

EQUITY CONFERENCE 2023 REPORT

Equity Conference 2023

The conference was held at the TUC's Congress Centre in London, 20-22 May, attended by 216 members, staff and invited guests.

Topics debated included self-taping, threats to drag artists, renewing the work around safe spaces, small venue closures, student membership, video games and arts cuts, including those affecting English National Opera.

A rally was held on the Saturday night in opposition to the mass closures of small venues across London and the whole UK, particularly LGBTQ+ venues. Closures had become all too frequent over the past decade due to many factors, but the problem had intensified over the past year as the cost of living crisis took its toll on small businesses and forced variety venues out of business up and down the country. The rally was hosted by Councillor Dan de la Motte and heard from speakers including President Lynda Rooke, Giovanni Bienne (LGBT+ Committee), Dian Cathal (comedian and Equity member), Dani Singer (Safe Only), Izzy Gibbin (Friends of the Joiners Arms), Gareth Forest (Campaigns Officer) and Paul W Fleming (General Secretary).

This year saw an expanded fringe, with nine events covering topics including the social model of disability, political attacks on the right to strike and celebrating activism across the union. Paul Nowak, TUC General Secretary, addressed the conference and spoke against the government's attacks on trade unionists through the new bill on minimum service levels, further undermining the right to strike. He also applauded the movement's unity in defending working people in all industries over this past year of industrial action.

A dinner was held at the British Medical Association on Tavistock Square. Joseph Ballard, Summer Strallen and seven deputies from the English National Opera (David Campbell, Deborah Davison, David John-Newman, Ronald Nairne, Amy Kerenza Sedgwick, Paul Sheehan and Andrew Tinkler) were presented with Honorary Life Membership.

MINUTES – EQUITY CONFERENCE 2023

**HELD AT CONGRESS CENTRE,
LONDON, 21-22 MAY 2023**

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: 214 including
99 representatives, five Officers and 27
Councillors.**

Conference was formally convened on
Sunday 21 May at 10:00.

The President welcomed everyone. She
read out the Safe Spaces declaration,
introduced those sitting with her and
explained some points of protocol. She
introduced the fringe events, and thanked
the staff for all their hard work.

1. REPORT FROM THE CONFERENCE BUSINESS COMMITTEE (CBC)

Julia Carson Sims introduced herself as
Chair of the CBC. She gave a few house-
keeping announcements and outlined some
points of procedure.

2. OBITUARIES

Jackie Clune and Nick Fletcher,
the Vice-Presidents, read out the obituaries.
This was followed by a minute's silence and
a final ovation in honour of those who had
died in 2022.

3. PRESIDENT'S ADDRESS, LYNDA ROOKE

The President began her speech with a
quote from Karl Marx: "philosophers have
hitherto only interpreted the world in various
ways; the point, however, is to change it".
She said that at conference in Leeds last
year there had been a buzz, a feeling of
change afoot. She recalled the rally at the
Corn Exchange for Channel 4 and the
demo outside Phoenix Dance Company
which had led to the reversal of plans to
lay off dancers, all of which pointed to a
sense of real resistance and challenge in
the voices of our members. She said that
the purpose of the conference had seemed
to shift, it had become more focused on the
needs of members and their working lives
and less on internal issues.

She said that had just been the start, with
the membership voting through the new
Rulebook, long overdue branch reform,
and we were now at our new, jargon free
conference. She acknowledged that there
were fewer motions and more fringe events for
better member empowerment, education
and engagement, and a real commitment
to address the current issues affecting
members – the rally last night on the
closure of smaller venues and in particular
the threat to LGBTQ+ venues had been
a perfect example. She said conference
had changed, was changing and would
continue to change. As a union we were
moving forward because we had to,
because the challenges we faced weren't
going away and new ones arrived almost
on a daily basis.

She said that our members had lived
through the pandemic, witnessing fewer

job opportunities in the subsidised sector due to cuts to arts funding, and a cost of living and housing crisis that threatened to drive them out of the industry. She said this meant we needed to be united and of one voice demanding dignity and respect in our working lives, demanding that we were paid for the work that we did and we were paid well, that we deserved a better work/life balance and that as freelance, self-employed workers we should be offered the support and protections other workers enjoyed.

Speaking about a creativity crisis in arts education in state school, she said that enrolment in arts GCSE's had fallen by 40% and the number of arts teachers had fallen by 23%, which was worse in the most deprived areas. She said that when a group of young people attended a public meeting to try and save the Oldham Coliseum, it was not just about them watching local, live performance but about them potentially entering the industry. She said that the closure of that theatre meant that Oldham, one of the most deprived communities in the country, effectively had closed the door on opportunities for those young people, especially in considering a career in the performing arts, because you can't be what you can't see. Speaking about the plans for a smaller theatre space in Oldham, she asked where were the jobs for the locals, where were the jobs full stop?

She spoke about the worrying trend that far fewer students from state schools were studying arts subjects at A-level and then university. She noted that some time had passed since she entered the industry but the proportion of working class

actors, writers and musicians had shrunk by half; back then it had been 16.4%, which wasn't representative of the UK demographic at the time, but now it was a shocking 7.9%. She said that in many areas of the UK, cultural provision had become a geographical lottery, and if we believed and stood by that statement on our banner, "To all artists good work, to all workers good art, to all people Equity" then our defence of culture and jobs in the performing arts was paramount.

She said that over the last year she had been asked to speak at various events on the impact of the pandemic on the talent pipeline and had been very clear that attempts to make the performing arts more diverse, open and inclusive had failed, and the gatekeepers of the industry still came from a narrow elite. She said it was their choices of the stories that were told and who those stories were about which continued to narrow the job opportunities on offer and prevent a more diverse and inclusive demographic entering and surviving in the cultural industry.

She said we must continue to fight for training at industry level to open up opportunity, and Arts Councils across the UK should require organisations in receipt of investment to create workplace training and learning opportunities for creatives and performers. She added that in the same way the BBC, Channel 4 and TV/film production companies should be encouraged, perhaps via improved tax benefits/relief, to offer more skill based training. She noted that in the case of the BBC, this was what it used to do before the casualisation of its skill base. But that

required a long term commitment for change in the structure of the sector and in investment decisions.

She praised the Roundhouse for news that it was to invest in training 15,000 young people annually from disadvantaged backgrounds to learn skills, build confidence and make connections to equip them to work in the creative industries. This was being funded by private organisations and individuals, but it should not be a geographic lottery and this level of investment should be nationwide. She said we were a powerhouse sector of the UK economy, contributing £109bn in 2021 and now bigger than UK life sciences, aerospace and the automotive industries combined.

Talking about funding she said that there was an urgent need to democratise, regionalise and cooperatise the investment and decision making in our industry. She said that centralised decision making, especially with recent government interference, had produced catastrophic decisions such as the pressure on English National Opera to relocate out of London, not to forget the impact of austerity at local government level prior to the pandemic which had seen £1bn wiped off local arts budgets. She said that we knew local governments could be an effective partner, by making the case for more funding, and what we needed from them was the commitment and will to stop seeing the performing arts as an easy target and to acknowledge the role of the performing arts as a vital contributor to local economies and to social health and wellbeing.

Referring to Equity's Cast it Here campaign she highlighted how the impact of continuing rounds of arts cuts had resulted in more co-productions and tri-productions in the subsidised and commercial sectors, where the relevance of the local had become ignored.

Speaking about Equity's international work she said that she had attended the Eastern European Conference on Local Governments in Mikolajki, Poland in March, speaking on issues around the cost of living crisis and the impact of the pandemic on our sector, and in February she had attended the International Labour Organisation conference in Geneva on the future of work in the media and entertainment industries. All of this formed a core part of our work with the International Federation of Actors (FIA) which would continue in a week's time as she and other colleagues would be back with FIA in Tallinn, Estonia where she assured members that the impact of artificial intelligence on both recorded and live performance would be a major topic of discussion.

She said that one of the messages she regularly received from members was about low paid and unpaid 'work', which was often advertised on social media. She stressed that if you were in doubt at all about these adverts then please seek advice from our staff, there and then –that is what the union was there for, and she asked all activists to spread the word about this.

She said that one of the things she had never understood was when she saw posts on Facebook, often weeks after the event, complaining about unpleasant experiences

at work or in auditions or commenting on insulting adverts that were seeking performers. The truth was that commenting about this weeks after the event was about as much use as a chocolate teapot. She said that the sooner appropriate action was taken by us the better and asked everyone to report it.

She said that in the last couple of years she had seen our credibility as a trade union grow within the trade union movement, and praised the efforts of staff and activists in making Equity a progressive, forward thinking union. She applauded those branches affiliated to trades councils, and urged any branch activists that were considering affiliation to do so, because this lifted the profile of Equity and the issues facing our members, helping to move away from the elitist image that had so often dogged our voice in the movement. She said that we were the 12th largest trade union in the UK and the second largest union of creative workers in the world, and that we should be proud, be bold, be confident.

Speaking about committee elections she said that everyone would be receiving voting papers soon and asked everyone to vote and tell their fellow members to do the same. She thanked all those who were standing for committee elections, and said that training and support for activists, starting with deputies, was underway and she hoped that this would encourage others to stand in future elections. She also thanked those who are standing down from committees this year and passing the baton on. She said that they should be immensely proud of the work that they had achieved.

She said that major progressive change in our industry would not come from us being passive and accepting of poor pay, long hours, lack of dignity and respect at auditions or in the workplace, but it would only come from members having the willingness to stand up and unite as one voice under the banner of Equity.

She said that in her time as an activist, she had never known so much effort and activity as the staff were currently involved in, from pay negotiations for both Live Performance and Recorded Media, the launching of a new website, updating of membership data, moving our union investments away from fossil fuels, our new design and magazine, our distributions team, our much increased profile in the media and new organisations across the four nations now working on Equity agreements, all on top of the day to day needs of our members. She gave her whole hearted thanks to every single member of staff, for their dedication and commitment to helping our members, and said that it hadn't gone unnoticed.

She praised and gave thanks to the 33 elected Equity Councillors, and said that they routinely offered their time and expertise in supporting the union, and were committed to making Equity a more progressive, effective, supportive and inclusive trade union.

She thanked her fellow Officers, including the General Secretary for his guidance and clarity on issues that were absolutely paramount, and the lay-Officers, Vice-Presidents Jackie Clune and Nick Fletcher and Honorary Treasurer David John. She

said that their efforts often went unnoticed or unacknowledged behind the scenes but were absolutely vital to the effective running of the union.

