

EQUITY

**WORKING ON PANTOS  
*AND* CHRISTMAS SHOWS**

**IN NORTHERN IRELAND**



STAGE DOOR  
THIS WAY



STAGE  
DOOR



## EQUITY IS BEHIND YOU

**Over the past year, we have been listening to Equity members working on Christmas Shows and Pantos in Northern Ireland to better understand your working lives. This guide is the result of that feedback and is designed to equip you with all the information you need to ensure you are paid and treated fairly.**

As of 2026, 14 production houses in Northern Ireland were signed up to use Equity agreements. These agreements dictate the minimum terms and conditions under which performers and stage managers ought to be contracted. There were also four companies using director agreements.

**Even if you are not working under an Equity agreement, we can support you if you suffer a breach of contract, unfair treatment or unlawful practices.**

Equity will visit each cast for productions working under an Equity agreement – at these meetings we can discuss the advice in this leaflet as well as any problems or issues. We will also ask for the cast to agree an Equity Deputy. The Deputy is the liaison between Equity and the cast or individual members, gathering and feeding back on any issues and speaking to management on behalf of the cast if something needs to be raised.

### Contact us

Equity Northern Ireland Official Alice Adams Lemon is available for each and every member to contact directly on [alemon@equity.org.uk](mailto:alemon@equity.org.uk)

## PRE-SHOW PREPARATION

Firstly, check if you are working on an Equity contract or not. If you are it should be clearly set out in the contract (if in doubt, contact us to check). If you are working with a company that has an in-house agreement with Equity, that agreement underpins your contract and you should have a visit from the Official at the start of rehearsals. If this has not happened, contact the Official. **Even if you are not working under an agreement with Equity**, a union Official can still visit casts, usually with the permission of management – so why not ask them!

Check your contract against the below to make sure you are receiving the pay and conditions you are entitled to.

### Amount of shows in a week – Breaks – Pay

**Number of shows:** Be sure to check the agreement against the amount of shows you are being asked to undertake. If there are more shows than permitted by the agreement, you should point this out to the production company. They need to reduce the shows or contact the Equity Official to discuss a potential variation to the agreement which would include, for example, extra pay.

If you are not working under an Equity agreement and the amount of shows seems excessive (for a full length show, we expect no more than 8 full length shows per week or 2 in one day), contact your Equity Official for more advice.

**Breaks:** Your contract should set out how many breaks you have during the day – and these should be sufficient over the period. If it does not set out breaks, then the following legislation applies:

You should be getting at least one uninterrupted 20-minute rest break during your working day if you work more than 6 hours a day - this could be a tea or lunch break - and a complete break of 11 hours overnight. It's not a lot is it?

**You are also entitled to at least 1 day off in 7, or 2 in every 14 relevant days usually based on a working week running Monday to Sunday** (unless the working week is clearly defined otherwise within the contract). This is an area of most concern in the Panto sector when some producers seek to cram rehearsal periods and tech to try to save money. This could be unlawful and dangerous. Please contact your Deputy or Equity Official if this is what your

schedule looks like or develops into. You should not work more than 48 hours on average in any 17-week period or the full period of engagement if less than 17 weeks. Some employers try to suggest it is conditional on accepting work that you might need to opt out of Regulation 4 Working Time Regulations 1998. You do not need to do this and if you have any concerns, you can contact us for advice.

Be aware that there are also considerations about health and safety – if you are providing very physical work or travelling excessively, you may need more advice.

**Pay:** If you are working under an Equity contract you have guaranteed minimum rates of pay. This means that you can negotiate upwards from the rate but the company cannot pay you less than the rate set out in the agreement. This pay is aligned with the hours which you can work in accordance with the agreement. If you see a discrepancy, talk to management and sense check with your Equity Official as soon as possible as short legal deadlines apply.

If you are not working under an agreement, you will want to make sure that the pay you receive for each relevant payment period meets at least national minimum wage, which is your basic right. It is important to look at how many hours you are expected to work in any given day or week (including meet and greets, promo work etc!) and divide these hours into your overall pay, giving you a total hourly rate. If this is less than minimum wage, your production company will likely be breaking the law and you could be owed a lot of money! It's time to contact your Equity Official!

**Paid Holiday/Holiday pay in lieu:** This is a basic right for performers and stage management. Your contract should set out not only that you will receive payment in lieu of holiday if you do not receive the holiday you have accrued, but give details that this is separate to your basic pay. Even better if they set out how the holiday pay will be calculated. We have plenty of advice on holiday pay so have a look at the Equity website or ask your Equity Official.

**Pensions:** You have a right to be auto-enrolled into a workplace pension either on request or (hopefully) written into your contract. You can take the Equity Pension Scheme with you as you move between jobs. Employers can lawfully postpone pension payment for up to 3 calendar months but they have to allow you to opt-in from the earliest point, if you choose. If there's nothing included in the contract and nothing provided afterwards, you could have a claim.



# REHEARSING YOUR POSITION

Talking to management can be difficult or can feel like it's going to be difficult. Our members have said they are particularly worried about the areas below, so use our guide to make those conversations easier.

