EQUITY

Conference 2026

Draft Agenda

9-11 May
Durham

EQUITY CONFERENCE 2026

Provisional Timetable

SATURDAY 9 MAY

14:00-17:30 Conference (session 1)	*Miners' Hall*
19:30 Reception	*Miners' Hall*

SUNDAY 10 MAY

09:30-13:00 Conference (session 2)	*Miners' Hall*
13:30-17:30 Fringe events (including lunch)	*Miners' Hall*
19:30 Dinner	*Durham Cathedral*

MONDAY 11 MAY

09:30-13:00 Conference (session 3)	*Miners' Hall*

CONFERENCE BUSINESS COMMITTEE

Julia Carson Sims (Chair), Ian Barritt (Vice-Chair), Laurence Bouvard, Dan Edge, Su Gilroy, Marina Hampton, Isabella Jarrett, Nana St Bartholomew-Brown, Sam Swann.
Secretary: Sam Winter.

Representatives with questions on this agenda or on conference procedure can visit the Conference Business Committee (CBC) at any time during Conference. The CBC will also be in formal session and available for advice in the CBC room at the following times:

Saturday 9 May	**Sunday 10 May**	**Monday 11 May**
TBC	TBC	TBC

All motions submitted for inclusion in the agenda have been vetted and (where required) amended by the CBC for punctuation, grammar and style in accordance with CBC protocols.

Issues relating to whether a motion is in or out of order were considered by the March CBC and Council meetings, following discussion with the union body submitting the motion.

FRINGE EVENTS

See the conference guide for more information. Please note that the fringe will be taking place on the Sunday afternoon, in various rooms around the Miners' Hall.

Sunday 10 May
TBC

INDUSTRIAL COMMITTEES

MOTION A: Audio Committee

AI is decimating the audio sector. Our work is disappearing at scale now.

Major ad and marketing agencies as well as broadcasters like Channel 4, Sky, Comcast, Bauer Radio and HGTV are already using AI voices.

Audible has 60,000 AI-voiced audio books available for download.

This is nothing less than an existential crisis and, while it has begun with audio, it is already spreading into other areas.

As more members lose their livelihoods and leave the industry, the union itself may be facing contraction and extinction.

Today, the biggest threat to our sector no longer comes from the unauthorised scraping of our data but from the unethical, poorly paid and legally dubious contracts which members are signing with AI companies and/or their intermediaries, often selling their voices and likenesses for pennies.

Performers urgently need union-agreed terms and meaningful licence agreements that are genuinely ethical, that enable consent without coercion, control without caveat and compensation which truly reflects the value of our members and their work.

Conference applauds the AI campaigning and contract work done so far and urges Council to go further with a robust, pro-active policy.

Conference calls on Council to -

1. create a template contract for voice and/or likeness licensing; and

2. use this to approach leading AI companies, like ElevenLabs, in order to formalise their procurement process and put a stop to their back door deals with unscrupulous intermediaries.

MOTION B: Continuing Drama Deputies Committee

The government Green Paper on BBC Charter Review sets out clear ambitions for the BBC, including -

- playing a crucial role in finding and nurturing new talent;
- having obligations to provide certain genres that are at-risk or underserved; and
- enhancing its relevance to all communities across the UK and creating jobs.

Continuing drama and returning drama series, especially those that film for more than six months of the year, can deliver on these ambitions, thereby making it imperative that the BBC develops and invests in more of this type of production, not less.

In this current charter period, the BBC has reduced by half the number of continuing dramas on our screens. Holby City went in 2022, Doctors disappeared in 2024 and River City bows out in autumn 2026.

The BBC needs to increase investment, not merely maintain current spending levels, in continuing and returning drama if it is going to meet the ambitions it has for audiences in the next decade. Maintaining current investment levels when production costs are going up means artists and audiences lose out: shorter filming periods mean more precarious employment, and the same budget delivers fewer episodes to enjoy.

Conference calls on Council to advance the demand, as part of Charter Renewal, that the BBC is obligated to produce a continuing or returning drama series that films for more than six months of the year in each of the Ofcom regions. This would mean two new productions – in Scotland and Northern Ireland.

MOTION C: Dance Committee

Choreographers and movement directors have been part of the theatre, film and television industry for over 75 years. Despite this, these professionals have continued to report unfairness and exploitation throughout the industry.

Two years ago, the Choreographers and Movement Directors Network was founded to address these issues. To date, 225 choreographers and movement directors have joined the network and more have got involved in the union.

It is widely felt among the membership that there is a disconnect between how our work is understood and treated by producers/employers, and the reality of the scope of our work and the creative input we actually provide to a production.

In some areas of the industry, movement directors are not recognised where agreements for choreographers are in place; in others, there is no agreement with provisions for movement directors and choreographers at all.

Conference calls on Council to seek to negotiate -

1. the specific recognition of movement directors in relevant agreements;

2. that the contributions of movement directors and choreographers are protected and credited via all relevant agreements; and

3. creative and material parity between choreographers, movement directors and other heads of departments/creative team leaders.

We are gathering a collective voice, but we need our contracts to reflect the reality of our work in order to protect our labour, our expertise, and our members.

MOTION D: Directors and Designers Committee

Conference notes that -

- inadequate remuneration is a shared issue for theatre workers of all disciplines. Whether weekly rates for performers and stage management or fees for directors, designers and other creative team workers, the money we receive for the job we do too often fails to reflect the time, skill, value, and experience we bring to our roles;
- as genuinely self-employed persons, the creative team is excluded from important statutory protections such as the National Minimum Wage and holiday pay that performers and stage management can fall back on in the absence of collective agreements, thanks to their categorisation as workers for the purposes of employment rights;
- negotiations over the industry standard agreements for designers are ongoing, and that later in 2026 claims will be submitted on our agreements for directors and choreographers;
- cuts to arts funding have had a direct impact on the fees creative workers can achieve in the subsidised sector; and
- the overall reduction in work across subsidised theatre further reduces theatre workers' earning potential.

Conference believes united we bargain, divided we beg.

Conference calls on Council to -

1. pledge its full support to all creative team disciplines Equity represents in seeking substantial, groundbreaking uplifts to minimum fees along with comprehensive improvements to other terms and conditions;

2. participate in wider trade union movement initiatives on improving the statutory rights of the genuinely self-employed; and

3. develop specific 'creative team' member materials and briefings for local and national decision makers in Equity lobbying and campaigning over arts funding.