She gave a final thank you to all the activists who attended conference. She said that they formed the bedrock of the union, and that the next year would bring challenges to us all in the industry, but the secret was for us all to celebrate Equity's successes, and where the industry failed our members, for us to unite as trade unionists under the banner of Equity to change this industry once and for all for the better.

She ended by saying her message for this conference was for Equity to move from resilience to resistance.

4. GENERAL SECRETARY'S ADDRESS, PAUL W FLEMING

The General Secretary said that it was an incredible pleasure to welcome everyone to Equity Conference 2023. Reformed, and renewed, this year's conference had fewer acronyms, more debate, a bigger fringe – and no Earl's Court Ibis!

He started by thanking the CBC for their incredible work to organise our most ambitious conference to date, with a dynamic fringe at its heart on both days and motions which overwhelmingly looked to mobilising Equity's industrial strength.

He introduced the annual report highlighting its easier to read format, and encouraged all representatives to read the staff reports from page 6 onwards which detailed every area of the union's work.

He thanked every single person who worked for Equity for their commitment to the members in building our unions, advising members and developing activists. He said that last year he had opened our conference in Leeds talking about power, when we were merely months away from the depths of the COVID pandemic, and Equity was still finding its feet, yet we were the 12th largest union in the UK. He said that it was critical that our Leeds conference reminded us that while the average workplace in this country had less than 25% union membership, the average Equity workplace had over 60% - and in the case of theatre 75-80%, and that we had one of the youngest trade union memberships in the country, with more members 28 years of age than any other. He said that 2022 had been our best year on record for recruiting new members, and our memberships in Northern Ireland, Scotland, and Wales stood at record levels too.

He said the potential of our power meant nothing if we didn't use it, and that Leeds had given us the chance to do that when on the final day we had rallied at Phoenix Dance, organised a mass protest at their offices to stop their proposals to put our members on £100 a month, and by the time most representatives had got off their train home, the bosses' proposals had been shelved, and Equity was back at the negotiating table.

He said that 2022 had been the year where we just kept winning, listing Channel 4 privatisation, millions of pounds of holiday pay and a new collective agreement with the biggest panto producer, a 10% rise in pay for independent

subsidised theatre, fighting a 10% cut in funding to Creative Scotland, doubling the number of collective agreements in Scotland and in the North of Ireland, small scale touring producers responsible for booking digs, proposals to mine data for AI, almost £10 million through our distributor service, a 100% cut to the ENO replaced with a long term settlement, over £200,000 in personal independence payments for two disabled members, the banning of strip clubs in Bristol and a collective agreement for the Commonwealth Games ceremonies in Birmingham.

He said that there's a popular rallying cry in the trade union movement: we want bread but roses too, and that our campaign against arts cuts in Oldham showed the union winning roses, even if we had not yet won the bread, but our campaign had given that community a voice – hundreds of people packed into that theatre brought there by a union campaign. The union movement's greatest achievements had never been pay, they had come through winning a collective sense of power, and the right to have a voice. Liberation, the big win, came not in the pay and campaigns we won, but in the inspirational struggle we made to get there.

He said that no year better exemplified those successes for our whole movement than the year just passed, quoting Mick Lynch, RMT General Secretary: "in decades to come, trades unionists will ask: where were you in 22?"

Talking about our solidarity actions he said we were with the RMT, the rail workers, the postal workers, university lecturers, driving

instructors, and civil servants. We stood on pickets outside museums, school gates, and on docks in Dover and Liverpool. He said that those workers were our communities, our audiences and our comrades, and we needed them on our side in every fight we had – whether it be schoolteachers refusing to take non-union TIE productions into their classrooms, drama school lecturers who we expected to stand up for dignified training, or the civil servants who fought to get our members access to benefits and Universal Credit.

He said that as well as unionised workers, this union would speak up for those who shared our struggle and were left behind: Ukrainian refugees, migrants, LGBT people and our trans comrades in particular. He said that he was proud that this union wanted to win for those on small boats, those harassed in toilets and changing rooms, because a society which was just and fair would see so many more flourish as human beings, sit in audiences for our work, and flourish as Equity members.

He said that we could not be free, let alone creative, if the liberties we had were not enjoyed by all, from ICAF's incredible work with Ukrainian artists this year, their ongoing work with Belarusian artists living in exile, or indeed with our Palestinian sister organisation Alrowwad. He said that the struggle of artists in the Middle East was no less the work for this union, than supporting our incredible Colombian comrades on the cusp of organising telenovelas after decades of fascist rule there. He paid tribute to Martin Brown, the former Assistant General Secretary, who had led on our work in Palestine, Ghana and across the

globe and sadly died last month, after a brief illness at the age of just 69. He made this promise to Martin's legacy: that our work for peace and justice in the Middle East, Latin America, Asia, and Africa would always look beyond the contentious nature of any conflict to the see the comrades who suffered because of it.

He said that some had tried to paint Equity's unashamed solidarity with other unions as new, remarking that a prominent regional theatre boss had recently described Stephen Spence, former Deputy for the General Secretary, as the first truly radical progressive member of Equity staff. He said he was sure Stephen would have been pleased, but that it would have come as a surprise to the first General Secretary, and Communist Councillor, Alfred Wall, and to the fifth General Secretary Gerald Croasdell – lifelong Communist Party member and Cambridge associate of Burgess and Maclean – and those who had boycotted apartheid South Africa or collected for those in the Spanish Civil War would also view the idea that this union's international obligations and activities were new with some bemusement. He spoke about the remarkable transformation of Guild House, where the walls of our meeting rooms now showed our members on rallies with nurses in the 1970s, hosting solidarity benefits for miners in the 80s and 90s, and our place front and centre of anti-austerity coalitions since 2010. He said whether you thought global solidarity was a good or a bad thing, it certainly wasn't new.

He said that winning in 2023, however, certainly at the pace and scale we had

achieved, had required change within our union – not change from the core moral, economic, and social truth of what trades unionism was about – but change in the tactics we used, and how we went about building a movement which was diverse, modern and inclusive. He spoke about the new reformed Rulebook, conference, committees, branches and complaints processes, so we could ensure the union was a safe space, with better funding and support for branches and the ability for committees to ratify their own agreements.

He said that these new rules and structures were wins for members – and when the new Rulebook had passed by the biggest turnout in a decade with over three quarters in support, it had been a loud vote of confidence from ordinary members in the wins which we, you, their union, had built. He was proud to announce that we had more contests for committee places this year, and an increase of 12% in people standing. He said the improved diversity and engagement with our democratic structures was objectively good.

Speaking about the officer leadership of the union, he paid tribute to President Lynda Rooke, Vice-Presidents Jackie Clune and Nick Fletcher, and Honorary Treasurer David John. He said that between them they had decades of service in activism to our union, in many of the professions and sectors we covered and that their activism was, as members knew, not passive, and rarely uncritical but they were critical comrades – members should not confuse a united officer team, with shared values and vision, with a lack of lay-leadership or scrutiny. He praised the miles that they

had all clocked up visiting members across the UK and supporting our sister unions at home or abroad.

He said that one of the remarkable contributions of this team was its desire to make sure we were winning for all members, not to occupy a space of privilege for their own sake, so that we now had a Council which was 40% under 40, but included members in their 70s and their 20s, our first openly trans Councillor, more comrades of colour, over 50% women, and a majority from outside of London. This showed who this union aimed to speak for.

Talking about winning for the future he said that the union's partnership approach had worked well for decades – with over 90% of TV and film made on a union agreement, pay had risen in real terms every decade on the West End for over 50 years but that progress had slowed. He said we had won, but we needed to win bigger.

He spoke about our Work, Rest, and Pay campaigns in theatre showing our new approach, and praised the comms team for putting us on the front of newspapers and at the top of the news, our deps for bringing in record turnouts in surveys and ballots, and our staff for organising and negotiating like never before.

He said that these were serious trade union negotiations, with a powerful industrial union, and that our Council had literally put our money where our mouth was. In a warning to the bosses, he announced that the union now had a strike fund of £1m, and said we were not afraid to use it.

He said that using robust trade union tactics was a means to an end, not an end in itself and that this union did not take action for show and no trades unionist would lose pay for their ego, but it set the tone for the significant partnership wins we had had in theatre: including the new working parties led from the top of both the management associations and the union on a five day rehearsal week, and the future of the digs system.

He said whether it was a boss at the BBC or ITV with restrictive covenants on what our members on the soaps could say or do, or a producer who imagined Mrs Miggins was still providing digs, our message was simple: work with us for progress in our industries, because not listening to this union now had serious consequence. He said that no longer would this union support the narrative of resilience in our industries, we needed resistance now, not resilience, that poor pay and precarity were not inevitable prevailing winds for you to bend with like reeds, they were tides which could be turned. Quoting the words of a Variety Artistes Federation member in 1906, he said we were not white powder to be blown away – pour water on us and we will turn to concrete. They won the music hall war and we were going to win the future.

He said that we were able to do this work because our union was increasingly financially strong and stable. Some had had their doubts about whether the tendencies of a militant, left wing Catholic with a penchant for tailoring would fare well with balancing the books, but this year our assets stood at around £20 million,

and our surplus was healthy. He said he was proud of the way our finance team, including the Honorary Treasurer, had achieved this, with modest subscriptions raises but also the massive re-tendering of services like never before and substantial savings which we could invest right back into the membership, our campaigns, our conference, our branches, and, yes, our staff.

He announced that he was excited that in June, Council would confirm a new set of six Trustees. He said that two would be familiar to you, Johnny Worthy, and a popular actor in straight plays and some films, Dame Judi Dench, but that they will be joined by three new trustees, the comedian Alan Davies, Adrian Lester CBE, and Ruby Turner MBE.

He said that the desire of the outgoing Trustees was, in the words of former President Malcolm Sinclair, to hand on the reins to a new generation and that the generous progressive spirit of Malcolm, Timothy West, and Penelope Wilton wanting our union to be strong and forward-looking was a lesson to us all, and he hoped that our majority women, majority black, working class Trustees – with gongs galore and a fiery passion for social justice – would stand us in good stead. He said that it also meant over one third of Trustees and Councillors were from or lived in the Midlands, a change and a win he thought we could all agree on.

