

Dr Darren Henley OBE  
Chief Executive, Arts Council England  
21 Bloomsbury Street  
London WC1B 3HF

## By Hand

14 November 2022

Dear Darren,

On behalf of our members engaged by English National Opera at the London Coliseum, as Chorus, Stage Management, Actors, Dancers, and Creative Team members, we are writing to formally ask Arts Council England to reverse your decision to remove ENO as a National Portfolio Organisation with effect from April 2023.

This decision is ill-judged and ill-considered. It takes no account of the devastating impact on the specialist work force who work at the ENO. Particularly affected amongst our membership are the Chorus who are employed permanently and some of our Stage Management. Indeed, no regard whatsoever appears to have been made for this permanent workforce and no plan put in place for them.

Our members are now facing the worst of all possible worlds with the potential removal of any of the job security that nine months of regular employment conferred and the total collapse of their income by April 2023. Across the country, there are less than 200 full time chorus jobs of which 40 are based at English National Opera. This guaranteed income will be difficult if not entirely impossible to replace with work as Opera Singers elsewhere. They have additionally built their lives and the lives of their families around their primary working location at the ENO in London with all the higher costs that incurs.

You have suggested that it may be possible for ENO to relocate and that you are prepared to provide limited funding for this. However this would take much planning and much time. It cannot be achieved overnight. It is our view that as a first step the ENO would inevitably be forced to make the entire artistic and technical workforce redundant destroying the very basis on which Opera could be produced.

Even should a relocation be possible, there is no world in which the same size of permanent workforce could be re-employed. It is also disingenuous for you to imply that some Opera will remain at the Coliseum under these circumstances. Even if that was possible this would

inevitably rely on a casual and precarious workforce engaged on considerably worse terms for considerably shorter periods.

Although Equity can only speak on behalf of Equity members, we are conscious that the withdrawal of funding will equally affect the Orchestra, Music Staff and the Technical Staff whose skills, along with those of our members, are absolutely necessary for the production of Opera, to the standard required.

The Arts Council do not appear to have taken into consideration any of the important work that the ENO have done to modernise and diversify their workforce including the Chorus and their principal Singers. It seems as though the reward for ENO's compliance with all that the Arts Council have required over the previous years has been a devastating withdrawal of all guaranteed funding. Nor would it seem that the Arts Council have allowed any time for the ENO to build back from the pandemic.

In your announcement you suggested that ENO should relocate to Manchester. Yet at the same time you have increased funding to Opera North who already have an audience and presence in Manchester. This does not seem a credible suggestion.

I'm sure other commentators will have stated the obvious, but for completeness, it does not seem right or fair to a city with a population of nine million that they should be deprived of an art form that has been made accessible and affordable to Londoners via the efforts of the ENO.

We would have expected, as I'm sure ENO did, that they be treated in the same way as the other large Houses with a reduction in grant that would still allow them to continue as an Opera House based in London.

We call you to reassess this decision and protect this specialist workforce, who are the product of years of training, experience and expertise and are not replaceable.

We look forward to hearing from you.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Paul W Fleming', with a stylized flourish at the end.

**Paul W Fleming**  
General Secretary

**CC:** Sir Nicholas Serota, CH – Chair, Arts Council England