MOTION E: International Solidarity Committee

Multiple states have backed the bloody conflicts in both the Sudan and Palestine over the last year, with devastating consequences for those living and working in each.

Through our relationships with artists struggling against oppression the world over, the International Solidarity Committee regularly hears directly about the impact of war, genocide and strife on the ability of artists to live in their homes and among their communities, let alone produce artistic work.

As a major international player, the UK government has many powers at its disposal to bring an end to conflicts and advocate for peace, whether that is through sanctions on conflict-supporting states, arms embargoes or enforcing international law.

Conference urges Council to organise an Equity lobby of the UK Parliament in partnership with other cultural organisations (including sport) to demand that the British government oppose conflicts in Sudan and Palestine, including a call for UK sanctions to be applied to states, corporations, and entities profiting from these conflicts, funding them, or supplying weapons.

MOTION F: Opera Houses Deputies Committee

Conference notes that Equity's opera membership has been engaged in a fight against cuts to the public funding of opera and against management tendencies to pass cuts on to the workforce. Cuts have taken several forms. There have been sweeping proposals to change terms and conditions. Members have fought these through the threat of industrial action, but members have also received below-inflation pay uplifts.

A more subtle attack comes from a drift towards increased workload for the same (or in real terms lower) pay. As total pay and weeks of employment are reduced, the arrangements for parts and covers (for choristers) and acting up (for stage management) remain substantively unchanged. Such arrangements were initially negotiated alongside a full-time, permanent salary and do not reflect the part-year contracts now used by some houses.

Beyond the national houses, commercial producers are also seeking to reduce their costs. Many consistently refuse to offer work on union-negotiated terms, and they engage individuals as choristers, while expecting them to undertake covers with no or minimal fees for learning, rehearsing or covering.

Conference asks Council to -

1. continue to fight vociferously against cuts to public funding of the arts, including opera and classical music;

2. carefully consider and claim for fit-for-purpose chorus parts-and-covers arrangements and stage management acting-up payments, both in industrial negotiations with individual houses and in discussions with relevant management associations; and

3. build and use industrial power to move those companies not currently using union agreements towards doing so, thus protecting Equity's opera workforce.

MOTION G: Screen and New Media Actors Committee

Supporting artists are a vital part of the industry. They are the human texture that makes a scene believable. Without them, our screens would look unnaturally empty.

They should not, however, be put in the position of being asked to do the work of a featured artist without being re-contracted.

They should not be asked to engage in any dangerous activity that should be done by a professional stunt performer.

They should not be treated like cattle.

Supporting artists should be supported artists.

However, the agencies that they are booked through often do not represent the best interests of supporting artists, seeking instead to brush complaints aside and keep producers happy. All too often the union does not hear about poor practices until after the event.

Conference calls upon Council to -

1. seek to deliver a programme of sessions to educate members and non-members across the nations and regions about why such practices are unacceptable and how to deal with such situations in workplace settings. It is vital that supporting artists know their rights and understand their terms and conditions; and

2. work with the main agencies who engage supporting artists to assist with this and to get a commitment from those agencies to notify the union of any wrongdoing.

This work can also focus on the recruitment of supporting artists and building the Supporting Artist Network into a powerful, industrial force committed to stamping out poor practices and fighting for fair and proper treatment for all members.

MOTION H: Singers Committee

Conference notes that many singers undertake highly international, portfolio careers.

Cuts to public funding for classical music and the wider arts sector, and shifting audience behaviours, mean that international work can prove ever-more crucial for UK-based classical singers in pursuing and remaining in a singing career. Members are left vulnerable to exploitation without full union protection when working overseas, and some singers cite their highly international working pattern as a barrier to their joining the union.

Despite this reliance on international work, it is less available to UK-based singers, not least because of a reduction in freedom of movement and the administrative, financial, and time-consuming burden of acquiring visas and other documentation.

Conference notes the international solidarity initiative taken by EuroFIA members to create a 'Dancers Passport', enabling dancers who engage in similarly international careers to benefit from union support when undertaking work with international engagers.

Conference calls on Council to -

1. continue lobbying work to protect and expand freedom of movement for singers and other performers and creative practitioners who are reliant on overseas work for their income, including lobbying to improve the process of acquiring A1 forms from HMRC;

2. continue lobbying work at local, regional and national levels to protect and further arts funding, including those institutions which engage singers of opera and classical music; and

3. explore the creation of a 'Singers Passport' style arrangement with other unions overseas, enabling singers to access support from sister unions when working internationally.

MOTION I: Stage Actors Committee

Conference notes that -

- actors and stage managers frequently work under contracts and rehearsal schedules that demand rigid availability, long and irregular hours, and limited consideration for caring or parenting responsibilities;
- the lack of flexibility in rehearsal scheduling, performance structure, understudy/alternate scheduled shows, touring expectations, and casting practices contributes to talented theatre makers leaving the profession or being unable to access opportunities; and
- improving working flexibility is essential to making the industry more inclusive, sustainable, and representative of wider society.

Conference believes that -

- caring and parenting responsibilities should not be treated as personal inconveniences but as a normal and respected part of working life;
- meaningful cultural change, rather than ad hoc goodwill, is required to ensure genuine accessibility for those with dependents; and
- introducing flexible working practices and exploring innovative models such as job sharing would strengthen, rather than weaken, the creative and economic health of the industry.

Conference asks for Council to -

1. champion sector-wide cultural change – call on funding bodies and industry leaders to recognise flexible and family-friendly practices as markers of responsible production management and to incentivise such practices in funding and commissioning decisions;

2. create an accessible bank of resources (for members and managers), applicable all sectors (e.g. West End, Commercial, Subsidised, Fringe) that raise awareness of the statutory rights and how flexible working practices can be achieved; and

3. write a letter to managers sharing positive case studies of job sharing, to educate managers in some of the different ways flexible working practices can be achieved.

MOTION J: Stage Management Committee

Stage managers are regularly given duties that cross union lines with our comrades in other technical disciplines.

Used as a cost cutting method by producers to reduce staffing, these responsibilities are imposed upon stage management often after point of contract (despite producers' prior knowledge), or as needs arise during productions. In both cases, there is normally little compensation for the additional duties.

