

Dee Mardi 2025 Equity Conference Report

On Friday 9 May 2025 I journeyed to Derry with Essex and Herts member Martyn Harrison who is a former Chair and Secretary of Essex Branch and who was representing the Singers' Committee (which I'm on too). On a mooch over the Peace Bridge on Saturday morning, who should we bump into- Bau and Erin who like me were representing Essex and Herts Branch; difference though- they'd never been to an Equity conference before! Hugs and photos in the glorious sunshine and scenery.

Derry's Guildhall Doors opened to us at 1.15pm **Saturday 10th May 2025 ready for a 2pm start.** On arrival we signed in and given our own Equity goody bag with a conference journal to write notes in (a brilliant idea and much better than the sheets of paper we've been given in the past), a who's attending sheet, and Equity socks! Coffee and Danish pastries were awaiting, albeit it at the end of a long queue.

Those of us who had been to conference before were surprised to be presented with a seating plan according to region, committees etc. Was a bit of a tight squeeze even before the Danish pastries but a couple of S.E. attendees kindly moved seats to enable Erin, Bau and I to sit together rather than be split between tables. Our table was at the front.

Julia Carson- Sims, Conference Business Committee announced they are trialing block seating to prevent lone attendees feeling awkward and welcomes feedback. (There were pros and cons in my view, including a lot of shuffling of chair legs to more easily enable our wheelchair bound members to be at the front. A change to conference rules meant that non-video/audio recording was allowed during conference except when voting.

As usual, **the Obituaries** were solemnly read out, followed by the Conference standing ovation. I noted Marjorie Keys' name and recall her hosting several afternoon summer parties at home for Essex branch members years ago.

In her opening address Linda Rooke, Equity President and conference Chair, said: We are building on the success of Birmingham conference here in Northern Ireland with Foyle and West Branch, one of the newest branches. There has been an 8% growth in membership in Northern Ireland. Last year she didn't think that at this conference she would be warning of loss of jobs to the marginalized due to the rise in the far right. She mentioned diversity, equality and inclusion, arts cuts, successful and ongoing campaigns in Scotland, Wales, Oldham, etc. "We have moved from resilience to resistance." Bethnal Green, Manchester Drag /live performance cuts. TV cuts are threats to Indigenous employment, specifically dramas, soaps which are training grounds and employment sources for the working-class talent. A.I. controls and is used to control corporate capitalism. This is the "era of feudal tech... Our message is you're not getting away with it." Lynda was metaphorically on fire! She continued about working with the Federation of International Actors, F.I.A.; the forthcoming July court case with Spotlight. That all committee seats are for the first time being contested produced rapturous applause from the conference floor- more members are more engaged with the union and union business. She thanked Equity members, staff, councillors and the activists for all contributions.

We all knew the result already, but Lynda formally announced the **General Secretary voting results:**

Ricky Ash. 1048 votes which represented 19%. Paul William Fleming. 4571 votes which represented 81%, is elected until 2030. Rapturous applause from conference. I admit to some reservations when Paul first became elected, but he had my vote this time. What he has done and is doing for our members, to raise our union's profile and to address the challenges affecting our industry and members is outstanding and commendable. I also apply that to our amazing President Lynda Rooke.

There followed a **video roundup** of what has been happening in 2024 to 2025.

Paul Fleming General Secretary made the point that this speech was specifically to introduce the annual report which he is obliged to do. He said that the 2019 Belfast Conference was deeply impactful. Union membership had grown by 5 per cent since. Now we have 3 hours of fringe meetings in addition to all the conference business.

“Our union is industrial action ready.” We should note that.

Business proceeded to the motions, starting with **Equality and Inclusion**.

Motion 1 LGBT+ Committee. Passed overwhelmingly with 3 abstentions. This motion calls on Council to 1) develop guidelines for engagers working with and supporting members accessing gender-affirming care to work with BAP ATM. 2) explore how it could help members access gender-affirming care and 3) explore new partners who may help members across gender-affirming care.

Motion 2 Merseyside and Cheshire Branch Passed (sorry I didn’t note the exact details). This motion calls on Council to 1) strive to ensure that venues work with disabled artists to carry out person-centered risk assessments as default when a performer discloses a health condition or impairment 2) call on venues to cover additional travel and accommodation costs faced by disabled artists 3) carry out regular health and safety inspections of venues and sets and 4) promote the access passports/ riders and support disabled workers in acquiring these.

