lee Evans and seconded by Peter O'Carroll.

The amendment was proposed by Sean Biggerstaff and seconded by Hywel Morgan.

There were three further speakers for the motion and one for the amendment.

The amendment was **CARRIED** with 53 in favour, 28 against and 16 abstentions.

The motion (as amended) was **CARRIED** overwhelmingly, with two against and two abstaining.

MOTION 13: Stage Actors Committee

The development of employment charters for projects, events and festivals covering a range of topics including treatment of workers and fair pay are encouraging examples of parties working together to raise awareness of important issues.

However, these employment charters are not acceptable substitutes for comprehensive, negotiated trade union agreements, which provide a deeper coverage of workplace realities and stronger, enforceable protections for our members, including provisions such as overtime, holiday pay, pensions, and proper working breaks.

We are concerned that an increase in the use of employment charters across the sector will erode the position of recognised trade unions and lead to a weakening in real terms of workers' rights and workplace influence.

In the interests of fair work and effective representation for our members, Conference calls on Council to lobby the arts councils to recognise the significant difference between an employment charter and a trade union agreement, and to ensure that the existence of a relevant Equity agreement is a requirement in any assessment of applications seeking to benefit from public funds.

The motion was proposed by Vivien Parry and seconded by Matthew Forbes.

There was one further speaker for the motion and one question.

The motion was **CARRIED** unanimously.

VARIETY

MOTION 14: Variety, Circus and Entertainers Committee

While Conference notes that open call auditions can be beneficial in widening opportunities for performers seeking work, they can put up barriers for some performers if they're not organised in a fair way. Large cruise companies tend to hold auditions in London and other major cities on a first come first served basis. Often there can be over 300 performers turning up and the company will only see a limited number of those at each audition. This works against those travelling from outside of the area. This is compounded by the fact that often there is no crowd control for the queue so even when performers do arrive very early, they may end up not being seen due to others joining the queue in front of them. This can result in performers wasting a lot of time and expense travelling and queueing without being auditioned.

Conference calls on Council to approach the major cruise employers and ask that they put in place measures for these auditions so that suitably qualified performers who would have to travel long distances can register in advance to get seen. This would make the process more inclusive for those with limited resources, particularly in these difficult times.

The motion was proposed by Rachel Darq and seconded by Neil McFarlane.

There were two further speakers for the motion.

The motion was **CARRIED** unanimously.

EMERGENCY MOTION

EMERGENCY MOTION: Council

Conference is concerned that the continued impact of cuts to arts funding, and particularly to the substantial underfunding of opera in England and Wales, is impacting the job security of our members working full-time in the Chorus of Welsh National Opera (WNO).

As a result of these cuts, WNO management are looking to reduce the current full-time contracts of our members with an estimated cut in base salary of at least 15% a year. In addition, they are seeking to reduce and rebalance the size of the chorus with a process which can only lead to the real threat of compulsory redundancy.

The chorus of WNO was built from the communities of Wales, and it was on that strength that WNO's reputation was founded almost 80 years ago. The many dedicated Equity members, for whom the survival of "their" company is a passion, a crusade, and a fight against sometimes daunting odds, need support in their fight against this attack on their pay and conditions.

Conference sends a message of solidarity to our members at WNO and asks Council to continue to provide whatever support is required as they seek to amplify the campaign that they, with our support, will not accept compulsory redundancies, or the desire by WNO management to have

the flexibility of a full-time contract with all the precarity of an unsustainable cut to their basic earnings.

Our members' resistance to the current proposals cannot, and will not, be contingent on the decisions of funders.

#SaveOurWNO

The motion was proposed by Hywel Morgan and seconded by David John Newman.

There was one speaker against the motion.

The motion was **CARRIED** unanimously.

EQUITY MOTION TO TUC

MOTION 15: Council

Conference supports Council in its proposal to send the following motion to TUC 2024:

Congress – notes that, while the Conduct of Employment Agencies and Employment Businesses Regulations 2003 prohibits charging upfront fees to work-seekers in most industries, the performing arts and entertainment industries are exempt from this ban; recognises that performers and creative workers – and not engagers, casting directors or agents – pay significant fees, often in excess of £180 per year, for their inclusion in a casting directory,

regardless of whether or not they obtain work; and notes that, during a cost-of-living crisis, this cost places a significant burden on workers in an industry already characterised by insecure work and unpredictable income.

Congress calls, therefore, on the TUC to – support the repeal of this unfair exemption for the performing arts and entertainment industries and call for such casting directory fees to be borne by producers, not workers; and lobby the government to bring forward legislation to remove the exemption.

The motion was proposed by Jassa Ahluwalia and seconded by Jackie Clune (Vice-President).

There were three further speakers for the motion and two questions.

The motion was **CARRIED** overwhelmingly, with one against and one abstaining.

RECORDED MEDIA

MOTION 16: Screen and New Media Actors Committee

UK independent film production brings important cultural, social and economic benefits. Independent film reflects life across the nations and regions through culturally specific stories and local talent and provides a thriving, highly skilled and globally recognised workforce.