Responsibilities include, but are not limited to -

- operation of sound, which can include powering up the sound system, rig checks, and prepping any production sound elements;
- operating lighting, which is more complex than 'simply pressing GO' and can include powering up and rig checks;
- operating automation or 'pyro', involving being responsible for powering up, rig checking and loading pyros which normally requires training;
- wardrobe duties, which can include laundry calls, costume maintenance and covering a dresser's plot; and
- puppetry duties, which can include maintenance and repairs of specialised puppet mechanisms and electronics, and covering stage plots.

Conference calls on Council to -

1. highlight that these roles are not in the standard remit of stage management, are therefore not included in the published job descriptions created by the SMC, and should incur recompense;

2. support members receiving these requests from producers, and help push back against being made to feel extra duties must be accepted in order to secure a role, or to take them on during a contract without reasonable conversation; and

3. develop wording with the SMC that could be codified into future agreements to support stage managers.

MOTION K: Student Deputies Committee

Conference notes -

- the funding crisis facing higher education (including nationwide redundancies) and its particular impact on performing arts education;
- that, in England, top-up funding for creative and performing arts courses has been frozen at £16.7 million from 2024/25, after being cut in half from £36 million in 2021;
- the scrapping of undergraduate courses at Bristol Old Vic Theatre School, closure of East 15 Acting School's Southend campus and now reversed plans to create two-tier courses at Italia Conti; and
- increasing demands to overhaul the student finance system to relieve the unpayable debt burden on students and graduates.

Conference believes -

- underfunding increasingly privatises performing arts education provision and excludes those from working class and oppressed backgrounds from entering the industry;
- the future of the performing arts depends on high-quality, fully-funded public performing arts education which rewards talent, not wealth;
- the reversal of plans for two-tier courses at Italia Conti following pressure from Equity demonstrates we have power to address this issue; and
- we shouldn't rely on the exploitation of international students to fund higher education.

Conference calls on Council to -

1. support local campaigns to oppose fee increases, cuts, and increasing barriers to access performing arts education; and

2. campaign with the University and College Union, UK student union bodies, and other stakeholders for public funding, to increase top-up funding for performing arts courses, and to make higher education free at the point of use.

MOTION L: Variety, Circus and Entertainers Committee

Conference notes that the recent survey into London Nightlife completed by those working in cabaret demonstrates that many members are still facing unacceptable conditions at work, making them feel less safe than in previous years.

Almost 28% of respondents to the survey explicitly described an increase in homophobia, transphobia, misogyny, racism, and far-right sentiment in their working lives, experiencing regular instances of violence, aggression, and inappropriate touching.

Conference therefore asks Council to look at further actions, such as workplace agreements, to protect these workers at their workplaces and when travelling to and from work. This would be in line with the new duty on employers to prevent sexual harassment at work.

MOTION M: West End Deputies Committee

Conference notes that Equity members fought for and won decent pension provisions via enhanced employer contributions in all of our major theatre agreements. It also recognises that many Equity members struggle to decipher their payslips and pension statements and, therefore, find it hard to check what pension contributions they should be receiving.

As recent experiences of a number of West End deps show, this can lead to Equity members missing out on the pension contributions they are owed by engagers, often because producers have failed to pay contributions at the correct rate. Conference notes that there have been a number of recent successes in the West End, where deps have been able to raise discrepancies, resulting in the correct payments being made, to the benefit of all. This can only happen where members are equipped with the skills to know what to look for and the resulting confidence to ask questions of their bosses.

Conference calls on Council to help facilitate a new suite of educational resources to enable members to better understand their payslips and pension statements and, therefore, be more able to challenge any discrepancies, including but not limited to using the union's social media accounts to reach as many members as possible.

EQUALITIES COMMITTEES

MOTION A: Deaf and Disabled Members Committee

Despite years of campaigning for authentic casting, Deaf, Disabled and Neurodivergent (DDN) performers continue to face significant barriers in the industry. Many are excluded from audition rooms, overlooked in casting pools, or told their access requirements are too complex to accommodate.

At the same time, non-disabled actors continue to be cast in disabled roles. The practice of disabled mimicry, or 'cripping up,' is not a historical issue; it is re-emerging in current productions. This denies employment to Disabled performers and undermines authentic representation for audiences. Disability is not a costume, and lived experience is not optional.

Equity has already undertaken important work with the Casting Directors' Guild to promote authentic casting. However, progress remains uneven, and further action is needed, particularly in influencing directors, producers, and artistic leadership, where final casting decisions are often made.

Conference further notes that the Disabled Artists Alliance has developed the Disability Conscious Casting Framework, a clear and practical tool to support equitable casting, but it has yet to gain widespread industry adoption.

Conference urges Council to -

1. publicly recognise the Disability Conscious Casting Framework as best practice for the casting of disabled roles;

2. use the full weight of the union to promote and advocate for its adoption across theatre, screen and live performance; and

3. work with theatres and companies to encourage public commitment to the framework, and challenge those who continue to cast non-disabled actors in disabled roles.

MOTION B: LGBT+ Committee

Conference notes that -

- a significant number of adult sex workers are existing Equity members, reflecting the substantial intersection between adult sex work and performance work; and
- due to the criminalisation of sex work and the absence of standard union contracts in many performance-related spaces, these workers are particularly vulnerable to the dangers of exploitation and lack of health and safety regulations in the workplace.

Conference believes that -

- sexualised labour does not remove or diminish an employer's duty of care; and
- all performers, regardless of the nature of their work, should be able to work safely, without fear of physical or psychological harm, and with clear rules in place to ensure fair treatment and proper payment.

Conference calls on Council to -

1. actively encourage adult sex workers who undertake performance work to join Equity, including through targeted outreach by union staff and activists;

2. explore how the union can better facilitate the unionisation of adult sex workers by advocating for the adoption of union contracts and minimum standards in performance spaces across live performance and recorded media; and

3. work with relevant organisations, including sex worker-led groups and creative industry bodies, where appropriate, and support collaboration with other trade unions campaigning for the full decriminalisation of sex work.

MOTION C: Race Equality Committee

Conference notes that over the past two years there has been a sustained and escalating pattern of violent disorder and intimidation associated with far-right activity, including riots targeting people of colour, aggressive protests outside migrant accommodation, and the display of nationalist symbols in public spaces, creating a hostile environment and a credible risk to the physical safety and psychological wellbeing of members of colour working across the UK's nations and regions.

