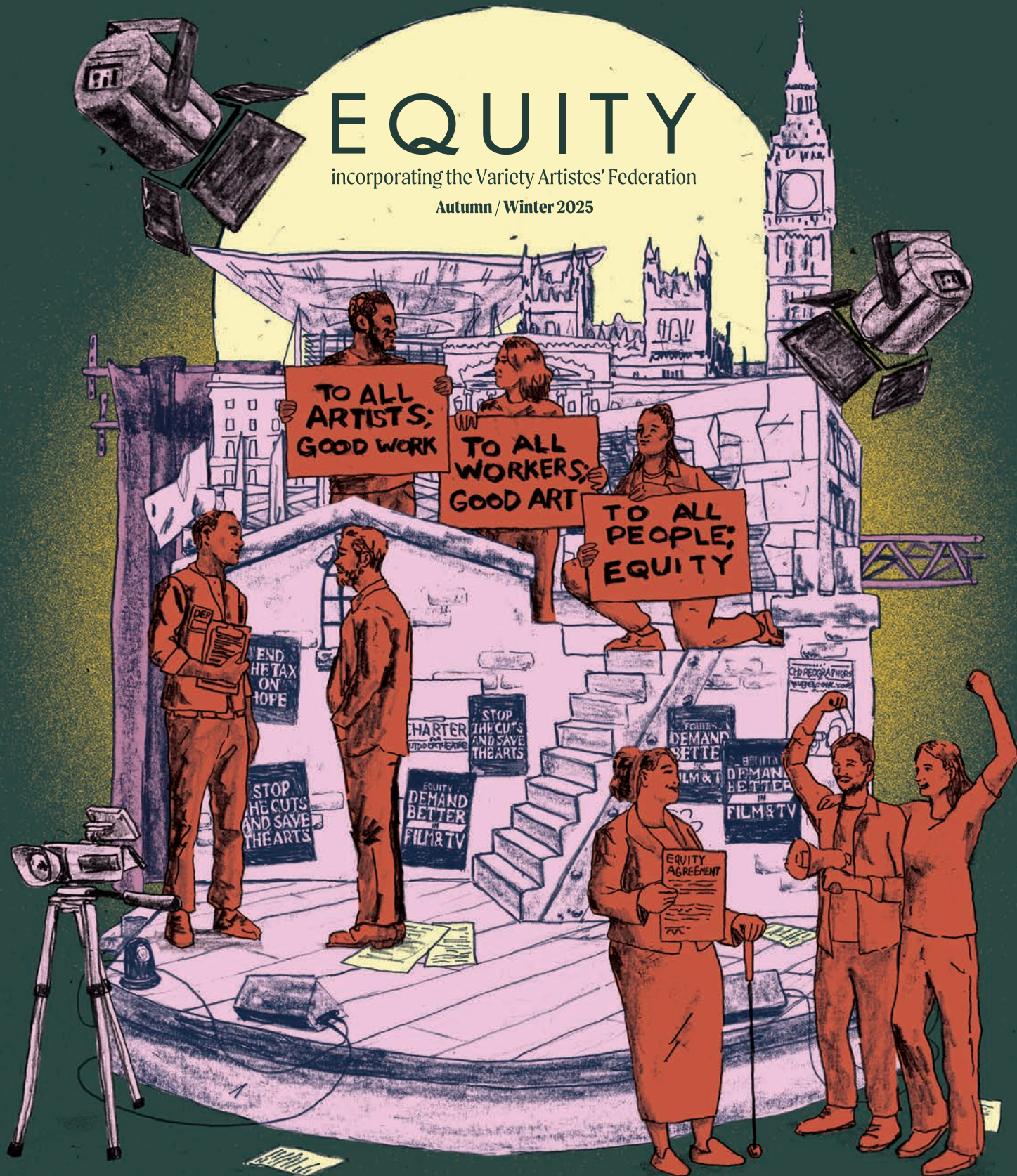


# EQUITY

incorporating the Variety Artists' Federation

Autumn / Winter 2025



## POLITICAL POWER & INDUSTRIAL STRENGTH

FROM OUR WORKPLACES TO SEATS OF GOVERNMENT, OUR POLITICAL POWER  
IS ROOTED IN OUR INDUSTRIAL STRENGTH

ALSO INSIDE:

TV & FILM NEGOTIATIONS – OUTDOOR THEATRE CHARTER – ACTIVIST EDUCATION



**To all artists: good work**

**To all workers: good art**

**To all people: Equity**



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## VIEWS

## “Our political work is rooted in our industrial work”

From censorship to social security cuts, to attacks on members' rights, Equity is fighting back, says General Secretary **Paul W Fleming** – with power rooted in the workforce

Freedom of expression has been a cornerstone of Equity's work for decades. We know it is not an abstract political construct, but a critical industrial issue; limiting freedom of expression affects our members as artists and as workers. Without a bold commitment to freedom of expression, both the commercial and social impact of our very industries are threatened.

The right to freedom of expression is not, however, unbounded. Equity policy is that it must not violate the dignity of working people, without which that freedom is meaningless. The freedom of producers to present a show should be bounded by their ability to pay fair wages. The freedom to cast should not compound existing issues of under employment for disabled artists. The freedom to present comedy does not include a freedom to have content which attacks the dignity of Black workers, women, or LGBTQ+ people.

Recently, we have seen drag artists' freedoms undermined by politicians and the far-right as they conflate drag with their war on trans people. We have seen a clear double standard from arts institutions on the war in Ukraine versus the genocide in Palestine. Funding in many political theatres has been slashed. Longstanding, apolitical acts from Jewish artists have been cancelled citing references to security costs. Every member experiences the censorship caused by low pay, rife across the industry, meaning they are not free to perform, express, or deepen their practice.

Our union is fighting back. We have been protecting companies and artists who have seen shows cancelled. We've made FOI requests that reveal political interference in funding bodies. We have rallied, protested, and appeared loud and proud in the media. But critically we have behaved as a trade

union: with power rooted in the workforce, united, who are at work and seeking work.

Irrespective of government and private funding choices: we will fight for pay to rise, up to and including industrial action where members back it. When trans members have their rights undermined by the state, we will do all we can to ensure our collective agreements step up. We are negotiating for casting guidelines to become enforceable clauses in our collective agreements to advance the work opportunities of under-represented artists.

Our political work is rooted in our industrial work. Our legal advice from a human rights barrister, delivered direct to MPs, played a leading role in the government U-turn on cuts to disability benefits – but it is backed up through negotiations with engagers to raise pay and opportunities. Conversely, our landmark High Court action against Spotlight was accompanied by political demands for Government to end the carve-out which allows directories to charge up-front fees at all. I believe members pay their subs for us to fight, and fight hard, using every lever we can, to advance their rights to work, and at work.

The gains we win cannot simply be moments, they must help build a movement. That was my message, crafted with members, in the recent General Secretary election. That message is one that the humbling, overwhelming majority have again endorsed. In a world of increasingly desperate and violent politics, an industrially-focused Equity is fighting back; building a different world which tackles the material causes of precarious work which limits the freedom of expression.

## VIEWS

## “Our industrial strength can push back against subsidised theatre cuts”

Ahead of negotiations for our subsidised theatre agreement covering performers and stage management, Equity President **Lynda Rooke** emphasises how members can stand up for a shrinking sector.



If you've been thinking that there are far less job opportunities in the subsidised sector – comprised of theatres and production companies receiving public funding – then you'd be right. For context: the total number of weeks worked by actors in the subsidised sector has declined by around 50% since 2004.

This is of great concern. The subsidised sector is a vital and necessary pipeline for the commercial success of the performing arts. What's more, its contraction has affected Equity members right across the UK, meaning less work for performers, directors, stage managers, design creatives, and others.

But it is also not surprising when you consider that this is a result of declining public funding for the arts. These cuts have been enacted without consideration of jobs or the positive impact culture has on growth.

It has led some theatre organisations to try to save money by teaming up to produce shows, giving rise to co-, tri-, quad- and quintuple productions. As this means fewer shows being produced overall, it in turn adds to the further contraction of jobs.

The majority of these joint productions are also between theatre organisations that are geographically unrelated, often leading to work that isn't rooted in a locale. This is a mistake, as theatre has an important role to play as part of communities: contributing to their economies, allowing artists to flourish without having to move away for work, and connecting residents through art and shared experiences.

Against this backdrop is the timidity and passivity of the heads of so many subsidised organisations, who fear to speak out in case their funding gets cut. But those who currently

manage our subsidised theatres mustn't forget that they are merely custodians – they don't own the organisations and should be accountable to the workforce and the community in which they are based. Their obligation is not only to ensure theatres remain open, but that they are thriving production houses serving a diverse local demographic.

In addition, theatre boards need to be democratised, with positions reserved for theatre workers themselves. Membership of such boards can sometimes be seen as a badge of honour for the local elite, some of whom might have little or no understanding of the industry and its workforce. And as for local councillors who sit on theatre boards while cutting arts funding, the rule should be: “No pay, no say!”

We, as trade unionists working in the performing arts, need to stand strong and use our industrial strength to push back against the weakness of the bosses. With negotiations for our collective agreement covering performers and stage management working in subsidised theatre due to take place in the coming months, now is the time to make our voices heard. If you are working on a subsidised agreement or have done so since April 2023, then look out for emails from Equity to find out how you can get involved.

It is within our power to call for the protection of jobs, better pay and fees, work flexibility, and digs which are safe, clean and reasonably priced. By showing our industrial strength, we send a clear message that we won't tolerate the decimation of the subsidised sector or the political choices that lead to it.



EQUITY MEMBERS

# DEMAND BETTER IN FILM & TV

“For the first time, Equity members have determined our negotiating priorities”



As negotiations for the next film and TV agreements continue, Equity members have been out in force at rallies, training days and meetings, calling for industry improvements.

If you're an actor, stunt performer or stunt coordinator who has worked in film and TV, chances are you've worked on a Pact Equity agreement. Pact stands for the 'Producers Alliance for Cinema and Television', the trade body for production and distribution companies. The agreement sets the minimum standards for how you work and usually runs for a few years, before Equity and Pact need to negotiate a new one.

As negotiations for the next agreement continue, Equity is running the 'Demand Better in Film & TV' campaign to amplify why members are calling for improvements. This time around, the claim focuses on better pay, secondary payments, artificial intelligence protections, casting (self-tapes), and hair and makeup. Choreographers and movement directors are also fighting to be recognised by these agreements.

“For the first time, Equity members have determined our negotiating priorities and for the first time, members who work on the film and TV agreement will get a vote on it”, says Equity General Secretary Paul W Fleming.

Leading the charge is Equity's Film & TV Network of members who shape the direction of negotiations – some of whom even attend negotiation meetings with bosses themselves. Members of the network have also taken part in training days to learn how to work collectively to win industrial improvements (*find out more on page 8*).

Over the summer, a rally was held for the network so that they could come together and highlight what needs to change in the industry. Addressing the assembled members, actor and Equity Councillor Sam Swann said that “changes in the industry – from the rise of streamers, to the hordes of American studios making productions in the UK, not to mention the rise of AI – means there has never been a more important time to stand together to demand that we have protections and rights.”

Photos by Mark Thomas

“Leading the charge is Equity's Film & TV Network”



The CMDN at a reception for members working on the Pact agreement (with Polly Bennet, bottom left)

# MAKING MOVES

In under two years, the Choreographers and Movement Directors Network's (CMDN) fast rise has seen it pick up 200 members, win spots on seven committees, and become a force within Pact film and TV negotiations. Here, the network's founder **Polly Bennett** (above, bottom left) tells us how she started it and why it's such an exciting time to join.

My dad was a trumpet player and since I grew up in musical rehearsal rooms, he was the inevitable trigger of my career as a movement director. As a seasoned freelancer, he bestowed me with three rules for surviving the precarious theatre industry: take any work offered to “keep the wolf from the door,” eat one home-cooked meal a day, and join a trade union.

I did my best with the first two but when I approached Equity in 2012, I was told the Choreographers Committee was being dissolved. I was unsure of how unions worked but it seemed there wasn’t a place for me. Although there were choreographer members on the Dance Committee it seemed like choreography was identified more as a “bolt-on” skill for an actor or dancer. Since I was not a performer I marched into my career without honouring my dad’s third piece of advice.

What’s followed has been a career always thinking the next job will be better. Perhaps on the next job “they’ll” see how much work I’ve done and give me a credit that reflects my role; perhaps my reputation will ensure a royalty like all the other members of the creative team and surely, now people have won Oscars with my input, I’ll get paid for the preparation I do for a job. Surely?

Unfortunately, tales of unfairness have rumbled in the movement community for years, but our singularity and lack of union presence has left us vulnerable. Movement choreography spans theatre, television, film, live performance, video games, motion capture, community dance and more, so it can’t be defined by one standard job description. This makes advocacy hard and undercutting easy. Too often this erasure in the public consciousness affects us daily at work; being left off call-sheets, rehearsal notes, credit rolls, meetings and premiere invites leaves bruises.