Motion 3 Deaf and Disabled Committee Passed unanimously. Calls on Council to campaign for arts councils across the UK to fund, create, roll out and support a nationally recognised mandatory disability and deaf awareness training within the theatre sector for key staff members of theatre productions and companies in receipt of funding from arts councils while ensuring input from Equity, Federation of Entertainment Unions (FEU) members and disabled people’s organisations are a part of its creation.

Motion 4 North East England Branch Passed Overwhelmingly 1 Abstention. Calls on Council to take a leadership role in addressing fat phobia in the entertainment industry and to strive to ensure that fat performers and creatives are given equal opportunities and fair treatment. It is very much a motion about dignity at work, and the proposer cited relatable members’ horror stories.

Motion 5 Race Equality Committee Passed Overwhelmingly 1 Abstention. Calls on council to 1) resource the affiliation to organisations actively challenging the far right (for example Stand Up to Racism) to allow for a coordinated movement wide response to the presence of the far right in the industry 2) support the coordination of joint responses from all relevant equalities committees where organised far right groups mobilize against diverse artists working across the industry and 3) endeavour to develop the coordination of joint trade union efforts via the TUC to respond to the far right including joint campaigns support for marches etc. We heard an emotional account of experience. A key point was “This is our world. Let’s reclaim it.”

Motion 6 Stage Actors Committee Passed Unanimously. It was shocking to hear the lack of provision of any and suitable wigs, hair and makeup provisions for Global Majority workers. This motion calls on Council to strive to ensure that clauses in Equity’s industry standard agreements for theatre reflect equalities, expectations of equitable WHAM and other provisions for all workers and to oversee the creation of guidance for members about their right to equal treatment at work.

Motion 7 Women’s Committee Passed Unanimously. Calls on Council to 1. Seek to negotiate collective agreements to include measures such as equalities monitoring to counteract inherent a bias. 2.

Raise awareness of the disproportionate loss of paid future work for those with protected characteristics. 3 Identify and work with ethical A.I. providers who work to counteract bias and give fair remuneration on A.I. licensing deals. Proposer Elaine Stirrat expressed concern A.I. is a tool of the patriarchy, is reducing women to stereotypes, and is concerned about bias in A.I. "... whoever controls the data controls the conversation". Lauren Bouvard mentioned A.I. goes for the average. A speaker said A.I. needs to work for everyone.

Guest Speaker Adrian Kane SIPTU Services, Industrial, Production, & Technical Union. Equity is an affiliate of this union. Talked about Trump and Netanyahu. In these troubled times resistance matters more than ever when global elites are united to silence...

John Barclay. Assistant General Secretary recorded media, always a popular and inspiring speaker, thanked our distribution service, all colleagues, staff, etc. "Impossibility never prevented anything from happening." Mentioned groundbreaking radical claim to deal with A.I., American AMPT members picked up PACT's baton. "A.I. isn't evil. Its users are." Equity talking to the ethical A.I. Companies trying to monetize agreements for use of our own work. Mentioned Equity now has a Continuing Dramas Committee and the disintegration of indigenous TV production Companies. We must support these companies. Games AGM at the Barbican caused chaos, and he collared the CEO of the Games Committee!

Chair Lynda informed us Motion 8 Equity Council Motion to TUC would on Sunday 11th.

Recorded Media Motions

Motion 9 Screen and New Media Actors Committee Passed unanimously Conference calls on Council to consider promulgating Equity guideline minimum rates. Alongside this, conference also asks Council to seek to establish a Dubbing Code of Conduct that, while not binding as a collective agreement would be, would at least clarify best practices around terms, working conditions and the ethical use of A.I. A.I. voices are trained on our trained unpaid labour. We must keep the human at the centre.

EMERGENCY MOTION 1: passed unanimously Motion wording was on the screen and later we gathered on and off stage for a conference photo in support of saving River City, Scotland's soap. This drama is an important part of Scotland's cultural identity, provides a vital training ground and career pathways for young Scots talent. Production is set to come to an end next year. 72 job cuts- writers, directors, costume, actors and more. Concern was expressed about working class drama being replaced by gangs' and lawyers' dramas not representative of the area and in essence relocating from the south to the north. Dawn Hope seconded the motion, drawing on overlaps with Hollyoaks. Dawn was our Southeast area Councillor for several years. Tracy Briggs from Birmingham highlighted what she viewed as the BBC management Lift and Shift policy. That the stories being aired are not from our regions and not our stories. She raised parallel issues in the closure of Birmingham soap Doctors.