Conference notes also that members of colour working in the entertainment industry have experienced organised and vociferous objections to their presence on stage and screen, alongside racist hostility from audiences and local communities, which reflects an ongoing pattern of intimidation rather than isolated incidents.

Conference calls upon Council to -

1. devise a strategy to allow Equity to work closely with theatres, venues, and production companies to develop and implement safeguarding arrangements that are operational and practical, including -
    - risk assessments for productions and touring, particularly in regions identified as high risk;
    - clear escalation procedures for safety concerns;
    - named safeguarding contacts known to cast and crew; and
    - front-of-house protocols for responding to racist or intimidatory audience behaviour; and

2. include in this strategy a focus that theatres, venues, and production companies adopt, actively implement, and regularly review comprehensive anti-racist policies and monitor compliance and challenge failures where such policies are absent or ineffective.

MOTION D: Women's Committee

The government is consulting on provisions in a new Employment Rights Act, including improvements on a range of rights that disproportionately affect women:

- statutory right to bereavement leave, including the loss of a child of under 24 weeks;
- strengthened rights to maternity pay and leave; and
- the right not to be discriminated against and dismissed on the basis of pregnancy and maternity issues.

This is to be welcomed. However, these only apply to employees, while workers and freelancers in the creative industries who experience loss or discrimination are not equally protected under the law. They tend not to be eligible at all for maternity pay and even maternity allowance – due to the complicated calculation of eligibility. Pregnant performers routinely do not submit, are not submitted by agents, and are not chosen for work. Performers are dismissed from jobs because they are pregnant or in a maternity period.

We need the relevant government departments to take these issues seriously, to enable our workers to benefit from these key rights. These would enable women to gain a foothold in the industry and to develop and lengthen their careers without fear of discrimination.

Conference calls on Council to -

1. lobby the government to consult on how the above rights could apply in the creative industries for freelancers;

2. carry out a properly-funded research project on how the above rights function in our industries, make recommendations for reforms, and research evidentiary case studies; and

3. join with other unions representing gig economy workers to present a joint approach.

MOTION E: Young Members Committee

Open castings are often seen as an important way to improve access to the industry, giving artists with no representation the opportunity to be seen by key industry players. However, they also present a unique set of challenges which can disproportionately affect members who are new to the industry.

Some of these challenges include -

- onerous preparation – extensive material is expected to be learnt and significant prep to be undertaken, with only a very small chance of being seen;
- high costs – often artists have to take time off work to attend, losing significant income; and
- scams and exploitation risks – some charge fees or push expensive workshops.

Conference calls on Council to -

1. launch a survey to collect data on the disproportionate impact of problematic open calls on young members;

2. draft guidance to deal with these specific challenges, extending Equity's existing guidance on self-tapes and auditions to open castings; and

3. run a campaign targeting casting directors, to drive up the conditions of open castings.

EAST AND SOUTH EAST

Two to be selected at the regional meeting.

MOTION A: Brighton and Sussex Branch

The current description in Branch Standing Orders of roles for committee members has been in place for many years. Conference urges Council to initiate a full review in order to update them.

Conference believes that the Standing Orders do not, at present, reflect the various jobs undertaken by committee members. Advances in technology and social media make demands on a regular basis when committee members promote and inform branch members of union affairs.

The recent national survey undertaken by Councillors on branch development may illuminate this fact and could be instrumental in implementing changes.

Conference suggests that Council set up a working party to investigate the above issues. Conference urges full support and backing from the union.

MOTION B: Kent Branch

Conference calls upon Council to develop clear and comprehensive guidance on members' engagement with vertical drama productions.

This guidance should address, but not be limited to, minimum standards on pay, hours, working conditions, usage and rights, safeguarding, and routes for advice and support to members.

In developing these guidelines, Council is asked to give particular consideration to the risks of exploitation within the vertical drama sector, especially for younger and early-career performers working for non-union or overseas based producers.

Furthermore, Conference believes it is in the interest of all members to seek guidance from Equity staff whenever considering working on non-union contracts for vertical dramas, with the long-term aim of achieving proper industrial agreements with the producers of vertical dramas.

MOTION C: Surrey and Berkshire Branch

Conference recognises the growing misuse of 'pencilling' within the commercials sector, where performers are asked to hold dates without firm commitment and are often neither booked nor formally released.

Conference notes that, historically, a pencil indicated a strong likelihood of engagement. However, current practice increasingly sees performers placed on hold at recall stage and left in limbo, sometimes until the day of the shoot, with little or no communication.

Conference further notes the damaging consequences for performers: loss of income from other employment, pressure and reputational risk in 'day jobs,' and the unnecessary use of annual leave. With average earnings for actors remaining below minimum wage levels, the financial and emotional impact is significant.

Conference believes that performers' time and availability have value and should not be treated as a free resource. The absence of clear standards allows poor practice and shifts commercial risk onto performers.

Conference therefore calls on Council to -

1. develop and promote clear standards on pencilling and timely release;

2. campaign for a compensatory payment where performers are held on pencil and not released within a reasonable timeframe; and

3. engage with casting professionals and producers to improve transparency and communication.

Conference affirms that fair and respectful treatment must underpin all engagement practices and that performers should not bear the cost of uncertainty in commercial production.

LONDON

Two to be selected at the regional meeting.

MOTION A: London North Branch (1)

Casting directors and agents need to provide clear self-tape instructions. Actors are regularly given no instructions on what casting wants to see. It's an issue throughout the industry but is particularly bad with commercial castings – containing full scenes of actions with almost no dialogue and no instructions, as if they want you to film the entire commercial. Actors are confused and frustrated.

For neurodivergent actors this problem is much bigger. Lack of clear instructions can be disabling and a huge barrier to opportunity, often ending with them unable to complete the tape, thus losing the job they were invited to audition for and are perfectly capable of. Actors are unable to ask clarifying questions to understand what they should do, without either appearing incompetent or disclosing their disability, a protected characteristic, which most often is irrelevant to the role but could result in conscious or unconscious bias when they are being considered for it. It's not difficult to provide clear instructions on what casting wants to see without directing the performance, so why can't these simple accommodations be made? They will be game-changing for neurodivergent people, and hugely beneficial to all actors.