He gave a final thought for representatives about conference, about change, and about winning. He said that a functioning

union was like a beautiful tapestry, that the conference, Council, branches, and committees were the threads at the back, often imperfect, patched, broken, threadbare, trailing. Union democracy could be messy, but the tapestry that the bosses, the government, and non-members must see was the front. He described that as a beautiful image which was undimmed by time, and instead became more beautiful as the threads behind it blended into one, saying that we must remember that every representative in this room came from a different tradition and place, and their intentions and contributions should be received in a comradely way, in good faith.

He said that the stakes could not be bigger; the union movement was the hope of the world, not the hope of some of the people in some of the places at some of the time. Whether you worked in a factory, a field or a film set; on stage or on screen or on a street corner; in an office or an audio booth – our movement was your hope, and not just of people, but of the planet, the material world yesterday, today and tomorrow. He praised the work of Equity for a Green New Deal for their excellent work on green clauses in collective agreements, and a new green rider. He ended by saying that our union had three objectives: to all artists good work, to all workers good art, to all people: Equity.

The speech was followed by the debates on motions 1-3 (Equality and Inclusion).

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

Sara Kestelman said it was an honour to celebrate the work of ICAF for 50 years to help artists in peril across the world. She spoke about the founding of ICAF and praised those founding members that were still involved. She said they were grateful for the activism of new, younger members. She talked about some of the ongoing work supporting Belarusian, Ukrainian, and Chinese artists. She said that the committee would be more fully incorporated into Equity but asked for conference and branches' support with donations.

Conference was adjourned at 12:35.

Conference was formally re-convened at 15:00.

The session began with the debates on motions 4-5 (Equality and Inclusion)

6. HONORARY TREASURER'S SUBMISSION OF 2022 ACCOUNTS

David John, Honorary Treasurer, said it was a genuine privilege to stand here as your new Honorary Treasurer and that when he first joined the union the thought he would become an officer was unimaginable, reflecting that it was difficult to even join the union back then. He said it may have been imposter syndrome kicking in but he hadn't felt welcome in the union at first, but times changed and our union had moved on, and he was extremely proud to be a part of this

team of Officers with Lynda Rooke, Jackie Clune, Nick Fletcher and a formidable General Secretary in Paul Fleming. He said that the group was progressive, forward looking, outward looking and determined to do everything they could to improve the working lives of all our members by fighting for better terms and conditions, and fair pay for all.

He said that one of his duties as Honorary Treasurer was to submit the annual accounts to the conference, but that before he did that it would be remiss of him not to pay tribute to his predecessor Bryn Evans. He praised Bryn's extraordinary dedication and service to the union in the last 18 years but especially over the last couple of difficult years. He gave his heartfelt thanks to Bryn for everything he had done for our union.

He said that the financial stability of our union was of paramount importance, for us to be able to campaign as we wanted to, to fight for better terms and conditions and fair pay we must as a union be in a strong financial position.

He praised the hard working and dedicated financial department at Equity. Daniel Fryer, Finance & Operations Assistant, Gareth Rawlings, Senior Finance Officer who had worked incredibly hard on the audit this year and Beccy Reese, Assistant General Secretary. He said that Beccy had given him so much time and advice since he started in the role and that her help was seriously appreciated.

He took the written report and the accounts as read but said he wanted to draw

conference's attention to the main headline figures.

He said we had had two years of severe disruption to our industry and that Equity had supported members in trouble during the pandemic to the tune of £1,294,504 at a time that 40% of Equity members had received no help from the government whatsoever.

He noted that we had made an urgent and exceptional payment of £2,000,000 into the staff pension fund to alleviate short term future deficit contributions, the much needed refurbishment of Guild House which he described as absolutely splendid and fit for purpose for a modern, serious trade union.

He said that due to these costs it was no wonder that we had reported a deficit in the 2021 accounts of £1,412,984 including the pension liability as a starting place, but the positive news was that in the 2022 accounts he was very pleased to report an operating surplus of £321,505 which was a healthy position for the union to be in and amounted to a significant fightback.

He spoke about how the surplus figure had been achieved, with more money going in than going out but noted that subscriptions from members were our primary source of income, and although recruitment had been good this year we were losing some members. He highlighted the pandemic and cost of living crisis which he referred to as post-Trussonomics. He urged everyone to be aware we offered subscriptions grants for a year and honourable withdrawal for three years for members who were not working, which meant they could keep

their membership for up to four years if they continued to be unemployed in the industry.

Speaking about our investment income he said he was delighted to be the Honorary Treasurer in post when Council voted to phase out investment in fossil fuels. He thanked comrades at Equity for a Green New Deal for helping to get this policy adopted, and said that our investment policy going forward was no baccy, no bombs and no fossil fuels.

He spoke about the industry recovery from the pandemic and said never to forget that it was us that had kept the nation entertained during the awful lockdowns we had had to endure, but we must also never forget how the workers in our industry had suffered during those difficult times, especially the 40% of our members who had been left hanging by this dire government. He said that we were all used to the disdain and complete lack of understanding that Tory governments always displayed towards arts and culture and we should never be surprised by it, noting that his first ever anti arts cuts march had been against the Thatcher government, and that some things never changed but we just had to be ready to stand up to the next attacks that would inevitably come our way.

He spoke about the poor leadership from the government on culture, with the worst Secretary of State we had had attempting to sell off Channel 4, but we had fought back. He said we had also fought against the recent awful Arts Council England cuts at the ENO and elsewhere. He said that it had been genuinely moving to be there to hear our members giving a rendition

of “You’ll Never Walk Alone” outside the DCMS, and now Arts Council England had been forced to reconsider.

He paid tribute to the campaign to try and avoid the tragic loss of the Oldham Coliseum, where our members had turned out in droves to try to save their beloved theatre, and to our members in Scotland who had campaigned loudly and successfully against proposed arts cuts by the Scottish government to Creative Scotland. He said we must never forget that campaigning against arts cuts could make a difference and we must continue getting out on the streets and defending our wonderful industry. He noted that with the way this government was changing the law, we would probably all end up arrested and locked up for doing it.

He spoke about last conference in Leeds and the great feeling when we had marched up to the Channel 4 Head Office with our banners and flags, and said not to forget the other demonstration of our power when we had marched up to Phoenix Dance to protest against their disrespectful treatment of our members. He said he had only got as far as Doncaster on the train home when the news had come through that the management had backed down.

He said that another of his Honorary Treasurer duties was to look after the benevolent fund, and that the number of applications had been rising due to this appalling cost of living crisis, and that we had already paid out more than half of our budgeted figure for 2023 by the end of April alone. He said that we could offer small but quick welfare payments as well

as give advice on which industry charities to approach for more substantial help. He thanked Nusrat Raahi for all her help and hard work administering the benevolent fund.

He ended by saying that we all understood the injustices and the unfairness that could happen in our industry but we were all here because we wanted to fight these injustices and improve all our members’ working lives. He referred to the General Secretary and said “no more resilience, now is the time to resist”. Finally he gave a quote from Ernesto Che Guevara which he hoped would resonate with everyone: “if you tremble with indignation at every injustice, then you are a comrade of mine.”

He thanked conference, confirmed that the union was a going concern and in a strong financial position, and commended the 2022 accounts to conference.

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

Becky Reese thanked David John, Honorary Treasurer, for providing scrutiny and working with our auditors to ensure our accounts were a fair and true representation of the union’s finances.

She said that financial stability was crucial to enabling staff and members to demonstrate and build our power as a union – helping us to collectively challenge and hold the bosses to account. She said that her department also looked after other key operational functions of the union:

information technology, the maintenance and running of the buildings we work in, and providing good administrative services to our members.

She said that in 2022 we had brought these functions together under one department for the first time, working together as a team with a focus on three priorities: ensuring we had facilities fit for purpose and future proofed, building strong partnerships with external experts and suppliers, and creating a culture of continual change to improve processes.

She commended the 2022 Annual report which demonstrated the work of our incredible, dedicated staff in the industrial departments working with members to support their resistance to attacks on terms and conditions.

She outlined the work that went on behind the scenes to support these colleagues and give them the best tools to do their jobs.

The refurbishment of Guild House had provided a comfortable and functional office space with meetings space suitable for Council and committees, and space for members to meet staff to discuss difficult/distressing matters comfortably, with facilities for hybrid meetings and improved accessibility in a number of areas across the building. She said that our Council room was used for negotiations with the bosses in theatre, projecting a sense of our power and duty.

Two large projects involved migrating our membership system and distributions software to newer versions. She said that as

part of this work some of our systems were sometimes intentionally unavailable as the migrations went live. We tried to keep these service outages to minimum – however, we had found that due to the bespoke nature of our systems and their undocumented development we had encountered some delays in getting them back on track. She said that we wanted our systems to deliver better for our members, and that our review had highlighted that the systems had not been comprehensively reviewed for some years and were out of step with more up to date technology. We had taken the decision to take the old post that had responsibility for both Guild House and our IT services across the organisation and split them into two separate roles to create more capacity to put in place a strategy across the workforce.

She said that in 2023 we had implemented a strategy around staff use of technology to ensure we were keeping our members' data secure and that our staff were able to work efficiently whether sitting at a desk in an office or whilst travelling to and from cast visits, and developing cross-departmental groups of members of staff who were key to the running of these systems and users. She said that we were taking the time to understand our key systems better and their future requirements, which would not be a fast process but getting as much right at the start was crucial.

She said we were also looking at our offices outside of London, making sure they served staff in the regions and nations to the same standard as those who worked in Guild House.

She said we were now building strong relationships with external experts and suppliers so that they understood what we did, monitored their invoices and were able to challenge the way they supported us, and that in 2022 we had started a tender programme for all our major suppliers which would take another 2-3 years to complete.

She said that we were creating a culture of continual change to improve processes, highlighting that Equity was a small staff team and a lot of expertise could lie in individual people's heads, buried in emails or someone else's filing. She said we were documenting processes, moving to more collaborative ways of working.

She thanked all of the Finance & Operations team for truly keeping all of our functions running.

She ended by saying all these roles supported our industrial colleagues to build members' power and strength in the workplace and fighting for fairness and equality to build an entertainment industry that worked for everyone.

The speech was followed by the debates on motions 6-9 (Internal Union Business) and emergency motion 1.

The President adjourned Conference for the first day at 18:00.

Conference was formally re-convened on Monday 22 May at 10:00.