The impact of these unchanging standards was taking its toll, so I started pulling people together – from individual freelancers to the Movement Directors Association, a group of film choreographers gathered by Ellen Kane, and the Choreographer’s Guild in the US. I spoke with Bectu, SDUK – and finally, Equity, who were by far the best placed organisation to support us.

In November 2023, we held our first meeting and began training days, introducing people to trade unionism. A steering group emerged and created a mission statement, met regularly, and practiced turning moans into practical plans to educate producers and the public. When an Instagram account launched, word got out: things were shifting. Now, at the time of writing, the Choreographers and Movement Directors Network has 200 official members.

With structure in place, CMDN members ran for multiple committees in Equity’s recent elections. This included the Dance Committee, the only obvious habitat for us – yet with some organisation, 13 of us ended up being elected across seven committees in total, including Directors and Designers, Race Equality, Wales National Committee and more.

To have that much representation within the infrastructure of Equity is something I feel immensely galvanised by and incredibly proud of.

Now, we are deep diving into theatre contracts and cross-referencing what is happening with what should be happening, and planning a handbook to guide fair practice in the industry. We’re part of negotiations for the Pact film and TV agreements, on which our existence is currently barely acknowledged. Despite choreographers contributing to the majority of the highest-grossing films of the last decade (imagine *Barbie* with no dance, *Star Wars* without the creatures, or *Bohemian Rhapsody* without Rami Malek moving like Freddie Mercury) the current Pact agreement only covers performers and dancers, and excludes the specifics of preparation fees, base rates and residuals for us. The bat-signal went out, and 40 film and TV choreographers gathered to work out how to push for these issues to be addressed in the agreement.

When I asked members of the CMDN how they feel about being part of the network, they all, unprompted, said “visible”. Since our work is created with humility and channelled through others, we – the makers – have long been invisible too. It cannot be ignored that we are a female-led sector, and the idea that our work is supportive and peripheral, rather than deeply integrated into a production, reveals systemic bias as we challenge the status quo.

The network is a coming together of passionate individuals who want their profession to be seen, recognised and respected. Equity staff have given me confidence that we can change antiquated standards and with each member that joins, I feel the effort easing for everyone.

When my dear dad passed away a few months ago, he cared less about how much I was working and the temperature of the food I was eating, but was thrilled I was standing up for myself, my peers, and the future of choreography and movement at Equity.

If you’re a choreographer or movement director who would like to join this network, email [moceallaigh@equity.org.uk](mailto:moceallaigh@equity.org.uk)

“Representation within Equity is something I feel immensely galvanised by”



A CMDN meeting at Equity HQ



# ACTIVIST EDUCATION



Campaigns & Education Officer Gareth Forest (credit - @onlyonebimmy)

*From Deputies training to political education, Equity offers a range of education sessions to members. Campaigns & Education Officer **Gareth Forest** explains why it's so important.*

A stately home isn't a typical venue for a union meeting. But Wortley Hall is different. Owned as a cooperative by Britain's trade unions, it is known as "the workers' stately home." It was the perfect venue, in the splendid isolation of the Peak District, for Equity's first activist education residential.

Equity has embarked on a programme of activist education because it is essential for members to understand their role in building a society that works for working people. Our programme takes different forms. There is in-person and online training available for members at all levels of activism, from briefings on health and safety at work, to the threat of the far right in our industry, to a comprehensive Equity Deputy training course for union representatives in the workplace.

To prepare members for film & TV negotiations, we have been running monthly 'How to Win' training days which have developed over a hundred Equity members into activists on set. This is a model we are rolling out across our other contract negotiations.

Our plan at the Wortley Hall residential was to raise members' political consciousness and teach them how to fight to make the economy work for them. And the effect on some members has been profound. Activist education is an essential part of trades unionism. We know that Equity is often thought of as a regulator or service. But in our sessions, we explain trades unionism as a collective experience of workers in struggle, that we share in sorority with workers the world over.

To find out more and see which training sessions are currently on offer, visit [tinyurl.com/equity-activist-education](https://tinyurl.com/equity-activist-education)

**“I now feel I have found my voice”**

– Bao Tieu

“I’m an actor, martial artist and contemporary movement artist. After I was elected to be the workplace Equity Deputy for *Innocence* at the Royal Opera House in 2023, then on *Madama Butterfly* in 2024, I realised I wanted to become more active in the union and join members in speaking up to improve the industry.

“So when I got the opportunity to learn about building worker power at Wortley Hall, it was amazing. The weekend armed us all with knowledge and we got to meet like-minded members, instantly becoming a circle of friends.

“My next steps were to get involved with my local branch. After attending a few meetings of the Essex & Hertfordshire Branch, I put myself forward as their conference delegate and was amazed to be elected.

“It was at conference I realised that we – as performers – have a voice, and we could be heard here without being dismissed. After I addressed conference to second a motion on increasing public funding for opera and the arts, I realised how happy I felt.

“After this, I was honoured to be elected to my branch committee. I now feel I have found my voice and can help fellow Equity members to fight for change.”



Bao Tieu at the Wortley Hall residential (Credit - Milo Chandler)

**“I’m now getting increasingly deeply involved in the union”**

– Shobu Kapoor

“I’ve been an actress for over 30 years, but I didn’t become active within the union until last October. I was in Budapest for a film and got a call from Equity’s Film Official, Amy Dawson, who asked if I’d like to be the Equity Dep for the production.

“I said no as I was going to be leaving soon, but we ended up talking about the union, negotiations for the Pact film and TV agreements, and what actors can achieve when we get together.

“As a direct result of that conversation, I attended a training day on the Pact negotiations and how members can win improvements to the agreements through our collective actions. We talked about issues affecting us at work – such as self-tapes, secondary payments, and AI – and worked out how to solve them in groups. It was wonderful to be with all the other creatives and the Equity staff were fantastic.

“I even ended up standing for election for the Women’s Committee a few months later, and got on! There needs to be parity – women should be paid the same as men and have equal representation on screen. I’m now getting increasingly deeply involved in the union and I’m very happy about it.”



Shobu Kapoor



## MEET YOUR GENERAL SECRETARY

In May, **Paul W Fleming** was re-elected as Equity's General Secretary by 81% of the vote. With his second term running until 2030, Equity's Vice-President Jackie Clune sat down to ask him about his plan for the next five years, taking Spotlight to court, his views on the Government, and a surprising childhood career in dramatics...

**Jackie Clune: For members who don't know what the role of the General Secretary is in a trade union, could you describe it for us?**

Paul W Fleming: I'm elected by the members to manage the union, which is different to Councillors, who are elected by the members to govern the union. I don't set the union's policies or its strategic direction, but I do set its day-to-day priorities and manage its budget, resources, and staffing. I decide how we action the priorities and strategies that the members have decided – that's the job, basically.

**Jackie: How do you feel about this being your second term? You've already done five years, and I think it's fair to say that in those five years the direction of the union has shifted to a more proactive approach. Is that something you set out to do and bring into the next term?**

Paul: That's something that the Council set out to do and I think what they were doing when they nominated me as their candidate for General Secretary in 2020 and 2025. So I don't think this is me, this is what the elected members – the union – wanted the direction to go in.

Where does this come from? We grew as a union in terms of member density in the workplace for 15 years. And we made a promise that if the union grows, members' voices will get louder, your pay will get higher, your terms will get better. Well, people joined, and now they're looking to us to implement that.

**Jackie: I agree that shift is largely down to us, the Council, but I do think you've brought a different energy and focus to the union. I want to talk about dignity at work, because there's still quite a lot of abuses of power going on in the industry – perpetrators of bullying, misogyny, racism going unchallenged. What can Equity do to make workplaces more fair when people have a complaint or raise an issue? Can we be more muscular in our response so that members feel Equity has their back?**

Paul: So one of the things that the Council's decided, is the idea that everything we do is centred around four values: that we're accountable, aspirational, collective, and industrial. And I think dignity at work is a problem which is second only to pay – and it's second to pay because it's a product of low pay and precarity.

What we've got to do is hold the right people accountable. Publishing lists of names does not hold the actual people responsible for this system accountable, which are bosses – it's people who profit from freelance and precarious work. People want you to be frightened you're going to lose your job, so you work for less money. That means bad behaviour can fester and it is in bosses' interests for the first thing to happen. I'm not saying that they want people to suffer horrendous direct abuse – but it's a byproduct of what they do want, which is low pay.

There's a lot of focus on individual perpetrators who, of course, must be held to account, but not enough of a recognition that the structures are made not by one man, or by some tablets of stone handed down from wherever, these are constructed by an entire system. It's about holding those responsible for the system accountable, and being aspirational – saying we can fix it. It's not an inevitable feature of the industry and it can be resolved through collective bargaining, by creating better structures, as well as people raising complaints and bringing them to the union. The more we know, the more we can do, but strong union agreements are the way to prevent it.

It is not down to a victim of bad behaviour, it is down to everybody in your workplace as a collective. And then behave industrially. This constant desire for a new regulatory body, a new campaign, another statement, another press release, or whatever. No, I want a collective agreement that actually creates parameters. We don't do enough to explain what the difference between 'guidelines' and 'collective agreements' are. Collective agreements are contracts between the union and the employer, and if they're breached there could be a penalty.

**Jackie: I wanted to ask you a little bit about how the relationship with the Labour government is going? Because last year there was great hope when Labour came to power, that they would be much more arts friendly and understand the huge impact that our industry has on the economy. Are things looking better? [Laughs] You don't want to answer...**

Paul: No? I think it's fair to say that the first 12 months of the Labour government has been fundamentally disappointing. It's economically illiterate the way in which they're proceeding and we, as a union, should not divorce the idea of lack of investment in the arts from cuts to PIP and the Winter Fuel Allowance.

It's bad economics – putting funding into our industry will generate growth. Keeping money in the pockets of disabled people or pensioners who are more likely to spend money than people who put it in a bank account, is good economics for growth. And for a Government that came to power saying their singular mission was equitable growth felt by everybody...

The one thing the Government is doing that's explicitly pro-growth is the Employment Rights Bill, which will empower trade unions. Particularly unions like us, we talk about precarity and the difficulty we have in engaging members – the ability to ballot our members for industrial action electronically instead of with their home address, really changes the game for us.

And that will put more money in working people's pockets, then into the shop where they buy their sandwich, then into the builder that they engage to redo their counter... That circulates money around the economy. That is growth.



I do feel like one can be hopeful that the disastrous results of the local elections for the Government and the proven failure of its economic strategy, where there isn't any economic headroom left for them to invest properly, means they would reassess where they are. And with us, engagement from the Government has improved in the last two months, I would say.

The industrial strategy is too broad, not backed by cash and not focused enough on revenue. But it is OK.

**Jackie: Also Spotlight – when we first decided to take legal action against them, you asked the Council whether this issue is widely and deeply felt. And we said, “yes, absolutely.” And all the social media comments suggest that people are so fed up of being exploited in this way. But some members will say it’s a waste of money, that we didn’t win. But is it important that we took Spotlight to court and we showed our teeth a little bit?**

Paul: The union has lots of tools in its armoury to fight industrially and legal action is one of those tools. But it is not a tool that the union has in recent history been very willing to use – that’s because it carries a degree of risk. This was an untested piece of law. We have lawyers who were convinced that we had a good chance of winning, but it was not guaranteed.

Do members pay their subs for us to take those risks? Yes, is my belief. We did it because we thought there was a chance that we could win and the courts are a legitimate battleground to advance our members’ rights.

One thing I try to think about to make sure I don’t go into my own rabbit hole, is what does the average member reasonably expect the union can do? Now, sometimes they’re wrong because the law doesn’t let us or it’s too expensive for us to do.

But when I think to myself, does the average member think that we should challenge Spotlight when their services are motivated by unreasonable profit on the backs of our members? Yes, I think they do. Is this a fair amount of money to spend? Yes. Is it a dangerous amount of money to spend? Categorically not, no.

It was a perfectly reasonable balance of risk for us to take, and those are the questions we’ve got to ask.

**Jackie: I was struck by the performance elements watching the barristers at the High Court. It’s a very performative role, isn’t it? As is being General Secretary in a way; you’re very good at public speaking and that’s a performance skill. So maybe you could have been an actor?**

Paul: I did do amdram as a child.

**Jackie: What did you play?**

Paul: I played a variety of roles through my career... I was Willy Wonka in Charlie and the Chocolate Factory. That was the highlight of my career, I was very well reviewed by the local paper.