Castings cannot claim to be inclusive if the audition process excludes people from being able to complete tapes. Conference calls on Council (in consultation with relevant committees) to organise a meeting/forum with casting directors and agents to discuss how to improve and clarify self-tape instructions to ensure castings are inclusive.

MOTION B: London North Branch (2)

Conference welcomes the tremendous 99.6% yes vote in Equity's indicative ballot for action short of strike over AI, as part of our negotiations with PACT. Our members' strength of feeling and willingness to fight is clear.

Like SAG-AFTRA in the United States, Equity's fightback is not limited to the crucial issue of AI protections. Our other demands include addressing streaming residuals that increasingly resemble 'residuals in name only', especially compared to those in traditional broadcasting, and minimum rates eaten away by inflation.

SAG-AFTRA won improvements across all these areas, including AI, in 2023 – and this required 118 days of strikes. No trade unionist sacrifices work and pay gladly, but only readiness to strike won increases for Equity members in the West End the same year. Conference agrees that successfully building on our landslide ballot result for action short of strike over AI also means launching a readiness campaign for strike action itself, on all demands.

Conference calls on Council to bring forth proposals for such a bold campaign – as a clear signal to both members and PACT and as part of a strategy for all recorded media.

Conference calls on Council for a meeting of deputies and activists, alongside committee and Council members, which would be an effective way to agree and flesh out this strategy. It could also initiate discussions in workplaces, branches and networks on how to build for and run strikes and solidarity funds if needed.

MOTION C: London South Branch

Funding in the arts and public services continues to deteriorate while major restrictions on workers' rights remain. Pro-worker legislation is an urgent need, especially in fields like AI. A consistent trade union voice in politics could only strengthen our campaigning. Our rulebook lets us 'work with others whose aims are the same or similar to the Union's... providing that the Union does not affiliate to any political party.'

Conference urges Council to consider -

1. continuing its work in approaching parties and candidates favourable to unions to publicly commit to Equity policy and supporting our campaigns;

2. inviting party leaders favourable to unions and who are aligned with Equity's aims and objectives to a meeting to explore ways they could adopt our policies and demands at local and national levels, through Equity's democratic structures and without affiliation;

3. writing to the executives of other unions examining these issues – which include Unite, University and College Union (UCU), National Union of Rail, Maritime and Transport Workers (RMT) and Bakers, Food and Allied Workers Union (BFAWU) – to open discussion on a political voice accountable to trade unionists; and

4. opening a process of discussion at all levels of Equity on how to hold political representatives (including 'BEAU', the Broadcasting, Entertainment and Arts Unions All-Party Parliamentary Group) accountable to union policy and on establishing a dedicated political fund, not linked to affiliation, that could selectively support political candidates fighting for Equity policy.

MIDLANDS

One to be selected at the regional meeting.

MOTION A: Birmingham and West Midlands Branch

Conference notes that the leisure and entertainment industry is not a luxury – it is a major employer, a driver of tourism, and a vital part of our cultural identity. Across the Midlands the cultural sector generates £1.1 billion of revenue and supports 24,000 jobs directly and 27,000 indirectly.

Yet current government policies are making it harder for actors, variety entertainers, and hospitality businesses to survive. Cuts to funding, rising taxes, high energy costs, and reduced public spending mean fewer productions, fewer live events, and fewer jobs.

Theatres are closing their doors. Pubs and hotels are struggling to stay open. Skilled performers and workers are being forced to leave the industry they love, not through lack of talent, but through lack of support.

If we continue down this path, we risk losing not just businesses and jobs, but the heart of our communities. We need policies that recognise the value of the leisure and entertainment sector and support it to survive, grow, and contribute to the economy and society as a whole.

Conference calls upon Council to -

1. specifically target policy and campaign activity in defence of live performance venues and against government measures which undermine the sector; and

2. champion the nighttime economy across the UK's nations and regions by working closely with sister trade unions, relevant trade bodies, local government and devolved government bodies.

MOTION B: Black Country and Staffordshire Branch

Conference notes that digs are becoming harder to find for freelancers working in theatre. Examples of members in circumstances where digs couldn't be found closer than fifteen miles from place of employment, commuting a round trip from home of a hundred miles due to scarcity of digs and sleeping in cars because digs were unavailable or unsuitable, are unacceptable.

Conference applauds the work by Equity in drafting the Dignity in Digs Code of Conduct as part of discussions with UK Theatre.

Conference also supports the call to report 'dodgy digs'. Conference requests that Council strives to ensure that -

1. an onus is placed on employers to implement a duty of care framework whereby freelancers must be contacted prior to engagement to ensure that they have suitable accommodation in place for the duration of engagement;

2. suitable standards should include accommodation being within reasonable proximity, safe, affordable within the subsistence allowance, and appropriate to an assessment of reasonable levels of comfort and hygiene; and

3. in such circumstances where no such accommodation has been found, there must be a commitment from employers to endeavour to seek suitable accommodation as outlined as soon as possible and that the same duty of care be given for the duration of engagement.

Members' safety is compromised by being unable to find suitable digs, and this motion seeks to prevent risk to members' safety, physical and mental health, and financial hardship in such circumstances.

MOTION C: East Midlands Branch

Travel is essential for performing arts workers: We have to travel to where the work is.

Public transport – the safest, most sustainable, lowest emissions travel – can cost a worker upwards of 20% of the job revenue.

Fares are too high.

Services are infrequent and/or unreliable.

Services don't run early enough in the morning or late enough at night.

Performing arts workers are more likely than the general population to be women, Disabled, neurologically atypical, or gender diverse. We work in the nighttime economy or unsociable hours.

Performing arts workers have variable, unpredictable, and precarious income. Running a car, for many, is impossible.

The solution: an Equity travel card.

Equity travel card could give Equity members cheaper fares – by a suggested one third off – on every bus, coach, tram, and train.

Lower fares for performing arts workers would boost demand for public transport services, offsetting the cost of subsidies.

For transport companies, the business case exists to improve services: Earlier mornings, later nights, frequent, reliable and trustworthy.

Better services, with less overcrowding, reduce transport stress for early-rising, late-working, women, Disabled, neurodiverse, and gender-diverse workers.