8. TUC GENERAL SECRETARY, PAUL NOWAK

The General Secretary introduced the TUC General Secretary, Paul Nowak. The General Secretary shared the history of Equity Conference as a place for democracy, community and building collective power within the trade union movement. The General Secretary said that Paul Nowak has been a long term friend of Equity, supporting our work and understanding the struggles of marginalised arts workers. The General Secretary said that Paul Nowak's ability to bring trade unionists together from across the movement was key to our future success as a movement.

Paul Nowak welcomed Equity Conference attendees to the TUC's Congress Centre and said it was the home of the trade union movement. Paul Nowak discussed the many cross-sector strikes taking place across the UK, such as striking doctors, striking teachers and striking transport workers. He thanked Equity for our solidarity towards striking workers in other sectors and thanked the General Secretary for leading Equity as a union. He thanked each delegate in the room for their contributions towards the trade union movement by fighting to make workplaces better and participating in trade union democracy through Conference. He reflected on Equity's recent campaigning successes, such as the Channel 4 campaign, which were testament to Equity's strength as a union.

He discussed how Equity represented every artist in the fight against low pay, and the scourge of no pay. He discussed the various

crises the entertainment industry faced, such as the cost of living crisis and attack on arts funding. He said the examples of the BBC Singers, ENO and Oldham Coliseum were direct examples of where the current government had sought to break communities and the arts industry within the UK. He shared a family story of relatives who had spent their lives fighting fascism and stated our country should never turn its back on those fleeing persecution. He applauded Equity's work with ICAF to financially assist Ukrainian performers attempting to maintain normal lives and performance careers amidst the strife and danger of war.

He reflected on workers facing dire financial conditions and wages not increasing at this moment in time. He said the wealthiest 1% of society were having their best years while the UK struggled to make ends meet during the cost of living crisis. He said that our economy rewarded the wealthy, but we must call on government for economic reform with a proper windfall tax and raises on taxes for the wealthy and not for workers. He said we could not ask politely for change, we must demand it. He pledged as General Secretary of the TUC that the TUC would always support Equity members in strike action and in every Equity campaign. He said we would collectively fight for pay rises in every sector as we all deserved decent pay. He explained how the current government had made promises for workers and not only not delivered these promises but attacked trade unions and workers' rights. He discussed the government's attack on trade unions through legislation and said that we must fight so that no worker was

sacked for taking industrial action. He said that we must ensure the current government suffered the consequences of their attack on performers' rights at the next general election. He said it is time for us to be bold and fix broken Britain. We could not create change just by hoping, but by fighting, organising and voting for it.

He said we must do everything we could to rebuild and renew the trade union movement to make it truly inclusive and representative for all. He discussed the impact of the #MeToo movement on the entertainment industry and noted that sexual harassment was a grave problem in the trade union movement, as well as the entertainment industry. He said that every woman must feel safe and included, and that every sister must feel safe and included in this room, at Equity and in the trade union movement. He said we must build our own trade unionism and the trade union movement was ours. He ended by saying that trade unionism was solidarity and that when we stood together and fought together, we would win together.

9. DEPUTY FOR THE GENERAL SECRETARY, LOUISE McMULLAN

Louise McMullan shared a video with Conference illustrating Equity's mission and values of 'resilience to resistance' for Equity members. The video shared the successes of Equity's campaigns for Channel 4 and Phoenix Dance at Equity 2022 Conference. The video showed highlights of Equity members campaigning, lobbying and protesting throughout 2022-2023 with banners, flags and megaphones, fighting for arts workers rights across the UK. She thanked Equity's members for their

activism this year, thanked Lynda Rooke for leadership as President and thanked the communications team for their work on the video shown. She said 2023 had been a busy year for the union, where Equity had transformed the way it presented itself to the world, through new branding and merchandise, and finding our voice on the world stage. She said Equity was speaking up with confidence and pride about what we did, what we believed and what we wanted to win. She spoke about Equity's member focused, dynamic and inspiring campaigns across the UK, such as Oldham, ENO, Dignity in Digs and Work, Rest and Pay. She said our members' enthusiasm and effort was helping us win and Equity members felt more powerful than ever before. She said our campaigning would soon deliver more wins for our members, across Recorded Media and Live Performance.

She applauded how Equity's Equalities Committees were challenging discrimination, creating safe spaces and making the industry more inclusive – but that even more, equalities must be at the heart of our campaigning work. She said linking every fight for pay, terms and conditions across all sectors to the pursuit of an equal, accessible and inclusive industry was key to our victory as a union. She said we must win for our members at work but we must also deliver wins for our members when they were out of work. She discussed the thousands of pounds Equity's Tax & Social Security team won for our members each year. She said that while this case working service was a life line for many members, Equity members nonetheless faced cruel and dysfunctional system.

She announced that in June Equity would be publishing a groundbreaking research report about our members' experiences of navigating the Universal Credit system, shining a light on the barriers DWP placed in the way of people trying to make a living in the arts.

She announced that a refreshed and updated sequel to Performance for All would be our blueprint for campaigning in the lead up to the next general election. She said the long running war of attrition against arts funding had to be resisted and substantial demands for increases to arts funding across England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland would be made. She celebrated 50 years of Equity's International Committee for Artists' Freedom. She discussed Equity's work with ICAF and how the money raised at Conference assisted performers in Ukraine, fighting to survive and carry on in the middle of war.

She thanked all comms and policy team members by name, and the industrial departments and nations for their work this year, particularly the work in Northern Ireland. She thanked all members for taking part in Equity's campaigns this year. Finally the biggest thank you to every member who had taken part in a campaign this year – for all who had tweeted their support, picked up a flag or sung a song at a demo – Equity's members were the source of our power.

The speech was followed by the debates on motions 10-11 (Policy).

**10. ASSISTANT GENERAL SECRETARY
(RECORDED MEDIA),
JOHN BARCLAY**

John Barclay shared that Equity Conference 2023 was his 33rd attendance at an Equity Conference. He shared a video clip from the Recorded Media department, showing a recent recruitment campaign for audio artists. The video featured Equity members David Menkin and Chloe Sommer. He thanked the Screen and New Media Committee, Audio Committee and all Recorded Media colleagues by name for their dedication and work this year. He thanked colleagues in the nations and regions, Communications, Policy, and Operations staff for their work. He thanked the Secretariat and Officers for their contributions, and stated that our collective work was what spurred the union forward and created wins for our members. He commemorated Glenda Burgess, a valued member of the Recorded Media department and a much-loved employee of Equity of many years who had sadly passed away this year.

He shared the challenges that workers and trade unionists in Recorded Media faced, both technological and business-orientated. These could seem daunting but working together we, as Equity, could meet them. He discussed Recorded Media's work around Non-Disclosure Agreements with streamers and producers to ensure that an NDA could not prohibit union activity or the reporting of bullying and harassment. He said that bullying, harassment and inappropriate behaviour in recorded media was the scourge of our industry. He shared that Equity was working with broadcasters, streamers, intimacy direction

professionals, the agent community and 21 major engagers across the world to carry out anti-bullying and intimacy provisions for our members. He said that working with the International Federation of Actors, Recorded Media has this year delivered 'SVoD; a Guide for affiliate unions' for FIA members. He said that in audio, we had now signed up 1,500 audio artists to Equity's Audio newsletter.

He discussed the astronomical rise of the audiobooks global market to 35 billion dollars and contrasted this to the poor terms and conditions our members faced and Equity's aim to change this. He discussed how the UK was the leading videogame market with a UK value of over £7 billion, in contrast with extremely low fees for voice over and motion-capture artists in videogames. He discussed how while TV advertising revenue in the UK was 3.8 billion, Equity members faced bad terms and unfair pay in this industry. He said that Equity's 'Crack Down on Commercials' campaign would be launched today. He said it was a campaign for better pay, more control over work and an end to oppressive and restrictive working practices for performers in commercials. He said we must tackle the non-union cultures in these sectors and there was no economic argument not to engage with these sectors, especially where the employers were anti-worker, anti-creative and anti-trade unionist.

He discussed how artificial intelligence had and would continue to have an immeasurable impact on the entertainment industry. He discussed how Equity's Recorded Media department was working with sister unions across the globe to push

back against exploitative AI contracts following on from Equity's 'Stop AI Stealing The Show' campaign. He made reference to 'Fake Neighbours' as how entertainers' personages, visages and voices could be manipulated without their permission. He shared that the new Equity AI Toolkit would shortly be launched to ensure our members understood AI, could advocate for themselves and advocate for fair terms and conditions. He said that negotiations for ITV, BBC and Netflix were all in progress to further strengthen terms around AI for Equity's members. He said that Equity's Distributions Team had to date distributed £69 million in royalties and residuals to Equity members. He made mention of Equity's stance of solidarity with the Writers' Guild of America and ACTRA. He stated that what we had achieved through collective bargaining was hard to get, but easy to lose, and ended with the closing statement of "you are us - we are you and together we are Equity".

The speech was followed by the debates on motions 12-14 (Recorded Media).

Conference was adjourned at 12:30.

Conference was formally re-convened at 15:00.

**11. ASSISTANT GENERAL SECRETARY (LIVE PERFORMANCE),
HILARY HADLEY**

Hilary Hadley said that her speech would have no videos and no jokes! She started by referencing her previous speeches to Conference when she had described the period of the pandemic as hell, and the period immediately after as purgatory. She said that through our own efforts as a Union we had now started the work of breaking through the gates of heaven. She said there would still be some waiting at the gates – and banging at the gates – but that there had been achievements this year which she would describe as heaven indeed.

She said that Commercial Theatre in particular was still in difficulties, with some exceptions, with audiences and income 10 to 15% down on 2019 levels. The West End, although a little better was still operating at 2019 levels.

She said that in Subsidised Theatre production had shrunk to effectively half of pre-pandemic levels with the consequent reduction in the number of jobs for our creative team, performers and stage management members.

She said that as one Commercial Theatre manager had said at recent negotiations, "If a Tory Government thinks in this current climate that the theatre industry needs more help and an extension of theatre tax relief for another two years, what sort of a state do you think we are in?!"

She said that on top of this, the Arts Council cuts and the levelling up agenda imposed

by the DCMS removed all money from some of the unionised workplaces, with the more fortunate NPOs receiving significant cuts that they could just about absorb and survive, but at a great cost to production and our members jobs. She said this was very far from heaven.