A quick dash to and freshen up at the City Hotel then off to the 7.30pm **Welcome Reception at St Columb's Hall** to hear various speakers including Lynda Rooke, several honorary life memberships being awarded- the p.a. and hall's echo unfortunately affected the clarity of what many of us could hear, including the some interpretation of our deaf member actress XX's signing. There was a surprise sampling of Equity's own beer, produced especially for the occasion by a Derry brewery. A highlight of the evening for me was the revealing of the newly commissioned Northern Island Equity Banner and its creator explaining the intricacies of the artwork inspirations. It's stunning, poignant and fabulous craftswomanship. Whilst there was plenty of it, the quality of the reception's buffet food was a letdown for me compared with last year's in Birmingham.

Motions continued promptly at 9.30am Sunday 10th May back at Guildhall.

Motion 8: Supporting Council's Generative A.I. and creative workers' rights motion to TUC 2025 passed unanimously. Congress calls on the TUC to 1. campaign for the implementation in full of A.I. for Creative Workers: a TUC manifesto. 2. Lobby government to introduce a regime of personality rights under which artists could better protect and license their voice, likeness, and other aspects of their personal image; 3. work with the government and its newly created Information Commissioner to push for improved enforcement of data protection rights in respect of generative A.I.; and 4. campaign against the government's intended introduction of a 'text and data mining exception' to copyright protection.

Recorded Media continued.

Motion 10 Continuing Drama Deputies Committee Passed unanimously Conference calls on Council to 1. support the committee's campaign to defend continuing drama ; 2. identify and work with our allies, including our sister trades unions; 3. call for the broadcasters to support the campaign's aims; 4. Lobby government to form measures that protect and enhance domestic and public service broadcast television production in England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland. This motion was proposed by Dawn Hope and seconded by Julia Carson-Sims. It overlapped in some ways with the Emergency Motion to Save River City. Continuing drama in the UK is under threat. In the past 18 months the BBC has cancelled Doctors, citing rising costs in drama production. Channel 4 has made significant cuts to Hollyoaks cast budget and episodes' numbers due to budget cuts and ITV has announced cuts to episodes on Coronation Street and Emmerdale from 2026. Dawn mentioned that 150 crew had been axed in Hollyoaks. That Indigenous programs were being siphoned off to streaming. We want the government to tell the studios companies to reinvest in the indigenous continuing dramas.

Motion 11 Birmingham and West Midlands Branch/East Midlands Branch passed unanimously Asks Council to strive to ensure that 1. the historical underfunding of the region is centered in its contribution to the Charter Review consultant consultation. 2. work for equity members in scripted production is made equally available in all regions and nations and commissioned and managed from those regions and nations. The Midlands pays 25% of the BBC's licensing fee but receives less than 5% funding.

Motion 12 Audio Committee passed unanimously Conference calls on Council to investigate why the BBC's Radio Drama Company (RDC) is mothballed and currently employs 0 actors, and to campaign for its protection. Additionally, we urge Council to join the Audio Committee in asking the BBC to give an undertaking that 1. There will be no further cuts to audio drama output for the duration of its current charter. 2. It will actively explore opportunities to expand audio drama on both its radio and BBC Sounds platforms; 3. It will actively support the continuation of the RDC and of the Carlton Hobbs and Norman Beaton prizes of a 5 month long contract with the BBC Radio Drama Company. Proposer Louise Barrett said that Radio 3 is now virtually all music. The Norman Beaton Fellowship offers opportunities for new people without previous experience, from different backgrounds. Seconding the motion, Marcus Hutton said the RDC will recruit 4 actors including students, currently has 0 actors. Audio drama is massively popular but the BBC doesn't want to be doing it.