Conference calls on Council to convene a working group to -

1. explore the challenges above;

2. establish the scope and business case for an Equity Travel Card that works for all: Equity members, public transport commissioners (e.g. local authorities) and transport companies;

3. run a feasibility study into piloting the Equity Travel Card; and

4. explore, with other creative worker unions, the possibility of a wider creative industries travel card.

NORTH EAST, YORKSHIRE AND HUMBERSIDE

One to be selected at the regional meeting.

MOTION A: North East England Branch

Conference notes that to join Equity, a member must meet one of the following:

- earn £750 or more from professional work in the entertainment and performing arts industry; or
- provide proof of membership of an FIA-affiliated union; or
- have undertaken a job on an Equity contract.

Conference believes -

- these routes do not reflect how many early career Variety, Digital and Grassroots (VDG) performers work, where Equity contracts are uncommon and fees are low;
- the £750 threshold excludes early career VDG performers at the point they most need union support and protection; and
- VDG performers aged 18-65 are also less able to use the subsidised membership route, because the nature of VDG work makes it less likely they will be graduates of a qualifying NVQ Level 4 (or above) course.

Conference calls on Council to review -

1. the £750 earnings threshold (or set a lower VDG threshold); and

2. expanding inclusive pathways for Equity membership, such as accrediting hours trained/online courses.

In this way, VDG performers would be able to join earlier, be protected sooner, and further grow union membership as we remove barriers.

MOTION B: South Yorkshire Branch

Conference notes -

- the term ‘pencil’ has changed in meaning from a shortlist indicator to a waiting list sometimes even used before recalls occur. Actors are often held as 'backups' without transparency regarding shortlist sizes, even after bookings are made. This practice forces actors to remain available for protracted periods without financial remuneration or timely release.

Conference believes -

- the current use of ‘pencilling’ is a misuse of an actor's time. Actors must be released from shortlists at the earliest opportunity, especially once a role is cast. Furthermore, a formal contractual retainer should be guaranteed for any actor held on a shortlist for more than one week.

Conference calls on Council to seek to -

1. standardise definitions: agree with casting directors on a definition of ‘pencil’ that requires disclosure of the number of people on the shortlist;

2. ensure timely release: obtain commitments from CDs to release pencils at the first available opportunity; and

3. negotiate compensation: establish an agreement for remuneration for any actor held on a pencil and not released at least 48 hours before the start of production.

NORTHERN IRELAND

One to be selected at the national meeting.

MOTION A: Lagan and East Branch

Trade unions play an important role in the protection of democracy. They promote participation, equality, and accountability and fundamentally fight against power remaining concentrated in the hands of a few. Our trade unions uphold democratic values such as freedom of association, freedom of expression, and the right to participate in public life.

The objective of this motion is to allow Council to act agilely when considering affiliating with movements and campaigns which exist to protect democracy anywhere in the world.

Globally, we watch those in power threaten political, economic and social democracy. We must stand together with our trade union comrades, and in communities, to protect democratic values where people in power attempt to amend laws to protect their position and use force to overwhelm citizens' peaceful participation in public life, including their right to work for the public, to associate with each other, and to protest.

Conference urges Council to consider joining in solidarity and, where appropriate in action, with international, national, and local campaigns and movements, if those campaigns and movements have the objective to protect democracy. This includes campaigns and movements which organise against public spending on goods and services from companies and governments which demonstrate their lack of democratic values. If those campaigns and movements do include this objective, Council ought to favourably consider joining these in solidarity and in action.

MOTION B: Northern Ireland National Committee

In August 2025, a Drag Storytime event in a Belfast library was picketed by protestors claiming to be 'keeping their children safe' and accusing performers of inappropriate activity. At the end of the event, performers had to be escorted from the venue by police, who were themselves harangued for protecting them.

Minister for Communities Gordon Lyons issued a statement saying the event was inappropriate for children and should not have taken place, adding that it had 'compromised the perception of our public libraries as a welcoming and inclusive space for all.' This followed a letter of expectation he sent to the Arts Council Northern Ireland which, among other stipulations, stated: 'To ensure maximum accessibility and inclusion, I expect the council in the terms and conditions of its funding programmes to ensure that any activity disrespectful of any tradition, in locations or by groups receiving council funding, results in specific and substantive action as regards funding.'

Equity's NI official wrote to the minister; the reply reiterated his original statement. The NI Committee chair raised the matter with the minister's party leader and MP Gavin Robinson. The response was: 'Gordon is entitled to his opinion.'

In a position of power and influence, a minister's responsibility must extend beyond personal belief or party politics.

Conference asks Council to mount an Equity campaign against political interference in the funding and delivery of the arts across the UK. The arts must develop free from censorship and political control. Ministers should champion the arts, not undermine them.

NORTH WEST

One to be selected at the regional meeting.

MOTION A: Greater Manchester Branch

The liquidation of Manchester Pride Limited has been widely reported, and it is clear that many Equity members are out of pocket as they have not been paid for performances at Pride 2025.

At a time of increased threats to the safety of the LGBTQ+ community, it is more important than ever that Pride events are safe spaces which allow for true celebrations rooted in protest traditions, prioritising needs of local communities and encompassing the work of trade unions, advocacy groups, charities and support groups which champion LGBTQ+ rights year round.

Many Pride events have moved away from historic protest traditions and local roots, becoming more concerned with corporate interests, sponsorship, and profit-making, above people and communities. We know from other parts of the country that Pride events are under threat from Reform-led councils; e.g., Durham County Council has withdrawn support from Pride.

We intend the ground-breaking Equity agreement with Manchester Village Pride CIC to be a blueprint for other Pride events across the North West and further afield so that workers can be assured their labour is fairly remunerated under unionised terms and conditions. This blueprint will also ensure that Pride events do not lose sight of the communities they serve.

Conference calls on Council to support the campaign to demand all local authorities involve workers from the LGBTQ+ local communities in their plans for Pride events and have clear expectations that companies/organisations managing Pride events use unionised terms and conditions to engage performers, working on Equity agreements.

MOTION B: Lancashire and Cumbria Branch

Considering the challenges 'gigging entertainment' Equity members are now facing collectively, Conference calls upon Council to launch a unifying campaign that highlights the importance of venues and the value of live entertainment across our UK nations, whilst also echoing support for the objectives expressed by Chris Webb, Labour MP for Blackpool South, who is a leading parliamentary voice for the hospitality industry, serving as chair of the All-Party Parliamentary Group for Hospitality and Tourism.