**Jackie: Were you? I didn’t know you were handing out golden tickets. So looking back on the last five years, what’s your proudest achievement?**

**Would it be the ‘Stand up for 17%’ West End claim, how we navigated through Covid, or the reorganisation of the staffing? Because there’s been quite a lot going on, hasn’t there?**

Paul: As a trades unionist we are collectivists and you shouldn’t be able to point to something and say “I did that – if I wasn’t here, the union wouldn’t exist”. What you want is: If not you, then who? If you walk away, does the union carry on in the direction you want, that you believe it should? Is our democracy, our activism, our industrial work, deep enough to sustain every individual leaving?

And that’s what I’m most proud of – if you look at the West End claim, the Spotlight action, the change in the union’s communication with the world. Whether it be a team of staff or members or both, there is nothing that has been done as a result of one individual. We’re not an individual vehicle, whether that individual is me or anybody else. And I think we’re in a good place, we’re in a solid place from that point of view.

**Jackie: So what are your hopes for the next five years? What are the big targets?**

Paul: The first three years of my first term were dominated by Covid – I was nominated by the Council in 2020 the day after the theatres closed, so there’s been a lot of change. The upside for the union as an institution was that we could spend five years making ourselves fit for purpose. The challenge of the next five years is that the internal changes we’ve made now have to deliver something material.

So we’ve got a big year of theatre negotiations that starts this autumn – every theatre agreement is up for negotiation over the next 18 months. We’re in the middle of the Pact film and TV negotiations now and we need an outcome that – in terms of royalties, AI, casting, and pay – delivers a radical shift. And to do that we need members galvanised to take industrial action. In variety we have seen a massive laying of the groundwork with the Drag Artist Network and so on. We’ve honed in on areas where we think we can make an impact to make change.

There’s a challenge too in the next five years of the unorganised areas – so audio, TV commercials, video games, new media in general. Artificial intelligence technology where your voice is being recorded for the purpose of AI synthesisation. We’ve got to spend five years honing which areas are the priority for us, because at the minute we try and be all things to all people.

So in the next five years: consolidate and win big in the areas where we are organised, prioritise and strategise in the areas where we’re unorganised.

*Photos by Jess Hurd*



# THE [ ] [ ] GREAT OUTDOORS



From unpredictable weather to varying hours, working in outdoor theatre can present with a unique set of challenges. **Nicole Vassell** finds out about members' experiences and reveals how a new Equity agreement will address these issues.

A rainy forecast shouldn't have a bearing on whether most people can work. But Samuel Lane can look back fondly at a time performing in a show in Birmingham when the evening's schedule all depended on the predictions of a weather app.



Samuel Lane (Credit – Yellowbelly)

"A thunderstorm was moving close to where we were performing, and if there was lightning, it'd be a big problem – we were on a metal stage," Samuel remembers. "If it got too close, then we'd have to call it for the night and refund everyone their tickets, and obviously that was something no-one wanted. The production manager was checking the forecast constantly."

Luckily, the storm stayed at bay long enough so that the show could go on – but it's an example of one of many unique considerations that those working in outdoor theatre have to make every time they put on a production.

It's unpredictable quirks like these that come with the territory when putting on a production in the great outdoors. Outdoor theatre is a much-loved and classic form of entertainment, serving audience members around the country every year. Yet due to the nature of this kind of production, working in outdoor theatre can come with its own specific set of issues.

"On the jobs I worked, we were unsure whether our paid hours counted from the time we were called to the tour vehicle or the arrival at the venue," Samuel says. When potentially travelling several hours across the country to get to the next stop on a tour, the time involved with the job starts to rack up, especially when also tasked with assembling the stage upon arrival. Because our official start time ended up being the time we reached the venue, when you added up all of the hours that were spent travelling, putting up the set, and actually doing the show, we were going over the legal work time with no overtime pay being offered."

In 2021, after working three different outdoor theatre jobs since graduating in 2016, Samuel, a

member of Equity's Young Members' Committee, decided to work with the union to find out how to address his and other open air performers' concerns about the lack of consistent rules and regulations in the sector. And in July 2025, after years of surveys, assessing performers' contracts, and discussions with producers, Equity's Outdoor Theatre Charter was launched – an agreement for companies to sign up to, setting minimum standards for pay, terms, and conditions in the open-air sector.

### Clear rules

Not sure what constitutes your working hours? The Charter states that they must include both travelling to a venue before a performance and to accommodation afterwards, as well as get-ins and get-outs. Bad weather during a show? Health and safety is also addressed, stipulating that managers should provide protective clothing for adverse weather conditions, make sure electrical equipment is waterproofed or suitable for outdoor use, and have a clear written cancellation policy for shows.

And among the other clauses, the Charter makes clear that performers and stage management are 'self-employed' for tax and National Insurance purposes, while holding 'worker status' in law. Such dual status typically applies to performers and stage management working on theatrical engagements, and entitles them to employment rights including holiday pay and a pension.

Karrim Jalali, Equity's Industrial Official covering outdoor theatre, has worked with Samuel and other union members to bring the Charter to life, and believes it lays out basic principles that should exist between workers and engagers. "They're sensible measures – not overly autocratic or difficult, they're the sort of things that you should expect from bosses," he explains. "But unfortunately, the bar has been so low historically that many engagers haven't met those standards."

For instance, the lack of consideration for working hours and rest periods could lead to injury. "People may drive very long hours to a venue, perform, then have to drive to get to a hotel halfway to the next venue. They'll arrive late, sometimes past midnight or 1am, before getting back on the road at eight in the morning. When you're knackered, there's a very tangible risk of harm – we've had members tell us of drivers falling asleep at the wheel," Karrim says. "Then, when you're really tired and carrying heavy bits of staging during get-ins and get-outs, you're far more susceptible to making mistakes."

While the law says workers have a right to 11 hours rest between working days, those who work for outdoor theatre companies are not always aware of this. But the enshrining of this right in the Charter

**"We were going over the legal work time with no overtime pay being offered"**



Illyria Theatre's production of 'Twelfth Night' (Credit: Illyria Theatre Limited)

means that bosses and workers operating on the agreement have no doubt about best practice. "With the Charter in place, workers can feel more empowered because they actually have clear guidelines on proper procedure in these instances, and it empowers them to come to us for advice and support," says Karrim. "If you think your working rights are being breached during an engagement, contact Equity (details below) to check and find out what you can about it."



Oliver Gray, artistic director at Illyria

### Benefits for all

Illyria Theatre, a touring outdoor company that produces Shakespeare and classic plays around the UK, is one of seven organisations to have signed up to the Charter, alongside the Quorn Grange hotel in Loughborough which is the first venue. Oliver Gray, Illyria's founder and artistic director, was keen to align his company with the Charter. "Immediately, I thought of it as a really good thing," he recalls. "There needs to be a basic standard recognised by the union that companies are expected to adhere to, and it needs to be publicised."

As a freelance actor himself, Oliver has had experience of both sides of the stage curtain, which has contributed to his encouragement of industry-wide standards between Equity members and engagers: "I believe that if somebody is buying a ticket to see a professional outdoor performance, that's exactly what they should get; not a performance that they're told is performed by professionals, but actually it's performed by people who are illegally underpaid with poor working terms and conditions."

**"It was a no-brainer to sign up to the Charter"**

"When we heard quite how badly some of the operators in the sector were treating their performers and stage management, it was a no-brainer to sign up to the Charter. Illyria had to stand against these practices and do our bit towards making the industry fairer."

Though the benefits the Charter brings for performers and stage management are clear, there is much to gain for the venues and companies signing up to it. Samuel Lane, who has given years of input to the Charter, notes that a company establishing good will for the people it engages will lead to better returns.

"If a company invests in the people that they engage, they will build a good reputation within the industry, which means they'll get the best possible performers and stage management attracted to their productions," he explains. "And if that happens, they build a good reputation with their audiences; their audience numbers will grow, which means more money coming in, which means that they could expand their tours and performances in the future."

For Illyria leader Oliver Gray, companies and venues adopting the Charter is a way of levelling the playing field based on the quality of work and the way businesses are run. "That's got to be a better way to work, rather than going, 'How can I match what that company is paying its actors, and go lower?'" he says. "If all the main players went by these basic terms and conditions, that exploitation couldn't happen."

Since the launch of the Charter, Equity has heard from several additional companies and venues eager for more information. By the time the 2026 outdoor theatre season begins, it's hoped that many more will also adopt the Charter.

"We want to really push for those who actually own the sites and heritage spaces that host productions to make the Charter a condition of using them," Karrim notes. "The six companies and one venue that have signed up to have agreements already demonstrate that working with the Charter is possible. It's perfectly achievable not to breach the law and to pay people properly, and still be able to produce. "If companies can't find a way of doing this work viably, without exploiting workers, then they should make way for the companies that can."

You can read the *Outdoor Theatre Charter* in full by logging into the 'Rates and Agreements' section of the Equity website [tinyurl.com/equity-rates-and-agreements](https://tinyurl.com/equity-rates-and-agreements)

Equity strongly encourages performer and relevant stage management members working on open air tours, panto school tours, or theatre in education tours to send contracts and schedules to Equity for review at [pmpp@equity.org.uk](mailto:pmpp@equity.org.uk).

If you are an outdoor theatre company or a venue, and would like to know more about the *Outdoor Theatre Charter*, please email [kjalali@equity.org.uk](mailto:kjalali@equity.org.uk).



Illyria Theatre's production of 'Pirates of Penzance' (Credit: Illyria Theatre Limited)

## Theatre companies that have signed up to the Outdoor Theatre Charter so far:

Illyria  
HandleBards  
The Rude Mechanicals  
Duke's Theatre Company  
Paperback Theatre  
The Plandits

Venues:  
The Quorn Grange Hotel



# CASTING A LIGHT

## Our campaign to challenge casting directory fees goes all the way to Parliament, the High Court, TUC Congress and beyond

Costly barriers to seeking and securing work are part of the challenges faced by performers, with casting directory fees one of many factors that are almost unique to the performing arts. Equity's 'End the Tax on Hope' campaign seeks to end casting directory fees, and in 2025 the campaign has taken a turn in parliament, the courts and TUC Congress as the union uses every opportunity to tackle this 'actor tax'.

In most industries, it is illegal to charge work-seekers a fee for work-seeking services, but there is an exemption for the performing arts. In May, the issue of casting directory fees was debated in Parliament as part of the committee stage of the Government's flagship Employment Rights Bill. While it won't be taken forwards as part of that legislation, politicians – including the Employment Rights Minister – are looking at the exemption applied to performing arts and the impact that the charges have on work-seekers.

The exemption is, however, subject to regulations saying fees should be "reasonable" and based on the organisation's costs if they are considered to be an employment agency.

Which brings us to Equity's court case.

In July – exactly a year after papers were lodged with the High Court – a group of Equity members tested this piece of law. They entered court room 12 in the imposing stone building of the Royal Courts of Justice on London's Strand for the hearing between the union and Talent Systems Europe, the owners of casting platform Spotlight.

While Equity members frequently share concerns about the cost of casting directories, it reached a crescendo in autumn 2023 when Spotlight tried – and failed – to introduce a pricey 'Premier' membership tier. Spotlight claimed that 99% of UK productions are cast via its platform, with most performers and agents considering it essential to have a Spotlight profile to land work.

For the regulations on keeping fees reasonable to apply, Equity's legal team had to prove that Spotlight met the definition in law that it is in "the business... of providing services (whether by the provision of information or otherwise) for the purpose of finding employment with employers or of supplying employers with persons for employment".

The judge disagreed, handing down a ruling in the first week of September. Many Equity members were surprised, and even amused, by the judgment. "If I'm not finding work on Spotlight, then why am I on there, it's literally the only reason I subscribe?" asked one member.

Many Equity members were surprised, and even amused, by the judgment. "If I'm not finding work on Spotlight, then why am I on there, it's literally the only reason I subscribe?" asked one member.

The ruling has now raised new concerns about the implications for other parts of the economy. As Equity's magazine was going to press, the union is seeking to appeal this decision. Equity General Secretary Paul W Fleming called it "dangerous and disappointing." He explained that one of the reasons an appeal was being sought was because "the implication of the judgment is that any worker, working in any sector of the economy is now unprotected from up front charges by similar platforms."

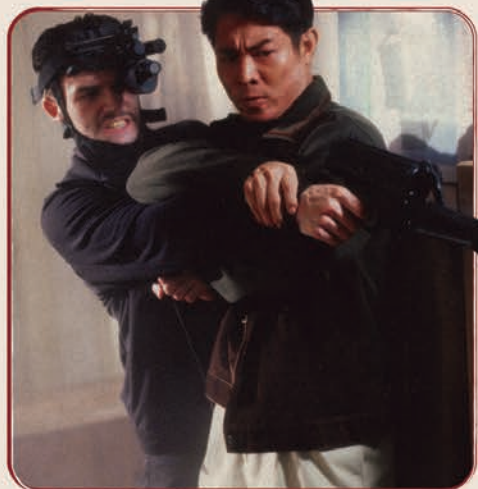
It is testament to its effect that the then-Employment Rights Minister called Equity's General Secretary the evening of the judgment to discuss its implications, and on her first full day in the job, his successor had already been in touch for a briefing.