Motion 13 Edinburgh and East of Scotland. Remitted to Council. After speeches, the proposer agreed the motion be remitted to Council for immediate consideration rather than to conference vote accepting advisement from Council, as informed to conference by Dan Edge, was needed to gain legal advice and evidence. This IMDb related motion is complex. Credits have been wrongly assigned to actors of the same name. Rachel Flynn said she is wrongly credited for "Heathers", for example. She is benefitting but the

'real Rachel Flynn' not. Attempts to get changed have failed. Dan Edge said according to IMDb, he's won a mythical BAFTA. The proposer talked of high-profile actors with early career 'awful student film' credits cannot get them removed... We shouldn't have to pay to change mistakes. IMDb should be held to account. Council has promised immediate consideration and to produce an action plan.

Adam Adnyana Assistant General Secretary Live Performance was allowed a few more minutes to finish delivering his slide-show report.

Explained the scope of his role. Mentioned the challenging environment. Reduced volume of theatre productions and output. Threats to local venues. Insecurity of public funding and investing. "The recognition of these issues does not prevent Equity from pushing for improved terms and conditions for our members." He advised members to read his fuller report in the published 2024 Annual report. Mentioned collective agreements, claims and organizing. Variety, including a template for cabaret contracts. A new team for Equity students can be emailed: students@equity.org.uk. Mentioned the 2025 live performance objectives cover the dance sector, directors and designers, students and variety. A major focus will be to abolish audition fees.

Lynda Rooke informed conference of a change in agenda. She gave an update on the Save Old Coliseum Campaign started back in March 2023 with an appeal to the Arts Council, and played a video recorded in 2024 including herself and Maxine Peake. The 2025 video update showed the successes of the campaign and huge contributions to that made by actress Julie Hesmondhalgh. This and her wider work as Equity dep on Corrie and much more led to Victoria Brazier and Lynda surprising her with flowers and an honorary life membership.

Sinn Fein MP Pat Cullen, who comes from a highly respected nursing background, gave a politically focused speech to conference,

Live Performance Motions

Motion 14 Northern Ireland Committee passed unanimously Conference calls on Council to create a set of guidelines for members along the same lines as previous booklets on subsidised and commercial theatre, laying out the rules of what can and can't take place when it comes to ensemble work- when is someone a volunteer and when are they a worker - and how this affects rehearsal, performance and payment arrangements. For too long our members, especially those in the early stages of their careers, have been exploited through bad practice in this area and we call on the Union to act now to protect all of us. Hear! Hear I say! And so did the rest of conference! The proposer Stephen Beggs received honorary life membership the night before.

Motion 15 Brighton and Sussex Branch passed unanimously Many industry professionals in regional theatres and touring companies are having to use a substantial part of their basic wage to help pay for expensive accommodation which is not covered sufficiently by the extra allowances. We believe regional theatres and touring companies in these areas need to recognise this, take responsibility and either a) pay allowances that realistically take into account local conditions or b) provide subsidised affordable accommodation for all industry professionals. Conference calls on Council to strive to ensure that negotiations with regional theatres and touring producers around relocation /subsistence take these factors into account so that members working in these locations do not find these extra costs eating into their weekly pay. Actors being given digs allowance of £200 for accommodation costing whilst £300 is not acceptable.

Motion 16: Stage Management Committee **passed unanimously** Conference calls on Council to seek to negotiate that stage management team differentials are codified and protected within all of equities industry standard agreements.

Motion 17 **Directors and Designers Committee** **passed unanimously.** This motion is to protect and define the role of fight director. Conference calls on Council to seek to negotiate that in conjunction with the Equity Register of Fight Directors, the Fight Captain role is formally defined within the Union's collective agreements for theatre and that guidance is created for performers who are appointed as fight captains in theatrical productions. This guidance should include stipulation that responsibility for appointing a fight captain sits with the fight director, and that a fight captain should have appropriate training.

Motion 18 **Singers Committee** **passed overwhelmingly 1 abstain** Convincingly proposed by Essex and Herts Member Martyn Harrison and seconded by Councillor Marie Kelly. Conference calls on Council to support 1. Recruitment efforts to bring more freelance opera singers into union membership to build the necessary power required to negotiate for change; 2. The encouragement of existing members to become active in the union, and in campaigning for improved terms and conditions; 3. the re-negotiation of SOLT/UK Theatre Opera agreements to seek improvements to rates, terms, and conditions, including the development of an appendix to the agreement covering summer festival work; 4 the development and negotiation of an opera appendix/opera singers contract for the Equity/ITC agreement; and 5. the development of a template Opera Singers Equity Fringe Agreement.