Entertainers have been adversely impacted by the closure of pubs and other venues in the hospitality sector.

The reduction of gigging opportunities is a concern that unites us all.

Regardless of our particular skills, we need venues.

No venues – no work!

It's over 10 years since Equity had a campaign that overarchingly brought together all entertainers, cabaret, variety and circus members, who collectively constitute a significant sector within Equity.

MOTION C: Merseyside and Cheshire Branch

A McKinsey report from 2023 stated that 91% of British adults had engaged with the arts in some way over the last 12 months, and in that same year, arts enterprises raised £126 billion in revenue, with creative industries accounting for nearly 8% of the UK's total exports. The benefits of arts in education are well documented, increasing self-esteem, cognitive capabilities, and mental wellbeing amongst many other attributes. Yet, arts funding is often the first to be cut when budgets are under pressure – as evidenced by Bristol's recent decision to cut culture funding in the city.

The threat of cuts to theatres is now existential. As more funding decisions get devolved to local councils and regional authorities, the removal of grants and subsidies becomes ever likelier, and the risk of theatres closing forever becomes inevitable. This will undermine the sector for generations to come, as well as undermining the UK's economic growth and global influence. Furthermore, ever since theatre's inception, it has been integral to democracy, allowing a forum for education, shared values, communal identity and political debate – all of which are more important than ever.

Conference calls on Council to seek to enshrine arts funding as a statutory obligation for councils and regional authorities, ensuring that multiple theatres across each region can continue their vital work within communities.

SCOTLAND

One to be selected at the national meeting.

MOTION A: Edinburgh and East of Scotland Branch

Conference notes that Access Support Workers (ASWs) are essential in supporting Disabled and other vulnerable performers across the industry. ASWs currently undertake a range of tasks, including administrative assistance, communication support, companion roles, and access facilitation.

Despite the importance of this work, there is no recognised regulatory framework, no requirement for safeguarding checks such as Protecting Vulnerable Groups/Disclosure and Barring Service (PVG/DBS), and no standardisation of responsibilities, training, or pay.

Conference notes that the lack of oversight places an unfair burden on Disabled performers, who are often expected to assess, source, and manage their support without guidance. This is particularly inequitable when performers require ASWs because of executive functioning or organisational barriers. The absence of standards exposes both performers and ASWs to inconsistent practice, unsafe arrangements, and potential exploitation.

Conference believes that establishing structured expectations within this emerging profession is necessary to protect both those receiving support and those providing it.

Conference calls on Council to -

1. research and map existing practice around the use of ASWs across theatre, recorded media, live performance, and events;

2. develop national guidelines outlining the core expectations, competencies, safeguarding requirements, and boundaries of ASW roles;

3. explore the creation of a recognised register or accreditation model, in consultation with Disabled artists, ASWs, relevant committees and external experts;

4. produce member guidance on hiring, engaging and working with ASWs to reduce administrative burden on Disabled performers; and

5. advocate for consistent, fair pay expectations and safe working conditions for ASWs and the performers who rely on them across the industry.

MOTION B: Glasgow and West of Scotland Branch

Conference notes that Access to Work (AtW) is a vital scheme enabling Disabled members to work with equity and dignity. However, AtW is currently failing many of those it was designed to support. Waiting times are approximately 37.5 weeks for employed workers and 67.5 weeks for freelancers, forcing members to turn down work when they cannot afford to self-fund essential support. Since 2015, the funding cap, set at twice the average national wage, has disproportionately affected those with higher or specialist support needs. Recent changes, including the removal of email complaints, have reduced accessibility and transparency. In 2024-25, 89.5% of renewals were reportedly reduced, often without warning, causing serious personal and organisational disruption, particularly for Disabled-led organisations.

When functioning properly, AtW underpins the UK's disability arts sector and enables Disabled artists, freelancers and leaders not just to participate but to innovate and lead. Without urgent reform, decades of progress in disability culture, leadership and employment equity risk being undone. Coordinated sector action is now essential.

Conference calls on Council to -

1. lobby the UK Government to reduce waiting times to no more than 12 weeks;

2. campaign for removal or urgent review of the funding cap;

3. demand transparent communication, proper consultation, and reinstatement of accessible written complaints routes;

4. work in partnership with organisations such as Unlimited, Graeae, and national arts funders, to coordinate sector-wide lobbying, particularly for freelancers and self-employed members; and

5. provide clear guidance and collective support to members affected by changes to AtW.

MOTION C: Scotland National Committee

Following an unprecedented number of cutthroat closures to creative arts spaces throughout Scotland and across the UK, Conference asks, where does that leave our artist and arts spaces?

The creative industries aren't seeing a fair return on the £29 billion a year they contribute to the economy (projected to rise to £53 billion by 2033); it is becoming increasingly difficult for our members to sustain and remain in this industry. The government has promised an increase to arts funding that works out at around 0.13% addition every year for the next 10 years. Therefore, we need to call on governments and local authorities to ensure financially viable spaces are available to artists and creatives on fair and accessible terms so that spaces cannot dictate the success or failure of vital creative resources, productions, and programmes.

Conference calls on Council to -

1. engage with government to seek to ensure that legislation protects artist tenants and service users' rights regarding spaces at risk of closure or eviction, including obligating local authority landlords/funders to find alternative options, particularly when Equity members are directly impacted;

2. encourage arts organisations to share under-used or vacant spaces that they have access to with artists and creative bodies who are needing facilities to create, produce, and deliver activity; and

3. consult with the relevant local authorities to develop a fair agreement and payment structure for small arts organisations and creatives to ensure buildings do not become vacant and creativity has a secure base to provide for communities.

SOUTH WEST

One to be selected at the regional meeting.

MOTION A: Bristol and West of England Branch

Conference notes that while most are happy to support the occasional unpaid cause, the frequency of unpaid requests, often from large, well-funded, and sponsored organisations and events, has now become unsustainable for performers.

Conference believes that a Pay the Act campaign offers a simple, practical solution, rooted in compassion, empathy, fairness, and realism. In a cost-of-living crisis, paying performers is not optional, it is essential.

Performers, producers, fundraisers, and charities can sign up and use the Pay the Act campaign logo. Performers can then easily and professionally decline unpaid bookings by citing their participation.