She said that an analysis of theatre pay rates before negotiations started, across all three national collective agreements, showed that had the cost of living crisis not occurred pay rates would have done very well against inflation, but as we were all too acutely aware it did! She said the country had experienced soaring rates of inflation not seen for decades, with fuel, food, housing and other basic costs spiralling out of control. This crisis had been hugely difficult for members to manage, particularly when all savings had been exhausted by the loss of work during the pandemic.

She said that this had not been the best of times to be renegotiating all three of the national theatre agreements with anxious producers and venues, struggling to recover and meet the rising costs of production. Yet we were very clear that whilst we accepted that these 'dead' costs could not be avoided, that they could not be used at the expense of the living cost of labour: that is, our members should not be expected to absorb what the producers could not avoid!

She said that this was why the Union had developed a campaigning approach to negotiations: it could not have been business as usual. She explained that this had required new methods to present and highlight claims, new ways of showing the

producers the very real experience of our members working for them. For the first time the Union had devised an overarching campaign called 'Work, Rest and Pay', which linked the objectives under each of the three agreements to give theatre workers a better deal.

She said the campaign had produced an early victory in the ITC negotiations, agreeing an immediate 10% increase on pay minimums, 20% on day rates, and a provision that unless mutually agreed otherwise, the producer would provide accommodation on tour. She said the ITC had also agreed to a five day rehearsal week unless mutually agreed otherwise.

She went on to say that under the 'Work, Rest and Pay' banner, two other campaigns had been launched. The 'Dignity in Digs' campaign asked members to share their problems with accommodation when working from home, so that before and during negotiations an accurate picture could be presented to employers in both commercial and subsidised theatre. In addition, the 'Stand Up for 17' campaign in the West End had been necessary to bang home to the producers the union's demand for a substantial pay increase, and show them in advance of negotiations that the membership were standing behind the union negotiators. She said that we expected resistance!

She said that the 'Stand Up for 17' campaign had been launched first by the Moulin Rouge cast at the Piccadilly Theatre, followed by every single cast in the West End participating in a photo petition coordinated by the West End Deputies, a map

of which had been submitted to the West End Producers at the start of negotiations.

She said that during negotiations, the deputies had organised a rally under the banner where hundreds of West End members had taken to the streets on a rainy two-show Saturday in March to pour further fuel onto the fire we had lit beneath the producers before the negotiations commenced. She said that although the producers would never admit to it, these tactics had worked.

She said that the final result of the West End negotiations had still not been declared (the ballot closed after the Conference), but that the union had recommended settlement. She highlighted that we achieved a guaranteed increase on basic pay of 9% this April and an additional 5% from next. These were levels of increase which many unions after months of bitter strike action had failed to achieve.

She said there were also large increases in the understudy, swing, and dance captain payments, leading to cumulative increases in basic pay from this April of between 11% to 15% for many ensemble members. She said that finally the true value of swings and understudies had been recognised. So too, the value of our West End stage management, with the differential unfrozen and increased, and with guaranteed acting up/cover responsibility and performance payments.

She said that on rest, holiday embargo periods would now have to be identified at the point of contact, which had gone down extremely well with members on musicals,

who had struggled to take holidays when last minute embargo periods were imposed.

She said there would be a working group set up headed up by our General Secretary and the two chief executives of SOLT/UK Theatre to work towards the development of models and templates to pilot a successful implementation of the five day rehearsal week both in the West End and in Commercial Theatre during 2023. She said this would give it the status and seriousness it deserved.

She said that negotiations in the subsidised sector had successfully concluded with 9% over two years. She said that negotiations would recommence at the end of two years in advance of the theatres submitting their Arts Council applications for funding, to provide a better fit with the funding review cycle. She said that this made absolute sense and was a major achievement. She said that over three years subsistence would increase by 24.9%, with 60% increases in understudy payments and again for stage management acting up payments guaranteed. She said, on the five-day rehearsal week, that a number of Subsidised Theatres had already been identified who were willing, or indeed delighted, to take part in a pilot programme this year. She said this new agreement had met with 92% approval of members in the recent ballot.

She said that on Commercial Theatre, after a considerable struggle, we had achieved an immediate 5% increase from April with CPI plus for the next two years, a minimum of 10%, and a maximum of 15% on the basic pay. She said there would

be an immediate 10% rise on the touring allowance to £330, and it would now be paid four weeks in advance for the largest tours, two weeks for the smaller. Finally and at last, the producers had agreed to provide accommodation and a per diem for tours going to Dublin – an achievement which sounded small but was not, given many members had endured much misery having to find their own accommodation in Dublin within the allowance.

She said that again that stage management would now receive responsibility/cover payments for acting up and a performance payment if they performed these duties.

She said that on digs, most importantly, it had been agreed that UK Theatre and Equity would develop a Code of Conduct with the intention that venues would require the digs owners on their lists to abide by the code. She said these discussions again would be headed by our own General Secretary and the two Chief Executives of UK Theatre/SOLT, and our Commercial Theatre Deputies would be closely involved in developing the requirements of the code. Again this gave it the status and seriousness it deserved.

She said she believed that this commitment, and this working group, would be a hugely important step in revealing the truth behind the provision and availability of digs of a good standard.

She said this Working Group and the development of the Code of Conduct was also extended to the Subsidised Sector.

She said she was expecting in a relatively

short period that the perennial problem with digs, particularly in the commercial sector, would be resolved once and for all! That would be heaven indeed!

She said that at ballot 85% of members had voted for the new Commercial Theatre agreement with a response rate that was double the ballot response in 2019.

She said it was important to say that for all three of these agreements we had achieved impressive gains without giving anything away in exchange. There were no trade-offs: it was all one way – our way!

She said that separate to this, another major achievement had been the signing of a house agreement with Crossroads Pantomimes (formerly Qdos Entertainment) for this year's pantomimes. She said she could not describe how pleased she was that this house agreement had now been signed, given the many years of to-ing and fro-ing with the elusive Qdos. This meant that the largest commercial pantomime production company was now using a union agreement. She said we were now persuading other credible commercial producers of pantomimes to follow Crossroads' lead.

She said that last, but never least, she wanted to outline the achievements in the variety sector. She said we had set up several new networks for Drag Artists across the UK; we had achieved sign-ups to our Comedians Charter including by the Leicester Comedy Festival; we had done work with Spotlight for puppeteers, developed a Charter for Care Homes, and assisted a circus from the Ukraine with a

subs grant and maintenance support until they were able to perform. She said we had collectively assisted with hundreds of non-payment and cancellation claims including many around the time of the royal demise, provided endless advice to individual variety artists and demonstrated the value of union membership at every point.

So thanked all Equity members who were part of our Campaign Groups and Negotiating Committees as well as our Deputies. Particularly outstanding was the ability of the West End Deputies to ensure that the members of their individual West End companies participated in the campaign, were well informed throughout, kept strict confidence throughout the negotiations, voted when asked to do so by the union in huge numbers, and who kept trust and faith in the union throughout the many twists and turns! She also thanked the Commercial Theatre Deputies who helped us through.

She thanked all the members of the Stage Management Committee and all our Stage Management Deputies who helped the union achieve this breakthrough in negotiations on all three Agreements. She said it had been a great year for stage management.

She said that although we had not yet achieved the new agreements for our creative team members, negotiations would begin the following week, and she thanked the Directors and Designers Committee members for their work in engaging with other director and designer members via a series of open meetings, monthly newsletters and the production of new

recruitment materials.

She thanked all the staff who worked with Live Performance both at Guild House and in the nations and regions covering variety and theatre, but particularly she wanted to thank those officials who had brought so many companies onto new theatre house agreements with the union.

She thanked Karrim Jalali, for not only the ITC Agreement, but for his persistence work with worker status issues and bringing these to tribunal. She said Karrim was literally engulfed by case work on a daily basis, but despite this he had also brought in over forty new house agreements.

She thanked Adam Adnyana and Marlene Curran working together as a team in Scotland, bringing in an unbelievable 26 new Scottish companies, whilst simultaneously achieving phenomenal amounts of visits to working members in Scotland.

She thanked Alice Lemon, working alone in Northern Ireland, bringing in six new agreements, together with the successful establishment of a new base in Derry to extend member activism and engagement outside of Belfast.

She thanked Louise McMullan for assisting her with the negotiations in the West End and for linking her department so closely to all of the industrial campaigns and communications in Live Performance.

She thanked Charlotte Bence and Hannah Plant for all their work delivering campaigns, supporting Deputies and

Negotiating Committees. She said it had been a particularly stressful time for them both, and neither were the younger for it!

She thanked Lottie Stables for working so hard to take over responsibility for the Standing Companies in Opera and Dance and for helping the members plunged into crisis by the terrible decision of the Arts Council at ENO.

She said she wanted to thank Ian Bayes, not for his jokes, but for his dedication, persistence, and for the fact that he was constantly thinking of new ideas and solutions to problems with an optimism and forward thinking of a man half his age and of half his service to the union.

She finished her report by saying that she was confident that under the leadership of the General Secretary, President and Officers of the Union, with members and staff working together in the various workplaces covered by this report, members who placed their trust in the union, kept confidence and were prepared to stand up to be counted when it mattered most, we were going to arrive at a heavenly future indeed!

The speech was followed by the debates on motions 16-24 (Live Performance), emergency motion 2 and motion 15 (Recorded Media).

12. FORMAL MOTION TO ADOPT THE 2022 ANNUAL REPORT AND ACCOUNTS

The formal motion to adopt the Annual Report 2022 was proposed by Paul Valentine, seconded by Lizzie Cooper and CARRIED overwhelmingly.

The formal motion to adopt the Annual Accounts 2022 was proposed by Sam Swann, seconded by Rhubarb the Clown and CARRIED overwhelmingly.

The President then brought Conference to a close at 17:10. She thanked Pattison and Brewer for the meal, the signers and the captioners, the staff at the TUC, all those involved in the organisation of the event and the Conference Business Committee. She reminded members to attend the emergency TUC "Protect the Right to Strike" that evening in Westminster.

13. AWARDS OF HONORARY LIFE MEMBERSHIP

Joseph Ballard

The President said this member had shown superb organisational qualities and dedication to branch activism, variety and fundraising over many years. He had supported older branch members during the pandemic, spearheading a grants scheme for those deeply in need, organised the branch to come out of the pandemic and later he had become branch secretary.