Motion 19 **Opera Deputies Committee** **passed unanimously** This raised issues about Arts cuts and the need to stop them. Our Essex and Herts conference rep Bao, a dancer at ENO, chipped-in in support, delivering his first ever conference speech to rapturous applause. The motions calls on Council to: 1. campaign for increased public funding of the arts at local, regional and national level, including funding for opera, specifically; 2. Campaign for a proper industrial strategy for the arts- including opera- to be developed with input from the artistic workforce via their trade unions. This should include a plan for art spending to reach the European average of 0.5% of GDP and should include planning beyond the three-year fund cycles which currently limit scope for growth, artistic and workforce development; 3. continue to lobby government and 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 4. continue to negotiate and campaign to. Improve workers' terms and conditions and to resist management attempts to pass cuts on to Equity members.

Motion 20 **Dance Committee** **passed unanimously** The proposer mentioned the day rate hasn't changed for x years. Is £126 but needs £269 as a minimum. Conference calls on council to 1. develop draft agreements for low budget, short term and one-off dancing engagements such as scratch nights, private events and music videos.; 2. Review and adapt existing resources that educate, engage us on how to meaningfully connect with Equity (e.g. materials from Variety and Fringe theatre) to ensure their relevance to the dance sector; and 3. establish a strategy for connecting with dance artists and engages to ensure these resources are widely accessible, understood and effectively implemented.

Motion 21 **West End Deputies Committee** **passed overwhelmingly 1 abstention.** The proposer mentioned that cast are being asked to document their days in social media films, TikTok routines, film themselves in their free time and so on. Producers send out strict rules to adhere to then change for in-house productions. Workers feel exploited and put upon. The seconder of the motion, Sam Foster said "it's not a

favour, it's labour." That being asked to boost merchandise sales is work. And that we're not free marketing tools. Conference believes that promoting a show is work and that all work to publicise a show should be conducted within the bounds of the relevant collective agreement and remunerated appropriately. Conference calls on council to 1. determine the severity of the problem in the West End through surveying the membership. 2. educate theatre workers about the parameters of the agreements, how work should be logged, what constitutes a reasonable request, and what is exploitative via a new code of practice; and 3. confront producers directly where bad practice is exposed.

Report given by the Honorary Treasurer David John Please refer to the published accounts for 2024 for figures. He thanked organizer Alice Lemon for her contributions. Said the union was in a secure and stable financial position and explained the accounts simply. Happy with the operating surplus of £186,003 before Pensions and Investments. The investment portfolio has been affected negatively by what's been going on in America but is confident we'll recover losses in the long term. Explained staff costs. Thanked the financial staff. Said he is delighted with the General Secretary Election result.

Beccy Reese Assistant General Secretary For Finance and Operations Spoke of changes since 2024 conference. The reduction to 3 membership categories is more successful. Everyone receives the same benefits. Collective public insurance liability covers commuting, training, auditions, accidents and can pay out £100 to £300 a week regardless of whether there is a contract for the work or the member is working/not working. I think she said £130,000,000 is held in the Equity Pension Scheme. We have a sustainable portfolio.

Appeal from International Solidarity Committee

They are helping artists in Turkey, Ukraine. Belarus. Gaza. Dan. Helping them with their homes, financial. Food. Mental health. If you would like to contribute, please use these bank details.:

Account Name: EQUITY I.C.A.F.

Account Number: 70582639

Sort Code: 08-90-61

Lynda thanked the conference Signers and those doing the captions.

There followed lunch and 3 hours of fringe sessions.

I attended 2:

Make your branch meeting like a festival which was run by staff Kirsten Muat and Fiona Tobin and Chris Clarkson of Greater Manchester Branch who was later given an honorary life membership. I'm looking forward to seeing our secretary Steve's reaction to welcoming our members wearing an Equity bandana and glitter on his face! Lol! It was good to share ideas and experiences with other branches.

Student Workshop: Fight for the Future of Performing Arts. Working with as many young people as I do, this is very close to my heart. Bristol Old Vic is at severe risk of stopping its undergraduate courses. This is mostly due to overseas students' losses. The alumni group is campaigning but the school has not been financially viable for the last three years and needs to prove viability. There's a huge deficit between income and expenses. By August 2025 they will run out of money. They're hoping for a deal with the University of West England. It's not known whether they will do degrees, diplomas, etc., find a new partner to be able to run courses. The word private keeps coming back into discussions suggesting non-public investments are being considered. Lynda Rooke said drama schools screwed around business models that are ineffective.