For organisers, publicly supporting the campaign strengthens industry standards and demonstrates ethical practice.

Conference calls on Council to develop a Pay the Act campaign as a positive and necessary step forward for the industry, focused on a clear principle: that performers must be paid fairly by event producers, charities, fundraisers, and promoters.

MOTION B: Devon, Cornwall and Wessex Branch

Conference notes the fears and reservations expressed concerning the advantage taken of young members of staff involved in performance surveyed at holiday camps and the under-representation of trade unions such as Equity among holiday camp and hospitality entertainment staff in the UK.

Members have shared examples of fear and sexual harassment at work expressed by holiday camp employees who spoke off record for fear of losing their jobs or refusals of employment if they were known to be dealing with a trade union.

Non-unionised camp entertainment staff are often poorly paid at or just above minimum wage, but hours frequently exceed those contracted for and may include cleaning rather than entertainment shifts. Furthermore, deductions from pay may be made for on-site accommodation. Access to any form of 'speak up' process is absent.

To facilitate Equity representation and to help give them a voice, Conference requests that Council consider extending education and training membership rates to equivalent age group holiday camp staff involved in performance. Council is also invited to consider a campaign of engagement with holiday camp operators to explain the advantages for them and facilitate broader awareness of and recruitment to Equity. This could form a suitable campaign for branches in whose areas holiday camps proliferate.

WALES

One to be selected at the national meeting.

MOTION A: South Wales Branch

Conference notes that -

- AI-generated 'patients' are beginning to be used in medical education and communication skills training;
- this reduces employment opportunities for professional medical role-players, particularly those engaged for complex interpersonal communication work;
- realistic human interaction is central to high-quality clinical communication training, with long-term implications for patient care across the NHS (or HSC in Northern Ireland); and
- Equity's Medical Role-Play Best Practice Guide sets out standards on pay, preparation, and professional respect, but does not yet address the use of AI in place of human role-players.

Conference believes that -

- the unregulated introduction of AI 'patients' risks undermining both members' livelihoods and the quality and safety of healthcare training; and
- Equity should take a proactive role in ensuring technology is not used to replace skilled performance work without scrutiny, standards, and collective input from workers.

Conference calls on Council to -

1. support the establishment of a Medical Role-Players' Network, beginning with a pilot in Wales, to gather evidence, share information, and build collective organisation in this sector;

2. develop, as a matter of urgency, guidance on AI use in medical training to complement the Best Practice Guide, including model contractual protections and minimum standards;

3. engage with medical schools, training providers, and relevant regulators to promote the value of professional role-players and advocate for ethical, worker-informed approaches to AI in healthcare education; and

4. request that the pilot network reports regularly to Council, so that findings can inform union policy and support the development of similar organising approaches in other nations and regions.

MOTION B: Wales National Committee

Conference notes that Equity's negotiated minimum rates of pay and terms and conditions are collectively bargained protections designed to prevent exploitation and establish enforceable minimum standards across the industry.

Conference further notes with concern that across the publicly-funded arts sector, particularly independent theatre and dance, some employers are increasingly treating Equity minimum rates as maximum rates of pay, regardless of experience, skill, responsibility, or length of career.

Conference believes this practice represents a systemic suppression of wages across the sector and actively undermines Equity policy on fair pay, career sustainability, and equality under the justification of funding constraint.

Conference further believes that when publicly-funded cultural work fails to provide pay progression, it contradicts the principle that culture is skilled professional labour and weakens the long-term sustainability of the workforce.

Conference affirms that a professional cultural workforce cannot be sustained where experience and skill are not recognised or rewarded.

Conference calls on Council to resolve to -

1. publicly and unequivocally assert that Equity's collectively bargained minimum rates are a floor, not a ceiling;

2. develop and resource a targeted campaign to challenge the misuse of minimum rates by employers;

3. lobby public funders to recognise that public investment in culture must support pay progression and sustainable careers, not permanent minimum-rate employment; and

4. strengthen industrial guidance and organising strategies to support members to secure rates above minimums.

STANDING ORDERS

A summary is included below. For the full Standing Orders, please go to:
https://www.equity.org.uk/about-us/how-were-run/rules-of-the-union/standing-orders/

TELLERS AND STEWARDS
The tellers and stewards are union staff. They examine the credentials of those attending and count the votes.

PHOTOGRAPHY AND RECORDINGS
Only the union's designated official photographer/s may take photographs or videos or any form of audio recording in the conference hall.

FLYERS
No Councillor, Representative, other member or guest shall place any flyer on the tables in the conference hall.

AGENDA
Compositing motions The movers of motions and amendments shall be asked to co-operate with the Conference Business Committee to composite (join together) motions where possible.
Remitting motions Remitting a motion means asking Council to decide it instead of Conference. A motion which has been moved and seconded may not be remitted by the mover without the consent of Conference.
Withdrawal of motions or amendments A motion or amendment which has been moved and seconded may not be withdrawn by the mover without the consent of Conference.
Unfinished business All matters on the agenda not reached at the conclusion of the last day of Conference shall be remitted to Council.

ORDER OF DEBATE
Limitation of speeches The mover of a motion can speak for up to five minutes. The seconder and subsequent speakers, including the right of reply, can speak for up to three minutes. One minute before the end of each speaker's time a warning shall be given, and again at the end of the speaker's time.
Amendments No amendments will be accepted at Conference. Requests to withdraw a motion, to composite (join) motions, or any other request that may alter the timetable must be made to the Conference Business Committee in its committee room and not from the floor of the meeting.
Rules of debate See Rule V. in the Union's Rulebook.

ADDRESSING CONFERENCE
• Representatives and Councillors shall indicate they wish to speak by holding up a voting card.
• Representatives and Councillors shall speak to motions only when called by the Chair. They shall address the Chair and give their name and the part of the union they represent.
• No Representative or Councillor shall interrupt a speaker except on a point of procedure. In particular, there shall be no heckling of speeches.
• If the Chair stands during a debate, the Representative or Councillor speaking shall immediately give way and shall wait for the Chair's permission to continue.
• No speaker shall ask those present in the conference hall to identify themselves by means of a show of hands as a member of any group or category.

VOTING
• Only elected Representatives and members of Council shall be allowed to vote.
• All voting shall be by a show of voting cards.