This concern is shared by the wider trades union movement. An emergency motion reached the floor of TUC Congress in Brighton just days after the judgment. Unions representing 5.5 million UK workers voted to fight the economy-wide implications of the judgment and support Equity's appeal.

An appeal is just one avenue. Ongoing conversations with politicians mean this issue remains firmly on the government's desk.

In the coming months we will be asking members to take other actions to push back against casting directories, and give voice to our campaign.

While no outcome is guaranteed, Equity takes direction from the words of Brecht, who wrote: "Those who fight can lose. Those who do not fight have already lost."



READY FOR

# ACTION

As negotiations for the agreement covering stunt performers and coordinators gets underway, Equity stunt members tell **Sarah Woolley** about the improvements they're pushing for.

Sarah Lochlan has been hit by cars, squeezed into underwater coffins, fallen down the stairs, jumped off buildings, set on fire, and chased by dinosaurs, to name a few.

It's all part of a busy career she's enjoyed as a performer, stunt double and assistant co-ordinator, with credits including *How To Train Your Dragon*, *Black Widow*, and the *Jurassic World* series. But, she says, there are many aspects of stunt performers and co-ordinators' jobs that those in charge need to address.

Discussing the demands of a full-time job in the stunt profession, she says "It's very difficult to catch up on sleep because the hours we work are so long. It's quite usual to start work at 4am and finish at 8pm, especially where prosthetics are involved. Recently some friends spoke of a 3:30am call and 11:00pm finish. That's an extreme, but it feels like health and safety is overlooked when it suits production. Sleep deprivation affects everyone in the film industry."

"Simple things like time with your family and friends, going to the physio, doctor, dentist, and getting the car MOT'd are all near on impossible on a full time job, but that's just what's expected of you."

"One of the biggest traps people fall into is rushing," Sarah continues. "Stunts deserve time, they deserve respect. But unfortunately time is money on a film set and this is what contributes to a mentality of rushing. In an often stressful environment, being able to manage a team calmly is a skill in itself. It requires experience, authority and confidence in one's own ability when it comes to decision making and a level of respect. Sometimes you have to be prepared to say 'no' which can be difficult in an

environment where everybody wants to be able to say 'yes!'"

Change is long overdue on many issues and there's now an opportunity to make it happen. Equity is currently negotiating new agreements with Pact – the Producers' Alliance for Cinema and Television, the UK trade body representing independent production and distribution companies. The agreements cover film and TV, and set minimum pay, terms and conditions for stunt performers and coordinators, as well as actors, (see page 4 for more on Pact negotiations).

"The 2023 SAG-AFTRA strike was a total game-changer and now it's our turn to make a stand," says Amy Dawson, Equity's Industrial Official for Film. "It's crunch time for stunts and every member needs to get behind the Pact negotiations because a better agreement will be a huge win for everyone."

### Making way for change

As well as being a member of the British Stunt Register (formerly JISC Register) since 2011, Sarah also served on its committee for five years, and now is part of Equity's Stunt Working Group – a driving force on behalf of the stunt profession in Pact negotiations.

Comprised of members elected by their stunt peers within the union, it's this group that continuously pushes to improve the working lives of their profession. They also meet regularly alongside Equity staff to discuss issues in the industry and how to resolve them, which sometimes involves liaising with production companies.

"We work five days for four days' pay," Sarah says, referring to a long-running frustration on Pact productions, over being paid a weekly fee for five days work that is equivalent to the daily fee for four days work. "Everyone I know in stunts talks about how unfair this is and how unhappy they are with this agreement. This has been an ongoing issue since before I got into stunts in 2011."

As a result, Equity is calling on Pact to pay stunts five daily fees for their work across a five-day working week.

Pay is certainly a key issue in the negotiations. For instance, there is a gap between the earnings of UK stunt workers

**"Change is long overdue and there's now an opportunity to make it happen"**

and their US counterparts. Talent from both sides of the pond can be working on the very same production, but a UK stunt performer can earn less than their American peers.

"We're claiming for substantial increases on the minimum fees to facilitate wage parity between the UK and US," says Amy. "Stunt performers and coordinators should be fairly remunerated for their work, and our goal is to ensure that those in the UK are not seen as the 'cheaper option'."

Related to pay is secondary payments, with Equity calling for a greater share of the profits for members and for this money to be paid earlier. Back in the day, stunt performers could also rely on royalties and residuals from DVD sales and TV reruns to top up their income, but that safety net has almost disappeared.

It all makes a stunt career increasingly untenable for the next generation, especially when breaking into that world isn't cheap. Stunt performers and coordinators are typically expected to be accomplished in various disciplines, with skills in areas such as martial arts, swimming, racing vehicles, climbing, and more. That all takes several years and can set someone back tens of thousands of pounds.

Sarah is especially keen for a "jargon free" agreement that "doesn't need to be dissected by a lawyer" and hopes that could solve a long-running issue with special stipulations – clauses production companies add to contracts on top of (and sometimes negating) the standards set by agreements. It's a key priority for actors too, and Equity is pressing Pact to only allow legitimately "special" clauses to be added to contracts and nothing else.

"[Special stipulations] are getting longer and longer," says Sarah. "When your contract is often not sent until the day you are working (and sometimes afterwards), it's not realistic to expect us to read through all the small print and check that something hasn't been added setting out less favourable terms than the contract itself. We're not lawyers! In an ideal world special stipulations should already be covered within the agreement. That way we all know what we're signing. It's not surprising that people end up signing their rights away due to lack of time or interest in scrolling through what can sometimes be an extra 20 pages!"

## Industry recognition

Stunts have been unsung heroes of movies since the earliest days of silent cinema. In 1908, the first-ever paid stunt was recorded for *The Count of Monte Cristo* when an acrobat – whose name is unknown – received \$5 to dive into the sea from a clifftop. With time, stunt action evolved into an artform in its own right, but in the UK that craftsmanship can still be kept in the shadows and at arms-length.

"A lot of people don't understand what stunt people do, especially the creative side," says Jude Poyer, an award-winning stunt coordinator and action director whose credits include *Havoc*, *Furies*, and *Gangs of London*. "In the UK, stunt people are seen more as athletes and tough guys, but it's not just about hazardous action: it's about storytelling and collaboration."

A stylised fight sequence can live and die by how it's photographed and edited, so on *Gangs of London* Jude and his team spent three months in rehearsals with director Gareth Evans and cinematographer Matt Flannery, building sets from cardboard to shoot low-tech previsualisation fight sequences that were followed on shoot, shot for shot. Jude says there's usually a lot of pushback to this practice in the UK, but doing it saved time, money, and meant Jude's stunt team weren't worn out by shooting endless coverage.

Jude is hoping the Pact negotiations will throw a spotlight on what stunt departments bring to every stage of production. "*Gangs of London* was the first time I'd worked on a UK production that fully understood and appreciated what a stunt department can do," says Jude. "When we designed the action we discussed the story beats, how the characters would move, and how best to photograph and cut the action."

Jude also points out some "grey areas" in the agreement that need to reflect the day-to-day realities of stunt work. For example, producers often won't pay residuals for rehearsal days, which means rehearsals are paid at a lower fee than days on camera. "On paper that sounds fair to an outsider," says Jude, "but in reality, the days when you're working things out are actually the most physically taxing and potentially the most hazardous." It's another issue that Equity is hoping to resolve as part of their current negotiations. "I'm really hoping that we can come to an agreement about fair rates on that front," adds Jude.

**"It's not just about hazardous action: it's about storytelling and collaboration"**

### An organised community

The good news is that union membership density is incredibly high in the stunt community, with the vast majority registered as Equity members, and those numbers are growing year after year at a faster rate than actors. It comes as no surprise to Amy that stunts have such a strong voice.

"Most of them are self-represented so don't have agents," she says. "Stunt members know their contracts inside out and they know where the gaps are. So they're really equipped to get stuck in and push back on the misuse of certain clauses in the collective agreements."

If you're a stunt member who thinks a production company is breaking its contractual or legal obligations – such as requiring you to work longer hours than the maximum set out, not following health and safety measures properly, or another issue – you can report this to Equity, as the union can hold them to account.

Work is also being done to increase engagement with stunt performers and coordinators as Pact negotiations progress, through stunt-specific workplace visits and

open meetings. It's this collective strength and leverage Equity's stunt membership needs to bring to the negotiating table.

If you're a stunt member who wants to get involved, email **productions@equity.org.uk**. An Equity staff member can visit you on set to talk through the issues that affect you, or you can find out more about becoming an Equity Deputy and pushing for improvements in your workplace.

"Right now, there's a lot of back and forth in the negotiations but we're on the precipice of having something to shout about," says Amy. "Pact aren't going to be a pushover, but the beauty of the stunt industry in the UK is that they are an incredibly organised group of members. There have been numerous examples of stunt members standing together collectively to push back against bad practice and improve their terms, and we want to demonstrate that strength to Pact."

Photos on page 20: top row, centre – Jude Poyer working on a fight scene for Farang; top row, right – Jude Poyer operates camera on Farang (Credit - Gilles Porte); bottom row, left – Jude in Hitman with Jet Li (Credit - China Star Entertainment, Win's Entertainment Ltd.); bottom row, right – Sarah Lochlan (Credit - George Anthony).



# IT TAKES A VILLAGE



A survey of Greater Manchester drag artists has highlighted the need for better pay. **Zoe Hodges** speaks to Equity members and staff to find out the realities of working life, and how pay and conditions can be improved in the Village and beyond.

**“71% said that their pay has not kept up with the cost of living”**

**“There was a real secrecy around pay”**

Manchester-based drag artist Misty Chance first put a frock on for the millennium. But it wasn't until several years later that she was able to give up her day job and concentrate on her act full-time. Now, Misty says her work as a full-time drag artist is under threat as drag queens, kings, and things are forced to subsidise their wage with other work. “It's going to push people out of the industry,” she says. “Nobody should have to be working behind a shop counter, and then shaving and getting into drag in the evening.”

This year, Equity surveyed drag artists across Greater Manchester about their pay, expenses, and other aspects of working life. The survey was put together by Equity's North West Drag Network – drag artist members, including Misty, who are organising to tackle issues specific to the region. It revealed that the average pay for a cabaret/hosting gig is £164 per evening – but while some respondents were paid up to £400 for these types of bookings, others took home a mere £20. When you factor in the sporadic or irregular nature of the gig economy, this can make it particularly difficult to keep up with living expenses.

### Popularity vs pay

Drag has experienced a growth in popularity over recent years, in part thanks to the success of TV shows such as *RuPaul's Drag Race*. In fact, season 3 of the UK version of the show, along with its spin-off *RuPaul's Drag Race: UK vs the World*, was filmed in Greater Manchester.

Yet despite the strength of the scene in Greater Manchester, nearly three quarters of respondents to Equity's survey (71%) said that their pay has not kept up with the cost of living. “Some of these venues are paying the same amount for a drag queen as they have been doing for over 10 years,” says Misty.

Since the creation of the North West Drag Network last August, Equity staff and members have been regularly visiting Manchester's Gay Village – a thriving area of LGBT+ bars, clubs, and businesses in the city – to chat to performers and offer support with work issues.

At first, the tight knit community were guarded about their pay and conditions, and the survey acted as a tool to get the conversation started. “There was a real secrecy around pay,” says Kirsten Muat,

Equity's North West Organiser. “There were rumours about what people got paid. People had worked in different venues and knew who the good and bad payers were from their experience of negotiating, but it wasn't an open discussion.”

And, as revealed in the first North West Drag Network meeting, there was a huge disparity. “We know there's undercutting going on,” says Kirsten. “We know there are some venues trying to exploit newer people coming into drag by asking them to perform for very low amounts, knowing that they will take that because they just want their first gig in drag.”

### Expenses

Something that respondents felt was not factored into their wage was the costs involved in putting on a performance. Respondents spent an average of £292.60 on hair, makeup, and costumes each month.

“A wig and a dress doesn't make an act, it's the actual performance, the talent underneath,” says Misty. “But for my type of drag, which is a little more leaning towards a variety act, where I would do a little bit of everything and it encompasses it all – stand up, vocals, dance, lip sync, impersonation, all those sorts of things – the outgoings are tremendous.”

It is a problem felt across the sector, affecting drag kings and things, as well as drag queens. Another member of the North West Drag Network, Cadbury Parfait, has been performing burlesque for 10 years, starting her career in Berlin, then Lisbon, before moving to Manchester two and a half years ago. Recently, she has been performing as a drag king under the name ‘Cadbury Fingers’. “When you watch burlesque or drag, you expect a certain look on stage and you have to maintain that. I have a huge bag of makeup, everything from lashes to glitter. The audience doesn't see all this preparation.”