The Guildhall looked resplendent for **our conference dinner on Sunday night** and the members looked great too- note I still can't get used to the term 'comrades' which was used throughout the weekend. As the daughter of an Estonian refugee who fled the Russian occupation, it's a word I was brought up to loathe and fear because of my father's experiences of communist repression. But back to the Guildhall dinner. It DID take an awfully long time to arrive, way beyond acceptable delay, and then, though tasty, left me wanting another meal- I refrained though! I was most put out that the waitresses whisked away the coffee cups without offering us a cuppa! Maybe they thought I was wired enough from all earlier cups throughout the day or enjoying too much wine and chat with other branch members. Nevertheless, I did enjoy the event. And the drink in the pub afterwards, especially being treated to a "Baby Guinness" which, I discovered, has none in it all but a rather palatable mix of Baileys and Tia Maria! I 'retired' around 2 a.m. and believe the revelries were still going on for some. And yes, I did make it to breakfast and to the street rally at 9am on Monday morning, braving the rain, outside the offices of those who had axed the budget for ECHO ECHO, shouting SAVE THE ARTS! RESIST THE CUTS! SAVE THE ARTS! RESIST THE CUTS! Derry folk stopped to ask us about our protest... Paul and Lynda were exceptionally strong and inspirational. We made a huge impact in a little time.

Back at Guildhall, conference business resumed at 10am. Ian Barritt vice chair of Conference Business Committee informed us Motion 27 is remitted to Council as the proposer must leave the conference.

EMERGENCY MOTION 2: Northern Ireland was passed unanimously after being read out by Nick Fletcher and displayed onscreen. It asked Council to 1. Campaign for a real-terms increase in Arts Council Northern Ireland funding and 2. engage with other unions, local communities and cultural organisations to fight against the arts cuts. Echo Echo Dance Theatre will not receive any of its expected annual funding. In 2024, Derry's Waterside Theatre and Arts Centre shut due to issues arising from lost funding. Derry receives £5 per head funding compared compared to £10 and £21 in other places in Northern Ireland. The DP is not funding the arts despite smiling, turning up at campaigns, etc. Scots Equity members protested outside Hollywood, were invited in and subsequently were given funding having previously had budget slashed- so hope for others. In Wales, 2025 /26 funding is really the value of 2023/24. Every year it is falling. There's been a 40% cut since 2010. Yet £1 of funding puts £2.50 back into the economy.

VARIETY MOTIONS

Motion 22: Variety, Circus and Entertainers Committee passed unanimously Passionate speeches were given proposing and seconding this motion which focused on the range of difficulties nighttime entertainment workers have and that their needs are not being met or voices sought when local authorities are making decisions affecting them. The motion urges Council to engage with Manchester City Council, the Greater London Authority and Mayor of London, to strive to ensure the views of nighttime entertainment workers are taken into account.

Equity Policy

Motion 23 International Solidarity Committee: passed overwhelmingly They accepted Council's amendment for point 3, which I've incorporated into the motion details below. This was the ISC's first ever motion. They played a video from Julio who attended last year's Birmingham conference. He thanked everyone for their support and sent best wishes. Council was urged to 1. work with the International Federation of Actors (IFA) to build on their Ukraine Emergency Fund by establishing a general fund to support post war reconstruction, material well-being and trade union development in other areas of conflict or oppression, such as Palestine, Sudan and the Democratic Republic of Congo; 2. through FIA, support other

affiliated national unions to establish new committees with a similar remit to the International Solidarity Committee, to campaign together on international solidarity issues; 3. support or affiliate to other solidarity organisations across the continent of Africa and the Global South and ensure those creative workers are represented in the solidarity work of both Equity and FIA; and 4. support the establishment of an international solidarity network within Equity to shape and amplify the campaigning work of our committee.

Claire Hanna MP for South Belfast, leader of SDLP spoke via a recorded video. She has chaired all party arts group, including Equity, M.U. and Writers Group. She said our arts are in crisis and that the sector can't limp on for much longer. Very positively supported Equity and the arts.