The British Film Institute recognised that UK independent films are an integral part of the wider screen ecosystem, as incubators of talent on and behind the camera. The BFI's review says this sector is under considerable threat and calls for 0% VAT on exhibition of these films and investment from streaming companies. In 2022, spending on UK independent films fell 31% from 2021, to £174m. BBC Film and Film 4 budgets have declined in real terms since 2016. Poor film funding and fewer domestic UK films means fewer jobs for Equity members, and makes it harder to unionise UK film employers. The Department for Culture, Media & Sport is now taking evidence from the film industry.

Conference therefore calls for Council to campaign for its existing policies (adopted in 2019):

A publicly-owned and financed, UK-wide, film producing sector, and for domestic film production to be raised to at least the level achieved in France; more public funding for BBC Film, Film 4, S4C and the BFI; and for more public funding for Screen Scotland, Northern Ireland Screen and Ffilm Cymru; enhanced Film Tax relief for UK independent film budgets between £1m and £15 million; and support for the BFI's response to its review of UK Independent Film.

The motion was proposed by Peter Barnes and seconded by Laurence Bouvard.

There were two further speakers for the motion.

The motion was **CARRIED** unanimously.

MOTION 17: Essex and Hertfordshire Branch (selected at the East and South East Regional Meeting)

Conference is concerned as to the discrepancies in the various rates of pay for stunt performers and is pleased to note the progress that has been made in North America.

Conference calls on Council to seek to negotiate an increase in the Equity UK stunt rates in line with SAG-AFTRA, the US market and the Canadian market rates, including, but not limited to, daily rates, usage fees, stunt adjustments, per diems, short turn arounds, accommodation, travel pay, travel requirements and residuals.

The motion was proposed by David Guinan-Brown and seconded by Dee Mardi.

There were two further speakers for the motion.

The motion was **CARRIED** unanimously.

POLICY

MOTION 18: Student Deputies Committee

According to the Office for National Statistics, almost 60% of students in higher education get student finance support that doesn't cover their living costs. This leaves many students in a difficult financial situation, with 65% saying they've had to reduce spending on necessities like food.

Students in the performance industries have intense training schedules and little time to work, making accessing education even more difficult for those whose families cannot support them. This is fundamentally unfair, as everyone should have an equal opportunity to pursue their creative talents regardless of their social or financial background.

It also isn't unusual for drama school fees to reach upwards of £16k a year, resulting in one of these institutions suggesting that students could set up a GoFundMe page to fund their studies.

Our industry and society benefit from diverse voices and experiences, and we should support this by removing any barriers to training. The current models of student funding perpetuate inequality, and it is time to put an end to it.

Conference calls on Council to – actively campaign and lobby for the abolition of tuition fees, return of maintenance grants and more funding opportunities for lifelong learning; commission research on how tuition fees and lack of government or institutional support pose barriers to people who wish to undertake training and enter the industry, especially those from oppressed and marginalised backgrounds; and support Student Deputies with resources to campaign in their institutions on issues related to the cost of entering the industry.

The motion was proposed by Joshua Bendall and seconded by David Hebb.

There were 10 further speakers for the motion, one point of procedure and one question.

The motion was **CARRIED** unanimously.

MOTION 19: West End Deputies Committee

Across the UK, those who work six days a week face unfair treatment as they accrue no extra annual leave compared to their colleagues working five days a week. Equity represents a significant number of such workers. The reality of this government policy means that six day workers in fact get less time off than their five day counterparts as they must use more days of their leave to take a week off, but accrue no extra days to reflect this. The disjoint between how leave is accrued and how it is spent is unjust.

Conference calls on Council to campaign for a change in the law so that those who work six days accrue extra leave for that sixth day, pro rata. A change in this government policy would benefit workers not only across the theatre industry but across the UK, bringing these vital workers in line with their colleagues and furthering the cause of a just work-life balance for all.

The motion was proposed by Andrew Linnie and seconded by Joey Pocket.

There were three further speakers for the motion.

The motion was **CARRIED** unanimously.

MOTION 20: Northern Ireland National Committee (selected at the NI National Meeting)

In Great Britain and Northern Ireland, the self-employed do not share the same rights as employees to Statutory Shared Parental Leave and Statutory Shared Parental Pay.

Under current legislation, only employee partners are entitled to share up to 52 weeks of SSPL between them. They can then share ShPP for 39 weeks of this, in at least three separate blocks of leave each.

Self-employed mothers do not have a right to SSPL or ShPP. They can claim Maternity Allowance, paid for 39 weeks at the same rate as ShPP. It can only be shared with a partner if the partner is an employee.

There is currently no mechanism by which self-employed partners (unless they are the sole carer) can claim financial support for looking after their child. As such, self-employed mothers are penalised by an inflexible system that automatically looks to place all of the responsibility of childcare on the mother.

In this election year, Conference asks Council to support the work of Parental Pay Equality by relaunching and reinvigorating Equity's campaigning for this change, highlighting their petition and campaign for SSPL and ShPP to be available to self-employed parents in Great Britain and Northern Ireland.