The outgoings offset against the incomings show that on average, per month, drag artists are essentially working one and a half to two gigs for free before they've even made up the cost.

For Cadbury there is an added complication; drag kings are often not paid as much as drag queens and struggle for bookings in comparison. “Everyone is doing some form

of gender play, gender expression, and bending the norms, but it's definitely more commonly celebrated for a man to present as a female. Perhaps it's because drag kings are not widely represented in the media."

### Cancellations

Two thirds (60%) of those who took part in the survey experienced at least one last-minute cancellation in the last 12 months. This greatly impacts performers not only financially, but also in terms of their mental health. Cadbury explained, "I've got a spreadsheet and I'm able to calculate my expected takings for the month, and then I know whether I need to get more gigs. If you get a good booking, you know that's taken care of, say, half the rent for the month. So when a cancellation comes in it hits you hard because then you need to find another gig or another two to pay the rent that month."

"I can't see that as a wage that people can live on, particularly when you've got the outgoings that you have associated with the drag industry," says Chris Clarkson, Secretary of Equity's Greater Manchester Branch comprised of members living in the region. The branch has been instrumental in the creation of the North West Drag Network, as well as the survey.

"We want performers to have cancellation fees put in their contracts," continues Chris. "Whether that's 50% of what they would have been paid if the cancellation is more than 48 hours in advance, or 100% of their fee if the cancellation is within 48 hours of the event."

How can this be achieved? Equity's North West Official Karen Lockney, who oversees the union's work in the region, says that "Equity wants to work with venues to establish house agreements in the Village and also to have Equity Deps in place," referring to union agreements with individual venues setting minimum standards for pay, terms and conditions, as well as members stepping up to be union representatives in their workplaces. "We also want to roll out training so that all performers know their rights, are confident in negotiating contracts, and feel they have the support of Equity in doing so."

### Working with the council

In addition to growing the membership of the North West Drag Network, Branch Secretary Chris hopes the local authorities will play a more active role in improving pay and conditions for drag artists going forwards. "The Village provides a hell of



A North West Drag Network meeting

## “The outgoings are tremendous”

a lot of money for the council’s coffers every year, but it doesn’t necessarily get the investment that it should. So even little things – like a lot of the workers finish at four o’clock in the morning, but public transport doesn’t start until six. So what do they do for a couple of hours? Some of the street lighting around the Village also isn’t that good. Local authorities need to listen to workers, not just the venues and owners.”

This sentiment is reflected by a motion which passed at Equity’s conference in May, put forward by the union’s Variety, Circus and Entertainers Committee of members working in these professions – including drag artists – and elected to set the union’s agenda in these areas. The motion notes that Manchester City Council “seeks to preserve and protect the character of Manchester’s Gay Village but has not engaged with drag performers working in Canal Street.” It goes on to urge the union to engage with both Manchester City Council and the Greater London Authority “to strive to ensure that the views of nighttime entertainment workers are taken into account.”

So in July, Equity North West Official Karen Lockney and Organiser Kirsten Muat did just this, meeting with a group of Manchester City councillors. “We discussed the survey and the councillors were clear about their desire to be informed by performers on their action plan for the Village,” says Karen. As a result, councillors invited Equity to a roundtable event to discuss this, will meet with members of the North West Drag Network, and have been invited to visit drag artists’ workplaces.

“There’s a few different things that the council could do, in essence, to support the workers,” says Kirsten. “Local authorities have the power to ensure venues are run safely and legally. We want to work with them to ensure they are encouraging workplaces to be unionised and that appropriate pay, terms and conditions are in place.” This is part of Equity’s wider work in the North West to ensure local authorities are listening to workers and championing their needs when it comes to arts and culture provision.

From survey to conference to city council, Equity members in Greater Manchester are determined to improve their own pay and conditions through the North West Drag Network.

*If you’re a drag artist who wants to do similar in the area where you work, join your local Drag Network or set one up by visiting [tinyurl.com/equity-drag-network](https://tinyurl.com/equity-drag-network)*

*And you can keep up to date with all of Equity’s drag artist activity, including details of meetings, by following [@EquityDrag](https://www.instagram.com/EquityDrag) on Instagram and Twitter.*

Main photo on page 24 – clockwise from the top: Misty Chance with Equity’s Greater Manchester Branch Secretary Chris Clarkson; Cadbury Parfait in drag as Chadbury Fingers; Equity meets Manchester City Councillors – from l-r, Councillor Sam Wheeler, community campaigner Fiona Moinuddin, Equity North West Official Karen Lockney, Equity North West Organiser Kirsten Muat, Councillor Jon-Connor Lyons.



Equity drag artist members (Credit – Mark Thomas)

# Equity's Derry Conference 2025



Photos by Neil Harrison

Set in Northern Ireland's second city of Derry, this year's Equity conference brought together members from across the UK to decide the union's agenda on everything from artificial intelligence to arts funding.

## EQUITY CONFERENCE 2025

Equity's presence in Northern Ireland has been on the rise in recent years, with the introduction of a dedicated Northern Ireland Official, Alice Adams Lemon, in 2021; a slew of new house agreements with theatre companies and venues; and growing membership, leading to the creation of the two branches: Lagan & East and Foyle & West.

With the union's activity in Northern Ireland riding high, it was fitting then that Derry should be the site of this year's Equity conference – the union's flagship democratic event. Taking place in Derry's historic Guildhall from Saturday 10 to Monday 12 May, over a hundred Equity members came together to decide the union's agenda and rules.

Motions passed include campaigning to defend soaps; ensuring theatre agreements contain suitable wig, hair and makeup stipulations; joining with other groups to challenge the threat of the far right; calling on the TUC federation of UK trade unions to lobby the government on artificial intelligence protections; and more.

Surrounding the debate of the floor were various fringe panel and discussion events held by Equity activists, a reception where guests could enjoy 'Equity beer' locally brewed for this year's conference and, of course, opportunities for members from across the UK to meet in person and build the relationships that help strengthen the trade union movement.



# Save the arts, resist the cuts!



A rally at Northern Ireland government offices in Derry was an opportunity for Equity conference attendees to show their support for the union's Northern Ireland members.

Northern Ireland members have been campaigning long and hard to 'Save the arts, resist the cuts!' since 2023. This is against a backdrop of 50% of arts cuts since 2011/12 (when adjusted for inflation), with Northern Ireland receiving the least arts funding per person of all the UK's four nations (just £5.07, half that of its nearest comparator Wales at £10.51).

This time, Equity members called on the Northern Ireland government to increase arts funding, following the closure of Derry's Waterside Theatre & Arts Centre and the news that Echo Echo Dance Theatre Company, also based in the city, would not be provided their expected annual funding from the Arts Council of Northern Ireland.

This action was underscored by a motion passed at conference, for the union to campaign for an arts funding increase in Northern Ireland.

# Honorary Life Memberships

This is the highest honour Equity can bestow on a member – reserved for those who have made outstanding contributions to the union. It is a tradition to keep Honorary Life Memberships a secret until the moment they are awarded at conference, leading to surprise and some rather moving moments.

In her roles as Equity activist and Chair of Equity's Deaf, Disabled and Neurodivergent Members' Committee, **Natalie Amber** has been a force for change. This includes holding bosses to account over inauthentic portrayals of disabled characters, working on industry standard-setting guidance, and calling out the Government's cuts to social security for disabled people at the UN and beyond.

**Stephen Beggs** has been Chair of Equity's Northern Ireland Committee since 2017 and a voice for the union's Northern Ireland members: addressing local councils on the issue of arts funding, representing Equity at the Irish Congress of Trades Unions, and taking on an engager over the issue of holiday pay – and winning payment for many members.

Not only does the Greater Manchester Branch have the highest regular attendance of any Equity branch, but it also has the most followers on social media. This is testament to the tireless work of Branch Secretary **Chris Clarkson**. An exemplar of branch activism, Chris also attends other branch meetings to engage with union work across the country.

A leading figure in the successful community and union campaign to 'Save Oldham Coliseum' **Julie Hesmondhalgh** has also used her profile to speak out about improving industry access for working class creatives, the impact of social security cuts on artists, and arts funding. She has also served as an Equity Deputy – an integral role when it comes to organising in workplaces.

Having served as Equity's Northern Ireland Councillor, **Louis Rolston** has championed the union's Northern Ireland members over a number of years. This includes being integral to member activity in Derry, which helped lead to the formation of the Foyle & West Branch, and supporting the establishment of an Equity Official in Northern Ireland.



Chris Clarkson and Natalie Amber



President Lynda Rooke and Julie Hesmondhalgh



Stephen Beggs, President Lynda Rooke and Louis Rolston

SCOTLAND

# CAMPAIGN TO SAVE RIVER CITY

## PICKS UP PUBLIC AND POLITICAL SUPPORT



River City cast members (Credit – Craig McClean)

Earlier this year, Equity launched a high-profile campaign to Save River City following the announcement that BBC Scotland was to cancel its only domestic TV soap.

Within hours of the announcement in March, Equity's activists and staff mobilised. They then led months of action in a bid to rescue the well-loved long-running drama, which provides work for dozens of Scottish actors every year and is widely acknowledged as a training ground for Scottish talent both in front of and behind the camera.

A petition to save the soap reached a staggering 12,000 signatures, while in April supporters from across the Scottish trade union movement joined Equity delegates at a rally during this year's Scottish Trades Union Congress to show solidarity with the River City cast.

That same month, Equity's lobbying efforts saw cross-party support from MSPs for a successful motion to support the Save River City campaign, where the show's cancellation was hotly debated in Holyrood. Equity secured support from Scotland's Culture Secretary Angus Robertson as well as leading figures in Scottish politics including Jackie Baillie, Neil Bibby and Pam Duncan-Glancy.

Then in May, Holyrood's Culture Committee took evidence about BBC Scotland from Equity General Secretary Paul W Fleming; President Lynda Rooke; and Equity member, actor and River City cast member, Frank Gallagher. BBC Scotland bosses were later grilled by MSPs in Scottish Parliament over their decision.

Continuing dramas are a cornerstone of local storytelling and provide vital job security and opportunities in TV. Equity will keep defending soaps whenever they find them under attack.

Words by Gail McAnena



Pam Duncan-Glancy MSP (Credit - Craig McClean)



River City cast members with MSPs at Holyrood (Credit – Craig McClean)



MSPs Neil Bibby and Jackie Baillie on the River City set (Credit – Craig McClean)



River City cast members at Holyrood (Credit – Craig McClean)

## NORTHERN IRELAND

# Idir shean agus nua i meirge Thuaisceart Éireann Equity

## Equity's Northern Ireland banner combines the old and the new



**1** Tá ann radharc suite in amharclann Rómhánach agus tá gairmeacha baill de chuid Equity ar an pheidiméid. Fiorealaíontóirí ó Thuaisceart Éireann a léirítear mar charachtair ar an mheirge.

The scene is set in a Roman theatre, with a pediment featuring the professions of Equity members. Characters appearing on the banner depict real artists from Northern Ireland.

Seoladh meirge Equity nua do Thuaisceart Éireann ag an chomhdháil bhliantúil i nDoire i mí na Bealtaine. D'oibrigh Coiste Thuaisceart Éireann Equity i gcompháirt le Laura Nelson, ealaíontóir, ar choincheap a léirigh "gairdín Equity", tagairtí do thiomantas Equity do inbhuanaitheacht chomshaoil agus do chearta oibrithe san áireamh. Léirítear fosta ar an mheirge fear agus arán ina lámha aige agus bean ag caitheamh rósanna, siombail ar ghairm sheasmhach ghluaiseacht an lucht oibre ar 'Arán agus Rósanna' – mar atá, ceart oibrithe ar riachtanais bhunúsacha agus ar shaol atá uasal agus faoi bhláth. Is comhartha ómóis é seo ar iarmheirge Thuaisceart Éireann Equity ar a raibh siombail d'arán agus rósanna fosta.

In May, a new Equity banner for Northern Ireland was unveiled at our annual conference in Derry. Equity's Northern Ireland Committee worked closely with artist Laura Nelson on a "garden of Equity" concept, including references to Equity's commitment to environmental sustainability as well as workers' rights.

The banner also depicts a man holding bread and a woman throwing roses, symbolising the labour movement's enduring call for 'Bread and Roses' – aka the right of workers to basic necessities and a dignified and flourishing life. This also pays homage to Equity's former Northern Ireland banner, which featured bread and roses symbolism too.

**2** In ionad piléar, tá crann darach (ar chlé) atá mar shiombail ar Bhrairse Dhoire / an Fheabhail & an Iarthair, agus fuinseog mhór (ar dheis) atá mar shiombail ar Bhrairse Bhéal Feirste / an Lagáin & an Oirthir. In place of pillars are an Irish oak (left) symbolising Derry / Foyle & West Branch, and a giant ash (right) symbolising Belfast / Lagan & East Branch.

