

FAO:

Sarah Maxfield, Arts Council England North Area Director
Kate Willard OBE, Arts Council England North Area Chair
Arts Council England
49 Lever St
Manchester M1 1FN

By Hand

14 November 2022

Dear Sarah & Kate,

We are writing this letter in response to the Arts Council England's (ACE) recent announcement of the 2022-2026 Investment Program, with specific reference to the impact this will have on the provision of arts and culture in the North West.

We welcome the announcement that a number of North West based organisations will receive Arts Council funding for the first time, including The Shakespeare North Trust, and ThickSkin Theatre. Equity looks forward to working with these and other organisations to secure agreements that will mean when workers are engaged by them, they will have decent remuneration and terms and conditions. You will understand that the provision of fair terms and conditions at work is essential in encouraging a diverse workforce in the arts, a sector that all too often offers otherwise insecure and poorly paid work.

However, it is extremely disappointing to learn that as part of the Arts Council announcement at least five North West based organisations previously in receipt of funding to provide dance and/or theatre opportunities have not been included in the new investment program. One of these organisations is the Regional Theatre Young Director Scheme (RTYDS), this is an important program that provides paid professional development for theatre directors. The RTYDS is particularly focused on directors who live outside London and who are from communities presently under-represented in theatre: RTYDS therefore would appear to support the Arts Council's National Council terms of reference which aim to, 'Increase accessibility of the arts to the public in England.'

We are also disappointed to learn that Oldham Coliseum is not included in the investment program. The Coliseum received approximately £2.4 million Arts Council funding between 2018-2022 and so the decision to remove this grant will have a potentially devastating effect on the town and the work force, including many Equity members who rely on the venue as a vital local source of work and income. We are particularly concerned that the decision to to renew the grant has been made without a workforce plan aimed at protecting jobs and ensuring decent pay. Since the easing of lockdown restrictions in September 2021 we estimate that The Coliseum has provided almost 400 weeks of paid work for actors and over 130 weeks work for stage managers. In addition some of those employed at the venue, including Equity members, have been on permanent contracts for many years. These loyal workers now face an extremely uncertain future. They have not yet recovered from the damage to their livelihoods caused by the pandemic, and are currently confronting the challenges of the cost of living crisis.

It is difficult to see therefore how the decision not to renew grants to organisations such as RTYDS and Oldham Coliseum support the government's stated levelling up agenda and ACE's own vision for England to be a country where everyone has access to a range of high- quality cultural experiences. We therefore call on ACE nationally and you as North Area Director and Chair respectively to reverse the decisions made in respect of the non-renewal of these grants for North West based organisations who provide such important cultural opportunities for local communities and workers.

Yours Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'P W Fleming', with a long, sweeping horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Paul W Fleming
GENERAL SECRETARY