The motion was proposed by Marina Hampton and seconded by Aisling Gallagher.

There was one further speaker for the motion.

The motion was **CARRIED** unanimously.

MOTION 21: London North Branch (selected at the London Regional Meeting)

One fifth of local councils, including Stoke, Bradford and Somerset, face bankruptcy primarily due to central government cuts of 40% to revenue support grants between 2010-2020. Since 2013, 40% of local authorities have cut their arts departments, and many LAs, like Bristol and Nottingham, are now making substantial or 100% cuts to arts spending. Central government in this period has cut arts spending by over 30%. Recently we have seen huge arts cuts in Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales. We are on the frontline of attack. The Labour Party, for its part, has not committed to defend and restore public spending, let alone the arts.

Conference calls on Council to promote our arts policy vigorously with MPs, local authorities, and especially the Labour Party, before the coming election so they – commit to raising UK arts spending across the nations and regions to 0.5% of GDP in line with the European average; commit to raising local arts spending at least in line with inflation and restoring lost arts departments and spending; and restore the 50% cuts to arts student funding in higher education, and promote arts education and access to the arts in schools.

Also, we urge Council to support other unions' calls for councils to campaign with trade unions and local communities for

no-cuts needs budgets, drawing on their reserves if necessary, to sustain and expand public services and regain lost funding and reserves from central government.

The motion was proposed by Doug Holton and seconded by Ayvianna Snow.

There was one further speaker for the motion.

The motion was **CARRIED** nem con, with one abstaining.

MOTION 22: Greater Manchester Branch (selected at the North West Regional Meeting)

Factory International in Manchester was built at a cost of over £210m, including unprecedented levels of public funding mainly from the government, Arts Council England and Manchester City Council. They also run Manchester International Festival which gets just under £1m of nonprofit organisation funding per year despite it being a biennial event.

Factory International acknowledges that taxpayer funding plays a huge part in supporting its work and their website says 'we are committed to following and developing best practice for freelance workers.' They are staunchly refusing to commit to using union contracts, however, leaving our members and workers across the industry without union-agreed workplace protections.

Conference applauds the fact that one of Council's key objectives for 2024 is to lobby employers to recognise union

contracts with the safety and security that they bring. However, the lack of engagement with the Union from such a new and high profile company shows a lack of respect for the people who primarily fund it, i.e. the taxpayer.

Conference urges Council to lobby for recipients of significant amounts of public funding to meaningfully engage with the Union on the use of collective agreements.

The motion was proposed by Chris Clarkson and seconded by Tilly Sutcliffe.

There was one further speaker for the motion.

The motion was **CARRIED** unanimously.

MOTION 23: Scotland National Committee (selected at the Scotland National Meeting)

The employment and career prospects for performers and creative team members in Scotland, and indeed in all nations and regions, are under threat.

A combination of inadequate funding, a lack of long-term strategic thinking and the devaluing of the arts has led to less regional touring, reductions in the number of productions overall and barriers to the development of fair work in the sector.

More scrutiny is required of all organisations in receipt of public funding, from national performing companies to funded theatre, film, dance, and variety producers, to ensure that the priority is the employment of performers and creatives and not a seemingly ever-expanding

administration and management workforce.

Conference calls on Council to support in every way possible the Scotland National Committee's 'Day of Solidarity'; a fight back against the serious issues plaguing our sector in Scotland and in other nations and regions. This will be an opportunity for Equity members to gather and join with our partner Scottish Trades Union Congress, creative trade unions, and other concerned parties to highlight these critical threats to our culture sector and take action.

The motion was proposed by Kirsty Miller and seconded by Rachel Flynn.

The motion was **CARRIED** unanimously.

MOTION 24: Welsh National Committee (selected at the Wales National Meeting)

The inconsistency surround

Amongst reasons cited for this is 'that the DBS is not fully applicable to the environment of the new engagement, and therefore invalid.'

The initial application for a DBS costs £38, with a yearly update cost of £13, another instance (like Spotlight) where Equity members are being asked to pay simply for the opportunity to gain work with an employer. Some organisations cover these costs; many do not. Freelancers therefore risk losing work if unwilling or unable to engage with the DBS system.

Conference calls for a review and reform of the system, with a unified approach to its application; for governments and local authorities across the UK to adopt

an approach which offers fairness and transparency to freelancers working across all sectors of our industry, at no additional cost to them as individuals; and for this new, reformed system to be clearly signposted for all employers to fully understand and engage with.

The motion was proposed by Jenni Barbieri and seconded by Elise Harris.

There were two further speakers for the motion and two questions.

The motion was **CARRIED** nem con, with one abstaining.

ding the use of the Disclosure and Barring Service system in England and Wales is posing numerous problems for freelancers across our industry, whilst acknowledging that systems used are different in Scotland and Northern Ireland.

As a result, some individuals are asked to make repeated applications for a DBS, sometimes possessing up to five separate certificates. The online system was introduced to allow a one stop shop for checks on individuals. However, numerous employers and local authorities do not recognize the validity of the existing certificate and request that a fresh application is made.