**6** Síleáil Halla Cholm Chille, Doire, a léirítear, áit ar nochtadh an meirge den chéad uair. Tá stair shaibhir an lucht oibre ag Doire, stailceanna dugairí agus tionchar Eleanor Marx san áireamh.

The ceiling is St Columb's Hall, Derry, where the banner was first revealed. Derry has a rich labour history, including dock worker strikes and the influence of Eleanor Marx.

**3** Tá éin cheoil Éireannacha ag ceiliúradh an cheoil agus an chanta. Tá an smólach ceoil (ar chlé) coitianta i nDoire, agus tá clú ar na druideanna (ar dheis) a dhéanann ealta os cionn abhainn an Lagáin i mBéal Feirste. Irish songbirds celebrate music and singing. The Irish song thrush (left) is common in Derry, while the starling (right) is famous for its murmurations above the river Lagan in Belfast.

**7** Tá micreafón, scálaí, leabhar dlí agus tatúnna a léiríonn aontacht ag An Cheart Uas – tugadh 'Bantiarna' uirthi roimhe seo. Mar a deir Laura Nelson, an t-ealaíontóir, "Tá sí óg, gan eagla agus is í guth an t-am atá le teacht í." Ms – formerly 'Lady' – Justice has a microphone, scales, a book of law, and tattoos symbolising unity. As artist Laura Nelson says, "She's young, she's fearless and she's the voice of the future."

**4** Tá an tseamair Éireannach mar mhaisiú ar dhá thaobh logo Equity. The Irish clover plant adorns either side of the Equity logo.

Focail le / Words by Zoe Ellmore

Grianghraif le / Photos by Neil Harrison Photography

**5** Tá 'Tuaisceart Éireann' scríofa i mBéarla agus i nGaeilge, sa tseanchló Ghaelach. 'Northern Ireland' is written in both English and Irish, in old Irish hand-drawn style.



# RHWYDWAITH GYMRAEG



# EQUITY

## Cmryu

### Equity yn lansio rhwydwaith newydd ar gyfer siaradwyr Cymraeg

Mae Rhwydwaith Iaith Gymraeg Equity yn ofod newydd ar gyfer perfformwyr a chreadigwyr sy'n gweithio neu eisiau gweithio drwy gyfrwng y Gymraeg.

Tyfodd y Rhwydwaith o aelodau Equity yn chwilio am ofod i gysylltu. "Yn ystod ein trafodaethau ar y cytundeb TAC/S4C, daeth yn amlwg bod angen Rhwydwaith Iaith Gymraeg ar ein haelodau" eglura trefnydd Equity Cymru, Elin Meredydd, sydd ei hun yn siaradwr Cymraeg fel iaith gyntaf. "Mae'n iach i'r iaith gael Rhwydwaith fel gofod naturiol."

Mae cynulleidfaoedd yn mwynhau cynyrchiadau Cymraeg, gyda chynnydd nid yn unig mewn gwylwyr domestig, ond mwy o sioeau hefyd yn cael eu gwerthu dramor, fel y ddrama garchar *Bariau*. Mae llwyddiannau diweddar eraill yn cynnwys *Cleddau* S4C, a addaswyd yn ddiweddarach i'r Saesneg fel *The One That Got Away*, a *Dal y Melt* a werthwyd i Netflix yn y Gymraeg yn unig a heb ei dybio. Mae Elin yn egluro bod aelodau'n llai awyddus i gyd-gynhyrchu ac yn hytrach "eisiau i'r Gymraeg gario ei hun."

Ond nid ar y sgrin yn unig mae cynyrchiadau Cymraeg yn ffynnu. Mae Theatr Cymru yn gryfach nag erioed ac mae'r cwmni yn mynd â Romeo a Juliet yn y Gymraeg i The Globe yn ddiweddarach eleni, ar

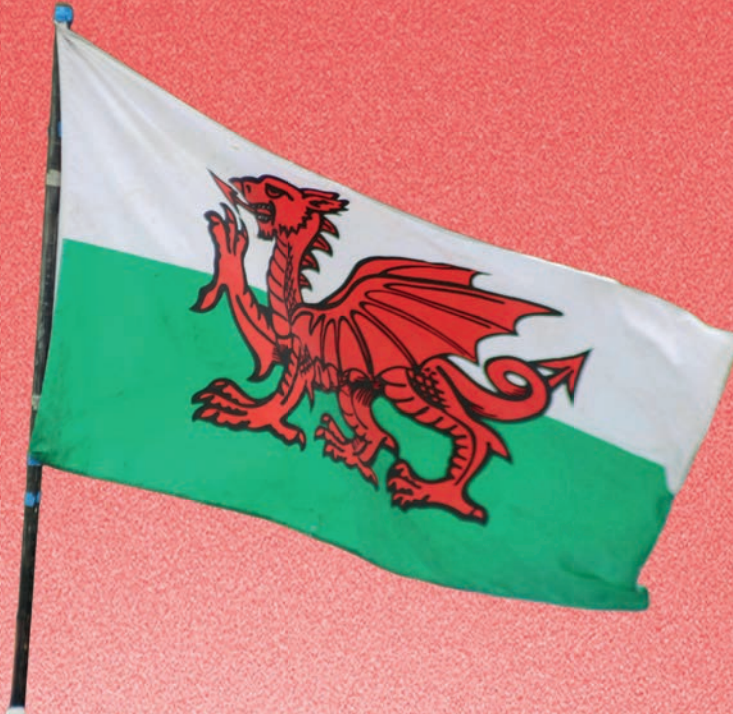
ôl teithio o gwmpas Cymru. Mae Theatr Clwyd, sydd wedi'i lleoli yng Ngogledd Cymru, yn ymgymryd â mwy o gydweithrediadau a chynyrchiadau Cymraeg – rhywbeth na fyddent wedi'i wneud o'r blaen.

"Mae'n amser da i gael rhwydwaith iaith Gymraeg yma" meddai Simon Curtis, Swyddog Cenedlaethol Equity i Gymru. "Gyda dyfodiad diweddar Swyddog De-orllewinol ymroddedig, ac agor swyddfa newydd ym Mryste, mae'r staff yn swyddfa Caerdydd bellach yn canolbwyntio'n llwyr ar Gymru ac mae gennym ni hefyd fwy o siaradwyr Cymraeg iaith gyntaf ar y Pwyllgor Cenedlaethol nag yn ddiweddar. Wrth feithrin gweithredwyr newydd, rydym yn gweld mwy o aelodau eisiau defnyddio'r iaith Gymraeg. Mae llawer o gyffro wedi bod ynghylch y Rhwydwaith."

Wedi'i lansio ar Ddydd Gŵyl Dewi yng Nghaerdydd, mae'r Rhwydwaith ar agor i holl aelodau Equity ledled y DU. Mae eisoes wedi denu siaradwyr a dysgwyr Cymraeg.

Am ragor o wybodaeth, neu i gymryd rhan, ewch i: [tinyurl.com/equity-rhwydwaith-gymraeg](http://tinyurl.com/equity-rhwydwaith-gymraeg)

Geiriau gan Sian Jones



# Wales

## Equity launches new network for Welsh language speakers

Equity's Welsh Language Network is a new space for performers and creatives who work or want to work through the medium of Welsh.

The Network grew from Equity members seeking a space to connect. "During our negotiations on the TAC/S4C agreement, it became obvious that our members needed a Welsh Language Network" explains Equity Wales organiser Elin Meredydd, herself a first-language Welsh speaker. "It's healthy for the language to have a Network as a natural space."

Audiences are lapping up Welsh language productions, with an increase not only in domestic viewers, but more shows also being sold overseas, like prison drama *Bariau*. Other recent successes include S4C's *Cleddau*, later adapted to English as *The One That Got Away*, and *Dal y Mellt* which was sold to Netflix in Welsh only and not dubbed. Elin explains that members are less keen on co-production and instead "want the Welsh to carry its own."

It's not just the screen where Welsh productions are thriving. Theatre Cymru is stronger than ever and is taking *Romeo and Juliet* in Welsh to The Globe later this year, after touring Wales. North Wales-based Theatre Clwyd is taking on more collaborations and Welsh language productions – something they wouldn't have done before.

"It's a good time to have a Welsh language network here" says Simon Curtis, Equity National Official for Wales. "With the recent arrival of a dedicated South West Official, and a new office opening in Bristol, the staff in the Cardiff office now focus solely on Wales and we also have more first-language Welsh speakers on the National Committee than in recent times. In nurturing new activists, we're seeing more members wanting to use the Welsh language. There's been a lot of excitement about the Network."

Launched on St David's Day in Cardiff, the Network is open to all Equity members across the UK. It's already attracted both Welsh speakers and learners.

For more information, or to get involved, visit: [tinyurl.com/equity-rhwydwaith-gymraeg](https://tinyurl.com/equity-rhwydwaith-gymraeg)

Words by Sian Jones

## NEWS

### Unclaimed royalties: Are you owed money from past performances?

If you've ever appeared in a film, TV show, radio production or performed on a cast album recording – even a long time ago – you might be owed royalties.

We're looking for thousands of performers, creative workers and heirs of deceased performers who are entitled to unclaimed royalty payments going back years. The average unclaimed payment is £169, with more than 700 performers due at least £1,000.

Don't miss out: search for your name on Equity's Online Royalties Checker now at [tinyurl.com/equity-unclaimed-royalties](https://tinyurl.com/equity-unclaimed-royalties).

And spread the word about the Checker with colleagues and friends, especially those who have left the industry and may not be aware they're due a payout. Even those who are not Equity members could be entitled to royalties.

If you're not able to access the Checker online, you can call 020 7670 0206, quoting 'Unclaimed Royalties'.

### Vote and stand in Equity's 2026 elections!

It is you – the members – who decide the direction of the union, and our elections are one way for you to do that. By standing for an elected position or voting for who you want to represent you, you get to have your say on what Equity does next.

In 2026, the union will hold elections for:

*President: The most prominent member within the union. They chair the Council, conference, and other meetings, and represent the union nationally and internationally.*

*Council: The union's governing body and principal executive committee, it is the key-decision-making body within the union.*

*Appeals Committee: Hears and decides on members' disciplinary appeals.*

*Conference Business Committee: Responsible for managing the business of conference – the annual event when representatives from across the membership get to decide the union's agenda and rules.*

They will be elected for a two-year term, from July 2026 to July 2028.

All members (aged 16 and over) will be eligible to vote and all members (aged 18 and over) will be eligible to stand for election (rules apply to be able to stand for some seats).

Nominations will open in March and will be managed online by our new elections provider, Civica. They will send round a link to all members when nominations open. If you require a physical nomination paper, please write to [swinter@equity.org.uk](mailto:swinter@equity.org.uk); Sam Winter, Equity, FREEPOST RTKS-BRUB-LYJR,

Guild House, Upper St Martin's Lane, London WC2H 9EG (*no stamp required*). The independent scrutineer appointed to oversee the elections is Civica.

The full timetable is included below:

September 2025: Timetable and scrutineer for elections published to members in the Autumn/Winter 2025 Equity magazine.

Wednesday 4 March 2026: Nomination papers sent to all members by email and online nominations process opens. (Paper nominations form available on request).

Monday 20 April 2026: Provisional nominations deadline. Members who have started the process by this date will be offered support to complete their nominations by the final deadline.

Friday 24 April 2026: Final deadline. Nominations close at 12 noon.

Wednesday 20 May 2026: Ballot papers and election statements sent to members. Voting opens.

Wednesday 1 July 2026: Ballot closes at 12 noon.

Thursday 2 July 2026: Target date for the delivery of the independent scrutineer's report on the elections. Nominations for Vice-Presidents and Honorary Treasurer sent to elected Councillors and papers for the first meeting of the newly elected Council circulated.

Tuesday 14 July 2026: First meeting of the newly elected Council.

## NEWS

## Celebrating 2 years of Green Rider!



The Green Rider team (Credit - Edward Howell Photography)

The Green Rider campaign was created by Equity for a Green New Deal, our network of members fighting for climate justice in the industry and beyond. Green Rider aims to shift the industry to fairer and cleaner ways of working by building a grassroots movement of actors, agents and producers. In just two years, the campaign has helped cut pollution dramatically on over 20 major TV shows.

Taking action is simple: when offered a job, actors send production a document called the 'Green Rider Handshake'. This lays out the pollution-cutting actions they will take and what they ask of production in return.

In 2024, Equity members trialled the Handshake on several productions, including *Wolf Hall*, *Strike*, *Funny Woman* and *Gangs of London*. Productions reused sets and costumes, while cast and crew took trains instead of planes where possible. Generators on set switched from diesel to HVO, a fuel made from recycled cooking oil, which reduced carbon pollution by up to 86 percent.