In 2022 he had been elected to Council. Around the same time, he had also been targeted by the far right for his work as a drag artist. He had stood up against

all those seeking to undermine him with immense courage and he had refused to be intimidated. He had continued to perform and be active in the branch and wider trades union activities, and had been pivotal in starting the drag network. He was, in the words of one Equity official, the best union activist he had ever met. The President said that she had the great honour of presenting Joseph Ballard with Honorary Life Membership.

The award was greeted with prolonged applause.

Joseph Ballard said it was a huge honour to receive this award from the union. He remembered Peachy Mead, his late friend and fellow branch activist, and said that this award was for him as well, and he commended all of the hard work that all activists do in the union.

Summer Strallen

The President said that this individual had shown strength and determination when others might well have stood back. Honorary Life Membership was awarded to members who had gone above and beyond for the union. When members in the West End had been unhappy with producers, she had been both supportive and encouraging. She had established the ensemble network on Facebook, and championed swings and ensembles. This was the root of the Stand Up For 17 campaign, which ballot-permitting would deliver a significant pay rise to members in the face of a unprecedented squeeze on the cost of living.

It took time to grow grassroots activists, but

she sowed the seeds and we were reaping the harvest. She had bravely put her head above the parapet to speak publicly about Andrew Lloyd Webber on the cancellation of Cinderella. She had served on Council from 2016 to 2018 and there would shortly be further demands on her with the arrival of her first child.

The President thanked her for her courage in standing up for members on the West End and said she was delighted to award Summer Strallen with Honorary Life Membership.

The award was greeted with prolonged applause.

Summer Strallen said this was a great honour and a shock. She said she knew how much work activists did, and she wanted to pass this message on to the newer generations, especially on the West End. She said she felt undeserving in a way because everybody did so much work. She said she was glad that everything that happened over the last few years with Andrew Lloyd Webber, because it had made her want to get involved in the union and give people the confidence to stand up for themselves and get the terms and conditions that they needed. She thanked everyone and dedicated the award to the members who come to conference each year.

English National Opera Deputies

At the conference dinner on Sunday 21 May, seven deputies and former deputies of the English National Opera were awarded Honorary Life Membership, for their activism and service to the union throughout

past disputes and particularly during the major dispute over the last year. They were:

- David Campbell
- Deborah Davison
- David John-Newman
- Ronald Nairne
- Amy Kerenza Sedgwick
- Paul Sheehan
- Andrew Tinkler

The awards were greeted with prolonged applause.

Accepting the award on behalf of all the deputies, David John-Newman, Ronald Nairne and Amy Kerenza Sedgwick said that it was a great honour and thanked the union for its support of the English National Opera throughout this difficult time.

EQUALITY AND INCLUSION

MOTION 1: Women’s Committee

Our women members tell us that — with worrying frequency — they arrive at an engagement to find themselves working with someone who has abused or harassed them in the past.

The failure of many companies to make full cast and crew lists available prior to the first day of work means that members are unable to make critical decisions about the security of their own mental and physical health. It is a failure in safeguarding on the part of employers which makes all members — particularly our women and intersectional members — vulnerable.

Members identify two basic needs: (1) to know who is going to be in the room prior to the start of an engagement, and (2) for it to be easier for employers to release abusers from employment.

Conference asks that Council convene a working group, including representatives from each of the industrial and equalities committees, to work with the Women’s Committee in order to identify and implement appropriate action.

The motion was **proposed** by Kelly Burke and **seconded** by Jean Rogers.

There were three further speakers for the motion.

The motion was **CARRIED** nem con,

with two abstaining.

MOTION 2: Deaf and Disabled Members Committee

The Deaf and Disabled Members Committee (DDMC) acknowledges the key strength and power that Equity exerts across the industry as a result of sound collective bargaining coverage and that this has resulted in a framework of rights for members that would not be available to them in their employment status as workers.

Noting the significant disadvantage faced by Deaf, disabled and neurodivergent members in seeking work and when in work, the DDMC welcomes an opportunity to strengthen their status and welfare by identifying and implementing measures to improve upon existing, specific rights in Equity’s collective agreements.

Therefore, Conference calls upon Council to -

- 1) establish a working party comprising representatives of the DDMC and each industrial committee representing relevant collective agreements;
- 2) identify a core set of priorities for inclusion in the collective agreements over the period 2023-25.

The motion was **proposed** by Natalie Amber and **seconded** by Megan Keenan.

There were three further speakers for the motion.

The motion was **CARRIED** unanimously.

MOTION 3: Race Equality Committee

Sheffield Theatres' upcoming production of the musical Miss Saigon is the first ever production of this highly contentious work in a publicly subsidised theatre. Miss Saigon has a long history of controversies going back to the 1990s and has been heavily criticised by Vietnamese-American writers and academics as 'a racial and sexual fantasy that negates the (Viet Nam) war's political significance and Vietnamese subjectivity and agency.'

New Earth Theatre had to withdraw their touring show from Sheffield Theatres when their Asian female lead creatives objected to being in the building while Miss Saigon was rehearsing. While our committee accepts that Miss Saigon will probably continue to happen in the commercial sector, we deplore that a publicly subsidised theatre is enforcing that lack of choice.

As a result, Conference asks Council to support a major inquiry to uncover the extent to which dignity at work for actors and creatives of colour and other protected characteristics is properly considered when programming decisions are made.

For the subsidised and independent sectors, this work should include national arts councils and local authority funders with reference to, for example, Arts Council England investment principles and local authority statutory equality duties.

The motion was **proposed** by Daniel York Loh and **seconded** by Julie Cheung-Inhin.

There were four further speakers for the motion and two against.

The motion was **CARRIED** overwhelmingly, with two against.

MOTION 4: Birmingham and West Midlands Branch

Equity's Safe Spaces campaign was a landmark strategy for root and branch reform of the industry in order to eradicate sexual harassment as a feature of women members' working lives. Whilst Equity has enjoyed some relative success in achieving its goal, there remains further work to be done on the Safe Spaces agenda. As such Conference requests that Council -

- 1) reviews and refreshes the Safe Spaces strategy and campaign;
- 2) ensures that the new strategy and campaign incorporates all forms of harassment and abusive behaviour including but not limited to racism, antisemitism and homophobia;
- 3) ensures that the new strategy and campaign includes a focus on Equity's internal activities and including branch meetings, committee meetings, etc.

The motion was proposed by Tonia Daley-Campbell and seconded by Nicholas Barnes.

There was one further speaker for the motion.

The motion was **CARRIED** unanimously.

MOTION 5: London South Branch

Ensuring members' safety as they volunteer is vital for Equity to be a thriving and effective union. However, by the time a request for internal disciplinary action has been actioned in Equity's revised Disciplinary Procedures, significant damage to the complainant's mental health may have already taken place.

In addition, wider conversations around harassment of members against a backdrop of possible institutionalised racism, ableism, etc. is not easy. Regardless, Conference calls on Council to have the compassion and courage to take action around this.

The Independent Commission for Race Equality (ICRE) recommended that Equity ensures that race and ethnicity features as part of an ongoing Safe Spaces review.

Conference calls on Council to -

- 1) start a process to implement all of the ICRE recommendations - including identifying the staffing and budget needed to ensure this process has a good chance of success;
- 2) include Equity itself and the volunteer activity of members on the agenda of a refreshed "Safe Spaces" initiative, by creating a working group to formulate a confidential consultation for all members, which is mindful of the nine protected characteristics, as well as social class, and bring in experts to look at how external expertise can illuminate any informal action before the stage of the disciplinary process in which the General Secretary takes a

- view on initiating formal action;
- 3) ask the General Secretary to report on interim progress on the above.

The motion was **proposed** by Jonathan Man and **seconded** by Mimi Tizzano.

There was one further speaker for the motion.

The motion was **CARRIED** unanimously.

INTERNAL UNION BUSINESS

MOTION 6: Student Deputies Committee

Equity's Student and Graduate memberships offer a vital link between artists in formal training and the arts industry. Equity visits to educational institutions are an essential tool for recruitment of new members and for preparing new generations of trade unionists to enter the industry.

Increasingly, institutions are allowing or encouraging students to seek work during training. Currently however, Student Members are not entitled to legal support from their union in the workplace, and only eligible for discounted Graduate Membership three months before their course ends. This opens the door to artists-in-training being underpaid, overworked and exploited, but without the protection offered to full members. Furthermore, workers who enter the industry by routes other than formal training are disadvantaged by being unable to access discounted Student and Graduate rates at all.

Conference therefore calls on Council to undertake consultation and a comprehensive review of Student and Graduate Membership to ensure that it is fit for purpose and serving the interests of all members. This should include (but not be limited to) -

1. ensuring that artists-in-training also engaged on professional contracts are able to access appropriate support and benefits;
2. improving students' access to Equity's democratic structures, including being able to engage equally with two branches reflective of training area and home area;
3. considering whether 'Student' and 'Graduate' remain the most appropriate categories, or whether alternative discounted rates for, for example, 'early career members' might better reflect the range of backgrounds and routes that members take into the industry.

The motion was **proposed** by Jonathan Rainey Reid and **seconded** by Samuel Jolly.

There was one further speaker for the motion.

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

MOTION 7: Welsh National Committee

The sweeping reforms to the union's branch structure combined with the requirements of the new Rulebook have lessened the possibility of members in Wales raising matters of national importance at the new Equity Conference. The choice of which motion from Wales should be selected for wider debate is made at a National Meeting. Whereas until 2023 there were

five convenient (non-industrial) means for members in Wales to raise domestic issues for wider debate, now there are three, and by setting North Wales, South Wales and the Welsh National Committee at odds in a National Meeting in order to have just one of their concerns raised at the UK-wide conference, this new union structure has the potential to sow seeds of division, not unity.

This reduction of the democratic voice of members by way of the drastically reduced number of motions to Conference is echoed in all regions and devolved nations. Furthermore, the number of representative voices allowed at Conference has been greatly diminished.

Crucially, for members in Wales, there is but one Councillor elected to represent the nation within the union's hierarchy, and no obligation within the new Rulebook to maintain an official union presence in Wales. It may be understood by members in Wales that the restructuring of Equity has diminished the worth of members in Wales.

As a first step towards correcting the imbalances listed above, Conference proposes that another Council seat be created specifically for a second Councillor for Wales.

The motion was **proposed** by Terry Victor and seconded by Jenni Barbieri.

There were four speakers against the motion.

The motion was **DEFEATED**, with 25 in favour, 64 against and 26 abstaining.