Sian Jones Assistant General Secretary Policy and Communications Said other unions are not providing its members with our type packages. Mentioned notable policy achievements. Four-strong policy team tracking legislation, briefing politicians, doing the communications and media. Mentioned that the government is rethinking its opt out option for A.I.; and spoke about Spotlight; thanked colleagues. Said we now have strong branding due to our in-house designer.

Motion 24 Young Members Committee passed unanimously This motion, passionately delivered, received huge support from Conference in solidarity when we were informed of terrible conditions, destruction that included performance spaces being bombed to rubble, and censorship. Building on the Race Equality Committees 2024 motion and the work of the International Solidarity and LGBTQ Plus Committees, conference calls on Council to 1. work with the TUC towards a clear road map for the implementation of the TUC's 2024 Motion 24 protecting arts workers' freedom of expression; 2. Launch a national public campaign to clearly communicate and further Equity's work to lobby government, the Charity Commission, funders and organisations to safeguard freedom of expression and prevent political interference; and 3. devise an intersectional political program which educates members on their rights to freedom of expression regarding censorship and activism in solidarity with marginalised people.

Motion 25 Student Deputies Committee passed unanimously It focused on making education more accessible, including abolishing audition fees, and the crisis in higher education due to funding cuts, including affecting the Bristol Old Vic Theatre School. Interestingly, both the proposer and the seconder said they themselves are international students. Conference calls on Council to 1. support local campaigns to save performing arts education and reduce barriers to access; 2 call on the government and education institutions to accept and implement all the recommendations of the Sutton Trust's report, especially to have 'a specific review of access to conservatoires and other specialist arts institutions'; and 3. work with stakeholders such as the National Union of Students and Sutton Trust to lobby government for a public funding model for performing arts education, which expands access to students from working class and marginalised backgrounds.

Report from Louise McMullen (an actual Derry girl!) **Deputy General Secretary** Louise gave a slide presentation in which she referred to campaigns and education. These details can be found in the Annual Report. Mentioned the City of Bradford is the 2025 City of Culture.

Conference unanimously passed the formal motions to adopt the 2024 annual report and 2024 annual accounts.

Motion 26 London North Branch passed unanimously This motion begins Drama and other art students are the future of our creative life and industry. We should remove obstacles to their development. Council are called upon to urge the Westminster and devolved governments to accept our Performance For

All and Conference policies and to 1. rescind the Tory 2021 cut of 50% to funding of higher education (HE) art students; 2 offer free HE tuition fees (as in Scotland), stop audition fees and restore maintenance funding to assist with training and industry costs; 3. promote radically reduced theatre ticket prices for drama students and professionals. 4. offer seed money for arts graduate training and projects 5. encourage careers advice in the arts in all secondary schools; and 6. abolish EBacc and progress 8, restore a rich, varied curriculum including all arts and promote funded visits to and by performing companies.

(Motion 27 related to Local Authority Arts funding, was remitted to Council)

Motion 28 London South passed (unanimously?) The seconder stated: Our fundamental rights are not negotiable.” Conference believes the new government's employment rights bill ending the distinction between employee and worker leaves loopholes that employers and engages will exploit to undermine union organising. We also believe the delay in implementing the bill and its measures, especially the limited repeal of anti-union legislation is unacceptable. Conference calls on Council to also campaign for 1. the bill's amendments to include collective bargaining for all workers; 2. the bill's amendments to include repeal of all anti-union legislation; 3. as a minimum, the promised repeal of the industrial action ballot thresholds in the Trade Union Act 2016 as well as the Minimum Service Levels Act 2023 to be separated from the Bill and immediately voted through Parliament as fast-tracked legislation; 4. fellow unions and the TUC to launch a national campaign to demand these changes, including ending the employees/worker distinction with protest action and potential industrial action as appropriate; and 5. the TUC to implement its 2024 Congress policy to call a special Congress to review the bill and demand its strengthening as part of that campaign.

Motion 29 Kent Branch passed unanimously despite one member shockingly speaking against. They seemed to misunderstand a particular point and were not in the room when the vote was taken. Like Theresa and Marie who put forward this motion, much of my work includes working with young people and in schools so these views hugely resonated with me. The motion asks Council to collaborate with the Arts and Minds campaign led by the National Education Union and urges Council to lobby the government to make creative arts a core component of the national curriculum and avoid cutting funding or sidelining these crucial subjects. The multifaceted benefits to young people, industry and the economy were well explained. Conference believes the creative arts are essential. Investing in them is investing in the future. We believe every child should have the opportunity to experience the transformative power of the creative arts and we ask Council to urge the Government to reconsider their proposed budget cuts. A well worded motion and one whose aims I hope our branch will endeavour to support further.