Setting up production-wide 'Green Teams' – working groups with a rep from each department – also worked to break down hierarchical barriers between performers, producers and crew, fostering collaboration to solve sustainability issues.

Now, the Handshake is being used on *Dune: Prophecy*, *The Capture* and upcoming series such as *California Avenue*, *The Dream Lands*, and *Prodigies*. Pollution-free sets may also become a contractual norm, as Equity tries to negotiate Green Rider measures into the new Pact agreements, which set minimum pay, terms and conditions for members working in film and TV.

"Our industry is in a unique position to flip the script on climate change – from doom and gloom to justice and solutions," say Equity members Will Attenborough, Danusia Samal and Fehinti Balogun who lead the Green Rider campaign. "We can show our global audience that ambitious action is not just possible – it's already happening."

"Throughout history, art has sparked social progress. We helped boycott South African Apartheid. We put gay kisses on TV. We spoke up during #MeToo. We can do the same for climate change."

Visit [green-rider.org](https://green-rider.org) for more information, including about using the Handshake. You can also contact the team directly at [info@green-rider.org](mailto:info@green-rider.org)

## NEWS

# Equity legal opinion contributes to Government dialling back on “regressive” welfare reforms

Over the summer, the Government row over proposed reforms to the welfare system was headline news – and it was campaigning and lobbying efforts from a variety of organisations, including Equity, that led them to make significant concessions.

The Government’s ‘Universal Credit and Personal Independence Payment Bill’ initially proposed cuts to health and disability support, including excluding many people from accessing Personal Independence Payment (PIP) – which helps with the costs associated with a disability or long-term health condition.

Equity commissioned lawyer Jamie Burton KC from Doughty Street Chambers to give a legal opinion on the Bill. The verdict? The Bill was found to “result in very serious breaches” of international human rights law and constitute “human rights violations for disabled people”. The opinion also described the proposals as “regressive”.

News of this opinion was published by *The Guardian*, *The Times*, and *Sky News*, during a crunch period of negotiations between the Government and MPs who opposed the bill. Equity collaborated with the latter, including Stella Creasy who worked with us to lay an amendment to the Bill, as well as MPs who referred to the opinion in conversations with government and during debates.

In addition, Equity members, its Deaf and Disabled Members Committee, and Social Security Advice team joined up with campaign groups such as Disabled People Against Cuts and Taking the PIP to attend and speak at a series of demonstrations, including the #WelfareNotWarfare rally outside Parliament.

Disabled activists also worked to keep the UN Committee for the Rights of Disabled People informed about the issues at play, resulting in the Committee issuing a letter to the Government calling on them to halt the Bill. All of this and more contributed to the Government delaying any changes to PIP until after a review, protecting existing claimants and ensuring inflationary increases in Universal Credit for some. Although there is a lot of work still to be done on the review, this huge effort spanning scores of activists, organisations and groups has knocked out some of the most damaging and dangerous parts of the Government’s proposals and led to protections for disabled people.

Find out what the Bill means for you at [tinyurl.com/cuts-disability-socialsecurity](https://tinyurl.com/cuts-disability-socialsecurity)



## NEWS

## Equity affiliates to London and Manchester renters' unions

While cities like Manchester and London proudly boast their cultural offerings – and benefit from the economic gains it brings – the arts workers who create this culture cannot access decent, affordable housing in these areas. That's the problem Councillors Fiona Whitelaw and Giovanni Bienne have been working to address since their election to Equity's governing body in 2025.

Having researched the crisis of housing affordability for workers across the performing arts and entertainment industry, Fiona and Giovanni proposed a successful motion at Council for Equity to affiliate to the London Renters Union and the Greater Manchester Tenants Union – communities of tenants fighting together to secure decent housing.

This represents a major step forward in Equity's campaigning for housing justice. As Giovanni says, "By affiliating to these renters unions, we aim to give Equity members access to the tools they need to fight for rent controls and affordable housing, and to join with fellow tenants to dismantle a system currently rigged in favour of landlords."

Now, the union's efforts have turned to lobbying: Equity will continue to follow the progress of the Renters' Rights Bill and work with trade unions, politicians and other groups to advocate for rent controls.

City Mayors also increasingly hold the power to regulate rental markets in their patch, or to introduce conditions on developers to provide housing and workspaces for communities such as arts workers. Equity – via Fiona and Giovanni – is now taking the argument for artists' housing to these city governments, as well as MPs and local authorities. Perhaps one day there'll be an artists' housing project near you...

"When I stood for election to Council most recently, I spoke about housing inequality being a factor that forces people to leave the industry," says Fiona. "By looking at housing schemes for performing artists, alongside affiliating to London and Manchester renters unions, we are leading the conversation on how important performing artists are to thriving cities and communities."



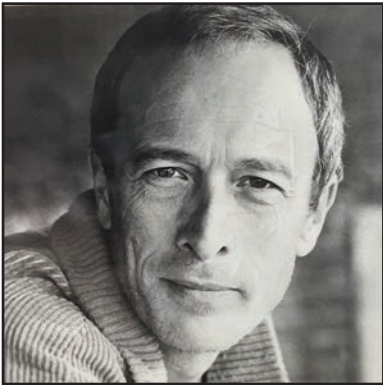
Giovanni Bienne (Credit - Paul Nicholas Dyke)



Fiona Whitelaw as Chartist organiser Mary Anne Cuffay in Dervish Theatre's 'Spirits of the Black Meridian' (Credit - Mark Senior)

# Obituaries

## Michael Culver



The title of the 2017 documentary about Michael Culver's life – *Anti-War Artist* – is a fitting epithet for a distinguished actor who was dedicated to fighting injustice.

A North Londoner, Culver attended the London Academy of Music and Dramatic Art and had back-to-back appearances on Broadway in *Twelfth Night*, *Hamlet*, and *King Henry V* with the Old Vic company, alongside many memorable roles on stage.

His breakthrough role alongside Derek Jacobi in the 1977 telefilm *Philby*, *Burgess and Maclean* led to work on screen including *A Passage to India*, *Secret Army*, and a brief but iconic turn as Captain Needa in *The Empire Strikes Back* that made him popular at conventions.

He said "everything changed" when he met Nicholas Kent, then-artistic director at Kilburn's Tricycle Theatre. Under Kent's direction, Culver performed in several of the acclaimed 'tribunal plays', including *The Colour of Justice* (on Stephen Lawrence's murder) in 1996. These works sparked Culver's political awakening and he was elected to Equity's General Council that same year, keen to protect secondary payments for artists.

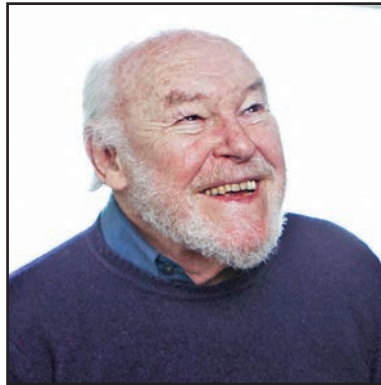
Fiercely opposed to the Iraq war, Culver was a long-running supporter of the peace campaigner Brian Haw and regularly visited his 'peace camp' in Parliament Square with food, banners, and even protest t-shirts of Culver's own design for many years. It was Culver and Mark Rylance who campaigned for a statue of Haw which stands today opposite the Imperial War Museum, created by Culver's wife, the sculptor Amanda Ward.

At Haw's camp, Culver once read a poem by David Gould, whose daughter was killed in the 7 July 2005 London Bombings: "There is no room within my heart for revenge, fire, or hate." Michael Culver died 27 March 2024. He is survived by his wife, and three children.

*Michael Culver (1938-2024) served on Equity Council 1996-1998.*

*Words by Sarah Woolley*

## Timothy West



My father Timothy West was a great believer in unions. European, trade and, of course, marital. The bedrock of his 61-year marriage to Prunella Scales was "the mutual society, help and comfort that the one ought to have of the other", as *The Book of Common Prayer* puts it.

Tim thought those same words should apply to our union. What he wanted for himself, he was prepared to do for others. He was a proud Equity member, a Trustee (a print of the 1930 founding document is framed on his stairs), and member of Council from 1977-78. On stage he played *King Lear* four times, at the ages of 36, 57, 68 and 82. And as a good union man, he didn't just lead, he supported: Bolingbroke to Ian McKellen's Richard II, Claudius to Derek Jacobi's *Hamlet*, Gloucester to Ian Holm's *Lear*.

When he died, the thousands of messages we received often mentioned *Edward VII*, *Brass*, *EastEnders*. And many recalled things we'd all but forgotten – someone's first ever Shakespeare at the Grand Theatre Blackpool; a march for Trade Union rights at GCHQ Cheltenham; joining a TUC picket line in support of the Writer's Guild of America strike.

And, of course, ten series of *Great Canal Journeys*. Tim maintained it was a documentary about industrial architecture. Anyone who's seen it knows that it's a love story, in sickness and in health. Mostly in sickness. *GCI* became one of the first programmes to treat the subject of dementia with the love and honesty it deserves – a fact which was pretty much lost on my mother, but meant so much to the hundreds of people who stopped Tim to say they were going through something similar. My father liked that. It spoke to a belief that he had running through him like seaside rock: be an asset to the collective.

*Timothy West (1934-2024) served on Equity Council 1977-78 and as an Equity Trustee 2016-2024.*

*Remembered by Samuel West*

*Photo credit - Rii Schroer; Eyevine*

# Exeunt

Here follows a list of Equity members who have died and been reported as such to the union since the publication of the last magazine. This list serves as a notice to members, and organisations within our industries and beyond, that Equity has been informed of the death of the members listed below.

Ann Aris  
Sally Armstrong  
Barbara Ashcroft  
Roy Astley  
Jez Avery  
Joanna Bacon  
Virginia Baker  
Peter Ballance  
David Barber  
Frank Barrie  
Peter Beaven  
David Berglas  
Diana Berriman  
Stewart Bevan  
Kyle Birch  
Diana Bishop  
Julia Burnett  
Carmen Capaldi  
Roger Carey  
Patricia Carnazza  
Antony Carrick  
Nadia Cattouse  
Angus Chisholm  
Moira Clark  
Teresa Collard  
Bernard Collins  
Rachel Cook  
Barry Craine  
Pamela Craine  
Gavin Creel  
Rosemarie Croom-Johnson  
Robert Crowe  
Michael Culver  
Paul Danan  
Wendy Danvers  
Deborah Davies  
Valerie Deakin  
Vivienne Dixon  
Maureen Dormer  
Frank Dux  
Robina E Hill  
Jason Ebelthite  
Colin Edwynn  
George Eugeniou  
Ruth-Eva Ronen

John Evitts  
Marianne Faithful  
Barbara Ferris  
Simon Fisher-Becker  
Keith Flood  
Maroussia Frank  
Sammy G  
Margaret Gale  
Pamela Gale  
John Gale  
Arthur Gavin Kohn  
Helen Gaynor  
Natasha Gerson  
David Graham  
Tracy Graham  
Gawn Grainger  
Kim Grant  
Carolyn Gray  
Jonathan Hackett  
Audrey Hall  
Risa Hall  
Prentis Hancock  
Steve Harley  
Peter Harlowe  
Gerald Harper  
Mary Helen Donald  
Stuart Hibbard  
Antony Higginson  
Julian Hirst  
Nick Hobbs  
Vilma Hollingbury  
Patti Holloway  
Julian Holloway  
Steve Hope-Wynne  
Muriel Hunte  
Cenydd Joeenz  
Mark John Honan  
Karalyn Kern  
David Killick  
Roger Lane  
Caroline Lange  
Diane Langton  
Ray Lavender  
Bernard Lawrence  
Pete Le Feet  
Annie Leake  
Roy Ledley  
Gitte Lee  
Barbara Leigh-Hunt  
Eryl Lloyd Parry  
Phil Lonergan  
Rosemary Lyford  
Peter Mair  
Simon Mark  
Jean Marsh  
James Martin  
Brenda Martine  
David McCann

Myra McFayden  
Michael McStay  
Louise Miller  
Angela Moran  
Elvi Murcell  
Brian Murphy  
Paul Newton  
Peter Noel Cook  
Linda Nolan  
Duncan Norvelle  
Lino Omoboni  
Brian Patrick Kennedy  
Donald Pelmeare  
Dewi Peters  
Colin Pinney  
Dame Joan Plowright  
Tim Pollard  
Ann Rachlin  
Peter Reeves  
Clive Revill  
Leslie Rhodes  
Brian Richard Trueman  
William Roberts  
Helen Russell  
John Savident  
Pink-Sen Lim  
Geoffrey Serle  
Jana Sheldon  
Ken Shorter  
Ronnie Sibbald  
Adrian Simmonds  
Noel Slattery  
June Spencer  
Linde-Anne Springs  
Alan Stocks  
Paul Strong  
John Styles  
Joanna Tope  
June Topping  
Carole Trangmar-Palmer  
Lilian Verner  
Tricia Vincent  
Paul Webster  
Timothy West  
Aubrey Wulfsohn  
Michael Wynne

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*In some cases it may be possible that another member may have used the same or a similar name subsequent to the passing of the above members*

# Getting Involved

You are the union: together, we can implement real change in the industry. There are many ways you can stand alongside your fellow members and get involved in Equity's work, from joining your local branch to becoming active within a network.