MOTION 8: North East England Branch

Equity's role as a campaigning trade union means that it is developing and encouraging activists to attend and participate in public protest and related activities more than ever before.

Such action has included participating in lobbying of MPs in the Westminster Parliament, attending TUC demonstrations, and participating in the Durham Miners Gala for the first time.

These are all welcome developments, but there need to be practical steps taken to encourage local activists to participate.

The insecure nature of our members' work means that too often it is unaffordable for many to give up work or take the time out to travel to events, particularly when they are in London.

Whilst one-off arrangements have been made to support activist participation, it is important that all members, including those in geographically distant locations, are properly supported to participate. Branch funds and support are limited and are meant to cover a range of activities for the wider membership.

Conference calls on Council to investigate practical and financial ways to support members to fully participate in campaigning activities without the need to drain the limited resources of their local branches.

The motion was **proposed** by Rosanna Turton and **seconded** by Anthony Blakesley.

There were four further speakers for the motion.

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

MOTION 9: Devon, Cornwall and Wessex Branch

It is concerning that the recent decision to limit motions for submission to Conference to one from each area, instead of one from each branch, will result in a large reduction of branch (and, therefore, member) representation. Branches being asked to submit a motion to the National/Regional Meeting, then having one be chosen to go forward to Conference, will mean branches having to compete against one another to have their motion heard and discussed at Conference.

Sadly, this very much undermines the spirit of connection and mutual support that should be prominent within branches.

It is appreciated that Conference needs to reduce the number of motions submitted, but the merging of branches now greatly enables that, without having to choose one from each area.

Branches should be able to work and grow together in the interests of members and not be put into an environment of competition.

Therefore, Conference requests that each branch be able, independently, to submit a motion to Conference and the decision to limit it to one motion per area be rescinded.

The motion was **proposed** by Chris Gallarus and **seconded** by Terry Victor. There were two further speakers for the motion, six against and four points of procedure.

The motion was **DEFEATED**, with 20 in favour, 65 against and 32 abstaining.

POLICY

MOTION 10: Scottish National Committee

The Scottish National Committee thanks Equity for its part in the successful campaign encouraging the Scottish government to revisit recent funding cuts to Creative Scotland which would have had a direct impact on the employment potential of many creative workers across the country.

However, these proposed cuts and the lack of ongoing UK-wide support following the campaign launch have illustrated the lack of understanding between members of the cultural infrastructures across all four nations. At a time when all workers face a significant reduction in work, pay, and workers' rights, it is more important than ever that members show solidarity with their comrades across borders. It is not possible to do so without an informed understanding of the cultural infrastructure and therefore an understanding of how to lobby effectively.

Conference calls on Council and staff to work with the National Committees to develop a comprehensive and updateable resource that clearly details the cultural infrastructure in each of the four nations, highlighting the overlaps and the similarities, better enabling activists to support each other as we work together for effective change.

The motion was **proposed** by Emma Jayne Park and **seconded** by Jo Cameron Brown.

There was one further speaker for the motion.

The motion was **CARRIED** unanimously.

MOTION 11: London North Branch

Equity members and the arts have suffered a 46% cutback from austerity policies, COVID-19, the cost of living crisis and recent government 'levelling-up,' leading to 100% cuts to some London organisations but a majority of the cuts being outside London. The government has also slashed higher education spending on arts training courses by 50% alongside additional rising costs.

Our Equity arts policy, Performance For All (P4A), promotes an equitable rebalancing of funding but within an increased arts spend at European levels. The Arts Council England spend for 2023-26 is 28% less than for 2018-22 and overall government spending as a percentage of gross domestic product (GDP) has actually fallen.

Conference welcomes assurances that P4A is being promoted through our industrial work and will be revised on the website, but last year's Conference motion from the North and East London Branch has not been implemented and we are still waiting for discussion and consultation on the amendments, updates, revisions and additions created by former members of the arts policy working party, the Deputy for the General Secretary, and new policy officers.

We call on Council to -

1. organise staff consultation with all drafters of the new amendments to

discuss how P4A can best be utilised and promoted;

2. re-establish the National Campaigners Network in the light of the new branch structure and creation of local campaigns officers, but specifically to campaign, to share information on the industry and promote co-ordination and advancement of 'grassroots campaigning' across the UK.

The motion was **proposed** by Peter Barnes and **seconded** by Rhubarb the Clown.

There were four further speakers for the motion.

The motion was **CARRIED** unanimously.

RECORDED MEDIA

MOTION 12: Screen and New Media Committee

Artificial intelligence (AI) continues to tear through the creative industries at an ever greater pace, threatening to upend members' working lives. Although Equity has achieved a great deal through its successful Stop AI Stealing the Show campaign, the union must now step up efforts to protect members' livelihoods and focus on a collectively bargained agenda in the face of AI's relentless, unlegislated developments.

To that end, Conference calls on Council to consider the following actions:

1. create an AI Working Party made up of members from a range of creative disciplines;
2. update and renegotiate existing collectively bargained agreements to include terms for AI and synthetisation;
3. seek to negotiate new collectively bargained agreements with performance synthesisers;
4. undertake an information programme to raise awareness of the impact of AI among the wider membership;
5. work with other UK unions to lobby for reform of the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988;

6. liaise with sister unions within the International Federation of Actors (FIA) to support each others' work in this area.

The motion was **proposed** by Laurence Bouvard and **seconded** by David Menkin.

There were five further speakers for the motion and one against.

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

MOTION 13: Audio Committee

With record earnings year on year, the UK video games sector is currently worth £4.7 billion, or 42% of the total British entertainment market.

Despite video games being one of the most lucrative and fastest-growing sectors in the UK, pay rates for performers have been declining since they were established in the mid-nineties. Equity members report a lack of diversity and inclusion in the industry, and vocal and physical injuries are a growing problem, with actors reluctant to make their concerns known for fear of losing future work in a very competitive market.

Equity has made a concerted effort to establish collectively bargained agreements with key industry engagers and is empowering its members with resources, workshops, and webinars. However, the UK does not have an industry-wide code of conduct and pay agreement for video games performers.

Crucially, the industry lacks standardised protection procedures for the recording of intimate, sexual, or violent scenes, as well as clear guidelines addressing NDAs, diversity or digital reproduction rights. This stands in stark contrast to other major territories, such as Canada and the US.

Conference urges Council to -

1. accelerate the Union's collective bargaining agenda to create a fair industry-wide video games agreement that benefits all;
2. establish and improve working relationships with the trade bodies for Interactive Entertainment to establish industry best practice guidelines;
3. lobby the government to mandate those who claim Video Game Tax Relief to abide by an industry code of practice.

The motion was **proposed** by David Menkin and **seconded** by Laurence Bouvard.

There were three further speakers for the motion.

The motion was **CARRIED** unanimously.

MOTION 14: Merseyside and Cheshire Branch

Conference welcomes last year's launch of Equity's first ever Code of Best Practice for self-tape auditions for commercials. However, despite the code being agreed with the major casting organisations, Conference is disappointed to note that members continue

to face deteriorating terms and conditions including, but not limited to, the following:

given little time to turn around self-tapes, often less than 24 hours, when the code sets a minimum turnaround of two days;

working unpaid hours, filming and editing audition tapes and associated equipment costs;

almost never hearing back;

being used as unofficial COVID-19 cover by being pencilled for jobs and expected to keep sometimes weeks of diary free, only to hear the day before filming is due to start that they haven't got the job;

receiving £50 for a recall and sometimes nothing, a sum which hasn't gone up in over 15 years;

being paid a buyout of around £1,000, when successful, fees which have plummeted since the days when actors got paid per airing of the commercial;

being prevented, when successful, from doing any other commercial work for three years, whilst more famous celebrities seem to be able to change products without this restriction;

paying hundreds of pounds in travel without reimbursement.

Council is therefore urged to highlight what is happening in this area of work, and to enter into negotiations with all parties, not just casting directors, to stop what has become a dehumanising and unprofitable

income stream.

The motion was **CARRIED** overwhelmingly.

The motion was proposed by Matthew Field and seconded by Aisha Numah.

There was one further speaker for the motion.

The motion was **CARRIED** unanimously.

MOTION 15: Kent Branch

Conference calls on Council to renew the Union's "Cast it Here" Campaign, with particular focus on TV and Film productions that continue to insist that artists must be London-based.

Conference also calls on Council to approach the Casting Directors Guild, the Casting Directors Association and Spotlight to address this practice, which is detrimental to so many of our members.

We have recently experienced absurd situations where productions filmed within Kent have refused to cast local-based talent or even permit them to audition for roles.

In terms of creating a sustainable industry, the policy of excluding local talent adds additional costs to producers and additional wastage in resources by relocating workers. It also prevents members who may not be able to afford to live within the M25 from accessing their industry. Producers are now required to be more environmentally accountable and local casting does and should perfectly complement this objective.

The motion was proposed by Marie Kelly and seconded by Nicholas K Brand.

LIVE PERFORMANCE

MOTION 16: Opera Deputies Committee

Conference notes the significant attack on the provision of opera by Arts Council England with their disastrous funding decisions which threaten the survival of English National Opera at the London Coliseum and have already resulted in redundancies amongst the workforce. Deep cuts in the funding for Welsh National Opera and Glyndebourne have resulted in the cancellations of tours to venues, leaving cities such as Liverpool no longer receiving opera productions. Companies including Opera North and English National Opera have announced they will not fill existing vacancies, shrinking their chorus sizes and therefore the opera workforce. The Royal Opera House has also been hit with a 9% cut. None of these decisions have been taken in response to a strategy that properly reviewed opera provision, and it appears that Arts Council England have had no thought for the workforce or indeed the audience for opera.

Conference calls for Council to continue to increase pressure on ACE by campaigning with every means possible to resist and reverse cuts to public funding of large scale opera, and to engage with all funding bodies to ensure that their future funding decisions are based on a well-considered strategy which includes proper engagement with the opera workforce and ensures that opera is accessible to all across the UK.

The motion was **proposed** by David John-Newman and **seconded** by Amy Kerenza Sedgwick.

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

The motion was **CARRIED** unanimously.

The motion was followed by a photo opportunity, with representatives of the Opera Deputies and Singers Committee standing on stage with an Equity "Save Our ENO" banner and members in the room standing with flags and banners.

MOTION 17: West End Deputies Committee

Theatre workers are often told not to talk about pay and this stigma allows producers to hold down wages, pay people different amounts for equivalent work, lie about the use of 'favoured nations' approaches and even forbid individuals from discussing rates of pay with their colleagues.