Motion 30 Wales National Committee passed unanimously Last but by no means, this motion reaffirmed that our members are entitled to a fair and living wage for the work they do. And it is time for change. Conference calls on Council to take action by 1. investigating ways to permanently remove the legal exemption for entertainment and modelling agencies that allows our members to earn less than the national living wage after commissions are deducted; 2. launching a public awareness campaign with materials for members to shed light on this issue and garner widespread support; and 3. collaborating with the union's industrial committees to develop a strategic plan that addresses this problem with employers and works towards negotiating Equity minimum rates that, even after accounting for the 15 to 20% agency fees, ensure our members receive a legal and fair living wage.

In closing the conference, Lynda said Equity's 2025 conference is the first ever national union conference to be held in Derry. She again thanked the 3 signers Heather, Samantha and Paul and those doing captions, along with Guildhall staff, sound team. Next year conference will be held in Durham. There was a last-minute

decision to do a group photo on the Peace Bridge, but like many others, I didn't manage to go. Many dashed off for flights, and I'd decided to join Martyn Harrison in a spot of sight-seeing around Derry, which I have to say was a fabulous and friendly place and a hugely enlightening and humbling visit.

In usual end of conference fashion, we were given a packed lunch to travel home with, but the vegan/vegetarian sandwich was lacking a filling between stale bread to say the least. Sadly, it's a thumbs down on the overall quality of the meals provided but I put this down to the respective caterers either having "off days" or not coming up to their recommendations. Equity staff did a great job in organising everything, and we representatives were well looked after and appreciated for our time and unpaid work for the union, including being given a good quality hotel room each.

Of the 30 motions on the agenda, 28 were passed and 2 remitted. 2 emergency motions were passed.

Lynda chaired excellently, managing the time brilliantly under much time pressure. However, I think that with the inclusion of so many fringe workshops and non-union speakers, the conference length for union business should be extended to at least a full day on Saturday to enable more speakers from the floor to actively participate in the debating process across the full conference, even if speaking in support of motions which Council have given their support to. Having been proposed and seconded, most motions were restricted to one speaker from the floor for/against, which prevented several eager representatives contributing valuable points they had prepared in advance of conference or really wanted to voice 'in the moment'.

First time speakers received the usual Conference cheers and applause. A few speakers were told by the Chair to stick to the point and not make light of self-describing their appearance prior to speaking which I understand was being done to more include the visually impaired members attending. The time taken by some members would have been better spent on hearing additional floor speakers' views and experiences supporting the motions.

The Derry conference guide I must say was very well thought out and designed. Well impressed!

Equity's website gives information on all those who received honorary life memberships, so I've not detailed that here. The recipients were highly deserving and each emotionally overwhelmed and very touched. It meant so much to them, as did a few words and hugs of support and encouragement in the bar/over a coffee to those marginalised representatives who have been experienced racial and gender bias, and younger members who put so much into the conference and who clearly are our union's future. That includes my co-reps Erin and Bau who were magnificent- they got stuck in, mixed and mingled, spoke up, observed, learnt a lot, participated, made me laugh, were great company,- thank you team Essex and Herts!- and whom I will be unrelenting in being on their case to come onto Essex and Herts committee. Quid pro quo I rather feel in return for me having a quiet word with our general secretary on their behalf the upshot of which is that he's agreed to a zoom meet with them to chat about their shared issues with some production companies.

There weren't just 3 Essex and Herts representatives in Derry though. We had a fourth unofficial one in Martyn Harrison even though he was officially there for the Singers' Committee. And of course, we mustn't forget our South East Area Organiser Iain Croker, who did a great job and supported Essex and Herts in various ways. A highly successful conference again, with members united and exceptionally strong leadership from the front who are making it clear the UK and International political and industrial powers that be that Equity members and all creative practitioners have a place in this world and our work is worth it and we should be paid it and treated with the respect and protection we deserve.

Dee Mardi, Chair Essex and Herts Branch, Saturday 24 May 2025.