## BRANCHES

Wherever you are based in the UK, there will be a branch: a community of Equity members who meet as a group to discuss the issues facing the industry, both locally and nationally. Branches hold regular meetings, organise and campaign.

### EAST AND SOUTH EAST

#### Brighton & Sussex

brighton&sussex@equitybranches.org.uk

#### East Anglia

eastanglia@equitybranches.org.uk

#### Essex & Hertfordshire

essex&hertfordshire@equitybranches.org.uk

#### Kent

kent@equitybranches.org.uk

#### Surrey & Berkshire

surreyandberkshire@equitybranches.org.uk

#### Oxford & Buckinghamshire

oxford&buckinghamshire@equitybranches.org.uk

### LONDON

#### London North

londonnorth@equitybranches.org.uk

#### London South

londonsouth@equitybranches.org.uk

### MIDLANDS

#### Birmingham & West Midlands

birmingham&westmidlands@equitybranches.org.uk

#### East Midlands

eastmidlands@equitybranches.org.uk

### NORTH EAST, YORKSHIRE AND HUMBERSIDE

#### East Yorkshire & Humber

eastyorkshire&humber@equitybranches.org.uk

#### North & West Yorkshire

north&westyorkshire@equitybranches.org.uk

#### North East England

northeastengland@equitybranches.org.uk

#### South Yorkshire

southyorkshire@equitybranches.org.uk

### NORTHERN IRELAND

#### Foyle & West

foyleandwest@equitybranches.org.uk

#### Lagan & East

laganandeast@equitybranches.org.uk

### NORTH WEST

#### Greater Manchester

greatermanchester@equitybranches.org.uk

### Lancashire & Cumbria

lancashire&cumbria@equitybranches.org.uk

### Merseyside & Cheshire

merseyside&cheshire@equitybranches.org.uk

### SCOTLAND

#### Edinburgh & East of Scotland

edinburgh&eastofscotland@equitybranches.org.uk

#### Glasgow & West of Scotland

glasgow&westofscotland@equitybranches.org.uk

#### Highlands & North of Scotland

highlands&northofscotland@equitybranches.org.uk

### SOUTH WEST

#### Bristol & West of England

bristol&westofengland@equitybranches.org.uk

#### Devon, Cornwall & Wessex

devoncornwall&wessex@equitybranches.org.uk

### WALES

#### North Wales

northwales@equitybranches.org.uk

#### South Wales

southwales@equitybranches.org.uk

### NETWORKS

Networks are a space for members with a shared interest to meet and discuss issues affecting their area, from choreographers to storytellers. Through these discussions, problems are identified and solutions offered, which the union can then implement.

#### Actor-Musician Network

hplant@equity.org.uk

#### Choreographers and Movement Directors Network

moceallaigh@equity.org.uk

#### Circus Network

circus@equity.org.uk

#### Class Network

classnetwork@equity.org.uk

#### Comedians' Network

comedians@equity.org.uk

#### Commercials Network

ysmith@equity.org.uk

#### Drag Network

drag@equity.org.uk

#### Film & TV Network

productions@equity.org.uk

#### Green New Deal Network

equity4gnd@gmail.com

#### Gypsy, Roma & Traveller Network

imanborde@equity.org.uk

#### Immersive Network

kjalali@equity.org.uk

#### LGBT+ Network

djohnson@equity.org.uk

**Liturgical Singers' Network**

singers@equity.org.uk

**Models' Network**

models@equity.org.uk

**Non-UK-Born Artists' Network**

nukba@equity.org.uk

**Puppeteers' Network**

puppeteers@equity.org.uk

**Storytellers' Network**

mday@equity.org.uk

**Supporting Artists' Network**

supportingartistsnetwork@equity.org.uk

**Wrestlers' Network**

wrestling@equity.org.uk

**Video Games Network**

games@equity.org.uk

**Rhwydwaith Gymraeg / Welsh Language Network**

emeredydd@equity.org.uk

**COMMITTEES**

Members are elected to Equity committees to represent their fellow professionals and to improve their working conditions. Different committees cover the interests of different groups. Committees drive union policy, conduct negotiations and ensure that the needs of all Equity members are heard.

**Audio Committee**

audio@equity.org.uk

**Dance Committee**

dance@equity.org.uk

**Deaf & Disabled Members Committee**

ddmcommittee@equity.org.uk

**Directors and Designers Committee**

directorsanddesigners@equity.org.uk

**LGBT+ Committee**

lgbtcommittee@equity.org.uk

**International Solidarity Committee**

tpeters@equity.org.uk

**Race Equality Committee**

recommittee@equity.org.uk

**Northern Ireland National Committee**

nicommittee@equity.org.uk

**Scottish National Committee**

scottishcommittee@equity.org.uk

**Screen & New Media Actors Committee**

screen@equity.org.uk

**Singers Committee**

singers@equity.org.uk

**Stage Actors Committee**

stage@equity.org.uk

**Stage Management Committee**

stagemanagement@equity.org.uk

**Student Deputies Committee**

students@equity.org.uk

**Variety, Circus & Entertainers Committee**

vcec@equity.org.uk

**Welsh National Committee**

pwyllgorcymru@equity.org.uk /

welshcommittee@equity.org.uk

**Women's Committee**

womenscommittee@equity.org.uk

**Young Members Committee**

ymcom@equity.org.uk

Information on this page is correct at the time of printing. For the most up to date contact details, please visit the Equity website **equity.org.uk**

Do we have your up-to-date contact details? If not, you can amend them by logging into the members area of our website and going to the 'personal details' tab in your account. Alternatively, if you are having difficulties logging in, you can send an email to the Membership Team at **membership@equity.org.uk**



# Directory

## General Enquiries

www.equity.org.uk/contact-us  
info@equity.org.uk  
020 7379 6000

## Membership Enquiries

membership@equity.org.uk  
020 7670 0207

## Social Security & Tax Advice Helpline

helpline@equity.org.uk  
020 7670 0223  
(Monday & Thursday 10am-1pm and 2pm-5pm)

## Equity Distribution Services

distributions@equity.org.uk  
020 7670 0206

## OFFICES

Head office, London: Equity, Guild House, Upper St Martin's Lane, London WC2H 9EG

Birmingham: Equity, Unit F3, The Arch, 48-52 Floodgate Street, Birmingham B5 5SL

Manchester: Equity, 5th Floor Suite 3, Sevensdale House, 7 Dale St, Manchester, M1 1JA

Cardiff: Equity, Transport House, 1 Cathedral Road, Cardiff CF11 9HA

Glasgow: Equity, Cambridge House, 8 Cambridge Street, Glasgow G2 3DZ

Belfast: Equity, SIPTU 3 Antrim Road, Belfast BT15 2BE

## OFFICERS AND STAFF LIST

To email a member of staff or Equity Officer, type the initial of their first name followed by their full surname with no spaces and add @equity.org.uk. For example, the email address for 'May Whitty' would be 'mwhitty@equity.org.uk'.

### Officers

Lynda Rooke, President  
Paul W Fleming, General Secretary  
Jackie Clune, Vice-President  
Nick Fletcher, Vice-President  
David John, Honorary Treasurer

### Secretariat

Paul W Fleming, General Secretary  
Louise McMullan, Deputy for the General Secretary & Acting Head of Recorded Media  
Adam Adnyana, Assistant General Secretary, Live Performance  
Sian Jones, Assistant General Secretary, Policy & Communications  
Becky Reese, Assistant General Secretary, Finance & Operations

## Governance & Allied Services

Nick Baker, Head of Governance & Allied Services  
Sam Winter, Governance Officer

## Policy & Communications

Sian Jones, Assistant General Secretary  
Tom Peters, Head of Policy & Public Affairs  
Dugald Johnson, Policy Officer, Employment Rights  
Anna Shea, Policy Officer, Industry  
Stephanie Soh, Press & PR Officer

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Adam Adnyana, Assistant General Secretary  
Charlotte Bence, Industrial Official, Theatre  
Michael Day, Industrial Official, Variety  
Hannah Plant, Industrial Official, West End/Central London  
Lottie Stables, Industrial Official, Singers & Dancers  
Steffan Blayney, Theatre Organiser  
Nick Keegan, Variety Organiser

## Recorded Media

Louise McMullan, Acting Head of Recorded Media  
Cathy Sweet, Head of Film & TV  
Natalie Barker, Industrial Official, BBC TV & ITV  
Liam Budd, Industrial Official, Streaming  
Amy Dawson, Industrial Official, Film  
Shannon Sailing, Industrial Official, Audio & Games  
Yvonne Smith, Industrial Official, Commercials  
Toby James, Recorded Media Organiser  
Salome Wagaine, Recorded Media Organiser  
Laura Messenger, Contract Enforcement Officer

## Nations and Regions

Louise McMullan, Deputy for the General Secretary  
Dominic Bascombe, North East Official  
(based in Manchester office)  
Iain Croker, East and South East Official  
(based in London office)  
Marlene Curran, Scotland Official  
(based in Glasgow office)  
Simon Curtis, Wales and South West Official  
(based in Cardiff office)  
Kye Dudd, South West Official  
(based in Cardiff office)  
Alice Adams Lemon, Northern Ireland Official  
(based in Belfast office)  
Karen Lockney, North West Official  
(based in Manchester office)  
Ian Manborde, Midlands Official  
(based in Birmingham office)  
Gareth Forest, Campaigns & Education Officer  
(Based in Manchester Office)



## MAGAZINE

Stephanie Soh, Editor

Tom Greenwood, Design

Cover Illustration by Phil Whitton ([philwhitton.com](http://philwhitton.com))

Jeremy Littlestone, Print Management

Precision Colour Printing Ltd, Printer

Contributors: Philip Cumming, Zoe Ellsmore, Gareth Forest, Sam Foster, Zoe Hodges, Sian Jones, Gail McAnena, Elin Merydedd, Nicole Vassell, Sarah Woolley.



Photos by Neil Harrison



An Equity delegation heads to 10 Downing Street on 15 April 1980 to hand in a petition calling for an end to VAT on theatre tickets. From left to right: Timothy West, Nigel Davenport (Vice-President), Jane Lapotaire, Julia McKenzie, Paul Eddington, Peter Plouviez (General Secretary), and John Barron (President).

# Bread and Roses

(1911)

“As we come marching, marching, in the beauty of the day,  
A million darkened kitchens, a thousand mill-lofts gray  
Are touched with all the radiance that a sudden sun discloses,  
For the people hear us singing, “Bread and Roses, Bread and Roses.”

As we come marching, marching, we battle, too, for men –  
For they are women’s children and we mother them again.  
Our days shall not be sweated from birth until life closes –  
Hearts starve as well as bodies: Give us Bread, but give us Roses.

As we come marching, marching, unnumbered women dead  
Go crying through our singing their ancient song of Bread;  
Small art and love and beauty their trudging spirits knew –  
Yes, it is Bread we fight for – but we fight for Roses, too.

As we come marching, marching, we bring the Greater Days –  
The rising of the women means the rising of the race.  
No more the drudge and idler – ten that toil where one reposes –  
But a sharing of life’s glories: Bread and Roses, Bread and Roses.”

– By the American poet James Oppenheim, inspired by the ‘Bread and Roses’  
call originating from the women’s workers’ rights and suffrage movement.



# WHY JOIN A UNION?

Join a union because of who we are, together;  
not just because of what you do.

Because together, our voice is loud when we make demands of bosses,  
- whether in theatre, film, TV, audio,  
new media, dance or variety.

Because together we will build an industry where your class, your gender,  
your sexuality, your race, your disability does not limit what you can do.

Because together your lived experience becomes part of our voice too.

Because together we can fund insurances, legal support  
and welfare advice - to enable artists to work.

Because together we educate each other and the industry.

Because together we put the future of our industry's workforce - freelance  
and employed - at the heart of its future.

Because together politicians of every party have to hear us - and give our  
industry, its workforce, and all working people the protection we deserve.

Because together we defend freedom of expression for artists  
in the United Kingdom, and around the globe.

Because together we create the global society working people  
and artists need to flourish - defend the environment,  
fight for new housing, better transport, freedom to move.

Because together you are not alone. We are over 50,000 members,  
and part of a global movement of millions, across the UK and the globe.

Together, and only together, can we say:

To all artists: good work  
To all workers: good art  
To all people: Equity