## Bullying – Reputational/Opportunity Damage – Knowing Your Rights

**Bullying and discrimination:** It is unacceptable to be bullied or suffer discrimination in the workplace - by management, fellow cast members, members of the team or indeed the audience. In the first instance, you ought to raise the issue with management – if they have a dignity at work or bullying/harassment policy, read this first – this should direct you on what to do. However, if this is not open to you, or you do not want to approach management yourself, contact your Equity Official. We will talk you through your rights, how we can help - including approaching management on your behalf - setting up a meeting with union support and signposting you to additional support for your health and wellbeing, including support from your Deputy.

It's important to know that from October 2026, employers will have a duty to take all reasonable steps to prevent sexual harassment, extended specifically to sexual harassment by third parties, such as audience members, crew, and other contractors at a venue or on set. At a minimum, that means all employers must have an anti-harassment policy, conduct a risk assessment (for example, on what third parties may be in the workplace) and implement all reasonable steps to mitigate those risks.

If you feel you have been bullied, suffered harassment or been discriminated against due to age, gender, sexuality, disability, pregnancy or another protected characteristic, contact your Equity Official as soon as possible, as legal deadlines to complain are tight.

**Reputational / Opportunity damage:** Members can be concerned that if they 'cause a fuss' bringing up an issue, this will lead to them not getting a job with the same company or colleagues in the future. It's important to ask yourself whether a company that doesn't take its legal obligations and duty of care to its company members seriously deserves to have you on their books.

However, we know that is easier said than done. Equity and the Deputy can help to strategise and address matters anonymously, for example bring up issues without naming names, create an anonymous survey of members to report back to management, or convene a meeting of creatives to discuss and feed back to management issues which are being felt by a number of people.

It is, however, important to note that raising anonymous concerns is sometimes not as effective because to protect the identity of individuals we are limited in how we provide examples of issues. If there are no specific issues we can point to, it is more difficult to have these resolved.

## PERFORMING YOUR RIGHTS

On stage we want you to be healthy and safe. And we know things can change during a run.

### Illness – Show Cancellation – Termination of your Contract

**Illness:** If you are taken ill during a run there is often pressure to continue performing. This risks your own health and those around you. Most performers and stage management working under an Equity contract are entitled to sick pay and you should check your contract to see if you are entitled. You should also check what pay you might receive if you have to leave the run altogether due to illness – again most Equity contracts ensure that you receive some pay to cover this. If you are not working under an Equity contract, check and ask.

It is not uncommon to have sickness in this season so producers would be well advised to make considerations including taking out insurance, contracting understudies and providing all workers with decent rest breaks. A good engager will consider illness under its risk assessment and you are entitled to review risk assessments that are relevant to the work that you are doing.

If the contract doesn't say anything about whether there is any sickness pay or not, this may be a potential breach of the law and you could be legally liable for 2-4 weeks average salary.

**Show cancellation:** Equity has had considerable success in claiming cancellation fees for members working on shows that have been cancelled. Check the cancellation clauses and make sure you are happy with these – and should the show get cancelled during the run, follow the terms and contact the union as soon as possible.

**Termination of your contract:** Sadly, this happens. Sometimes production decides that they no longer wish to work with a particular person – be they actor, director, designer or stage manager. And sometimes our members want to part company with the producer. On either side this is usually due to an issue which has occurred or developed during the job. If you are considering leaving a contract, contact Equity before you do so. If you leave in a way that breaches your contract, you could be at risk having to pay for that breach to the engager. If the engager terminates your contract unfairly, you could have a claim against them for their breach.

We like to see issues resolved *before* it gets to that and if we don't know about it, we can't work to fix it. Often after the fact can be too late – so don't delay in getting in touch to sense check or talk things through with your Deputy or direct with your Equity Official.



# THE WIND-DOWN

Some tips for a healthy wind down after the season:

## **Don't forget to claim your holiday pay.**

Yes, you will be owed this if you are a performer or stage manager and haven't been able to take your holiday - and you only have a limited time to make a legal complaint about a lack of this pay. Sadly, this isn't the case if you are a director or designer (this is a legislative matter to do with your employment status and not the choice of the union!).

## **Look after yourself!**

We have links with British Association of Performing Arts Medicine. They provide free counselling and they also provide FREE surgeries in Belfast, including physiotherapy and other consultations.

## **Stay in touch!**

Your union is only a click away – online at [equity.org.uk](http://equity.org.uk), on socials including Facebook (Equity NI Committee) and Instagram (@EquityNIBranch). Even though we close main offices during the Christmas to New Year period, there is always a staff member on call during the day if you need to get in touch.

## **Feedback.**

If you have had a great season we still want to know – especially as we continue to promote good terms and conditions with our contacts and develop in-house agreements with producers we haven't yet met. If something has gone wrong but we weren't told at the time, we will want to work to offer advice on your position even after the event and seek to improve things for the next year.

# KNOW YOUR RIGHTS

Sometimes the first step to feeling empowered is simply to know your rights. Equity in Northern Ireland will be providing information sessions throughout the year so check your emails and social media for details. We will also be providing production companies with whom we have agreements with information on the rights held by performers, stage managers and creatives, as we come into a busy and pressurised season.

Online advice: [www.equity.org.uk/advice-and-support](http://www.equity.org.uk/advice-and-support)

Your Equity Official is: Alice Lemon on [alemon@equity.org.uk](mailto:alemon@equity.org.uk)

## Further resources

- [www.bapam.org.uk](http://www.bapam.org.uk)
- [www.nidirect.gov.uk/articles/national-minimum-wage-and-living-wage](http://www.nidirect.gov.uk/articles/national-minimum-wage-and-living-wage)



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