Conference calls on Council to campaign for greater pay transparency across theatre, including petitioning producers for the removal of unfair and unenforceable gagging clauses from contracts; educating members on their rights; and introducing annual pay audits of members, building on the work undertaken in the West End, in order to arm workers with the knowledge they need to negotiate fair rates of pay.

The motion was **proposed** by Rhidian Marc and **seconded** by Nonhlanhla Makhathini.

The motion was **CARRIED** unanimously.

MOTION 18: LGBT+ Committee

All workers are suffering the consequences of a catastrophic housing crisis across the UK. Access to good quality, affordable housing is out of reach for millions. Housing insecurity is exacerbated for LGBT+ people by homophobia and transphobia. A shocking 24% of young homeless people identify as LGBT+.

Equally, the consequences of this crisis are felt in our industry, where the system of theatre digs is broken and does not provide secure, affordable accommodation to our touring members. Equity's Dignity in Digs campaign has found evidence of widespread issues of poor quality, unsafe temporary accommodation, as well as evidence of the additional threats that cheaper, unregulated accommodation present to the safety and wellbeing of LGBT+ artists on tour.

Conference calls on Council to build on its Dignity in Digs campaign by ensuring that future public policy on housing, including, for example, that set out in Labour's Charter for Renters, directly addresses issues around short-term letting and temporary accommodation faced by artists in our industry, while drawing on the specific experiences of LGBT+ people and other marginalised artists.

The motion was **proposed** by Mais Robinson and **seconded** by Ken Birk.

The motion was **CARRIED** unanimously.

MOTION 19: Directors and Designers Committee

Conference notes the work Equity staff and activists have done across the theatre sector during the Dignity in Digs and Stand Up For 17 campaigns.

Conference further notes that both of these campaigns have focused on improving the terms and conditions of performer and stage management Equity members.

Conference recognises that creative team members work very differently to performers and stage management members and do not frequently encounter the union at work in the way their fellow performer and stage management company members do. Conference further recognises that low pay and poor terms and conditions are common problems for all theatre workers, and that Equity should seek to represent and champion the entirety of its membership to the best of our collective ability.

Conference asks Council to support the development of industrial campaign plans and programmes of work for Equity that will raise the profile of directors and designers across the union to build member density and awareness of Equity's work with and for creative team members. This should include consideration of how best to reach creative team members in our workplaces, how to communicate union successes with and for creative team members across union communications, a review of benefits and services Equity offers for the creative team, and how to better promote and celebrate Directors and Designers Committee activity across the UK.

The motion was **proposed** by Charlotte Emma and **seconded** by Max Jones.

There was one further speaker for the motion.

The motion was **CARRIED** unanimously.

Motions 20 and 21 were debated together and voted on separately.

MOTION 20: Brighton and Sussex Branch

Conference calls on Council, with regard to its published Code of Best Practice for Self-Tapes and Zoom Auditions, to further incorporate additional guidance for theatre and recorded media casting which addresses issues members are currently experiencing.

We acknowledge the current publication and guidance of this code and best practice that has been produced to make self-taping and remote auditions more accessible for all. However, there is concern that the guidelines do not yet fully take into account the different requirements of theatre and recorded media. To cite a recent example of good practice, the National Theatre of Scotland has successfully offered the choice to actors of whether they self-tape or attend auditions in person. We actively encourage this.

Conference therefore calls on Council to raise these issues and develop additional guidance to address members' concerns. Our continued ambition is that these guidelines will become accepted as industry standard practice in due course.

The motion was **proposed** by Kate Dyson and **seconded** by Carole Bremson.

The motion was **CARRIED** overwhelmingly.

MOTION 21: Northern Ireland National Committee

The last five years have seen a huge increase in the number of theatre and live performance auditions carried out by self-tape only. Whilst this was understandable during the pandemic, it is concerning to see that as restrictions are lifted, this insistence on self-tapes for theatre auditions has continued.

Self-tapes for film and TV casting seem natural as the audition is taking place in the medium of the job. The argument in favour of theatre self-tapes seems to be that a casting director can 'see lots more people'. If a casting director's job is to arrange casting, then surely they should take the time to see people live in the room. When submitting a self-tape, the actor gets no guidance or direction as they would in a live audition. Additionally, where a recorded media audition will be guided by a detailed character break-down, theatre auditions tend to come with much less information.

Conference calls on Council to work with casting agencies and casting directors to ensure that while self-tapes may be retained as an option in certain circumstances, the principal method of auditioning for theatre and live performance is by live session in the room with those carrying out the casting.

The motion was introduced by Stephen Beggs.

There was one point of procedure.

The motion was **REMITTED**.

MOTION 22: Dance Committee

The Dance Committee recognises the success of Equity's Low Pay No Pay Campaign in improving conditions across the complex area of fringe theatre and would like to see similar work undertaken to reflect the dance and movement industry, so that engagers and workers are more informed about their obligations/rights.

The production of work across the independent and subsidised dance sectors is extremely diverse, and there are deep misunderstandings amongst engagers about appropriate rates for dance artists.

Currently, there is no specific trade association or body that Equity can negotiate these rates with, meaning current Equity/ITC rates - intended for dance or choreography alone - are being used as a basis when dance artists are engaged in research and development, utilising their intellectual property, and/or delivering additional engagement around productions.

The lack of rates truly reflecting the independent sector is a barrier to dance artists believing Equity can support them, weakening our Union potential.

Conference calls on Council and staff to support the work of the Dance Committee to build on the framework of Low Pay No Pay to create a dance-specific campaign for fairer conditions and pay across the diversity of the independent and subsidised

sectors, including developing a series of effective resources that are reviewed and updated annually.

The motion was **proposed** by Emma Jayne Park and **seconded** by Sam Burkett.

The motion was **CARRIED** unanimously.

MOTION 23: Stage Committee

Conference calls on Council to give its full support to addressing and challenging the defunding of unionised work places in the latest round of Arts Council England funding. This has resulted in the immediate threat to, and loss of, members' jobs, all of which are on union-agreed terms. In parallel with the loss of funding to unionised work places, we are seeing a transfer of financing to non-unionised producers and to unnamed projects by Arts Council England, in particular, resulting in a deficit of jobs on union-approved terms.

Conference calls on Council to continue to lobby as necessary respective arts councils and governments to protect and prioritise funding to both established and up-and-coming producers who recognise the union and use our collectively bargained terms and conditions. Conference also calls on Council to continue its good work in encouraging producers newly in receipt of public money to adopt collective agreements.

The motion was **proposed** by Emma Manton and **seconded** by Adam Pettigrew.

The motion was **CARRIED** unanimously.

MOTION 24: Stage Management Committee

Stage Management Committee's 2014 Conference motion asked for forthcoming claims on the Equity and UK Theatre/ Society of London Theatre collective agreements to make best endeavours to ensure that "...where any member of stage management is expected to undertake any acting and/or understudying responsibilities that this role will be in addition to minimum Stage Management staffing levels."

Key arguments to support this becoming adopted policy were to -

- best ensure company health and safety;
- respect the professionalism and demands of stage management work.

Despite sterling work by activists and staff in improving the perception and understanding of Stage Management, there are still engagers advertising -

- acting ASM (assistant stage manager) roles, which cannot be safely fulfilled;
- combined role-CSM (company stage manager) positions on the book, which cannot be safely fulfilled.

This poor practice -

- increases risks to health and safety;
- makes workload for stage management untenable;
- impacts on the physical and mental health of the stage management workforce;
- drives employment shortages.

Conference asks Council to -

- reaffirm support for the 2014 motion and incorporate it into all future collective agreement claims;
- expand the policy remit to include opposing and campaigning against combined stage management roles, which negatively impact safety;
- encourage producers to offer members the opportunity of paid experience and/or training in order to keep companies safe;
- prioritise communicating and educating members on rights, particularly in respect of health and safety;
- support the Stage Management Committee to report on progress of the above during the next committee term.

The motion was **proposed** by Caron Jane Lyon and **seconded** by Adam Burns.

The motion was **CARRIED** unanimously.

EMERGENCY MOTIONS

EMERGENCY MOTION 1: Council

Drag has been a celebrated artform in entertainment, ranging from Music Hall to Variety, with a recent renaissance in popular culture. There has been a significant rise in targeting drag artists who perform storytelling for children, with protests and campaigns from far-right extremist groups, most notably with recent demonstrations at venues in South London in March and April, but also across the UK. Ongoing abuse includes physical attacks, threats, slurs, name-calling, verbal and online abuse which is designed to destroy artists' careers and personal lives, resulting in loss of earnings and reputational damage, along with safety concerns not just in the workplace but at home.

We also note the wider picture, such as the prohibition of drag in some states of the USA, whilst hate crimes fuelled by transphobia and homophobia rise here in the UK, perpetuating debate around gender identity and sexual orientation.

Conference calls on Council to make sure the message of solidarity with affected members and drag artists is advocated, including to:

- Encourage branches and Variety Officers to reach out to affected members and potential members, so all feel safe and supported in solidarity.
- Ensure the establishment of drag networks across the UK is supported

by local branches and includes the key message of this motion.

- Develop guidance for personal safety and how to respond to such activity, to complement the guidance written in partnership with Hope Not Hate.
- Emphasise that drag is a professional artform whether storytelling, variety and cabaret, theatre, audio or on screen.

The motion was **proposed** by Joseph Ballard and **seconded** by Mary Lane.

There were seven further speakers for the motion.

The motion was **CARRIED** unanimously.

EMERGENCY MOTION 2: Council

This Conference is very concerned about venue closures within recent weeks, due mostly to the pandemic and the cost of living crisis. There is already a significant loss of work because of four pubs closing in Bedminster, Bristol, causing one performer to lose 14 gigs in one go. Broad Plain Social Club, which is in a deprived area, is also closing, having been a community hub for many years as well as providing entertainment on a regular basis. Two other clubs are seriously concerned about rising costs, and one of them has cancelled their New Year's Eve as a result. This Conference asks Council to actively raise awareness by helping to offer links to other organisations which may offer support, such as local trade associations, Councillors, and any other group which may be able to help, even if it means seeking alternate venues.

The motion was **proposed** by Mary Lane

and **seconded** by Rachael Fagan.

There was one question raised.

The motion was **CARRIED** overwhelmingly.

