

Performers' Alliance APPG inquiry:

Breaking the Class Ceiling in the Arts: an inquiry into social mobility in the creative sector

Why this issue is important?

There is now a high profile debate associated with diversity in the arts. This has been important in highlighting inequalities in relation to race, disability, gender and other protected characteristics. There has yet to be the same level of scrutiny associated with questions of social mobility and class. This is despite clear public, media and policy interest in this issue; for example, the Secretary of State for Culture, Jeremy Wright has highlighted the problem of under-represented groups in the arts and cultural workforce. The absence of social mobility and class is partly because class is not a 'protected characteristic' in equality legislation, which has meant data collection and publication of statistics on class diversity and social mobility monitoring has been uneven across the arts workforce.

Despite this uneven data collection, there is evidence of barriers to social mobility - the 'class ceiling' – in the arts. There is growing concern about how this sector is dominated by people from privileged backgrounds; how some of the great performers from working class backgrounds of the past 30 years – from Julie Walters to the Stone Roses – would not make it today. There is also a growing body of work which has found that social mobility in the arts may be declining, and organisations and activists working in this space to address it.

Barriers to social mobility need to be addressed because they prevent talented people from finding rewarding jobs in a booming part of our economy. It matters that our artists and writers are drawn from the widest talent pool to ensure the sector's continued future success, to develop the quality and diversity of its output, and help reach new audiences and grow commercially. Social diversity is perhaps even more important in the creative sector than in others given the role of culture in reflecting our national life in all its diversity back to us.

What are the aims of the inquiry?

The inquiry aims to:

- Receive oral and written evidence from a variety of stakeholders, including from performers and writers with first-hand experience
- Identify and investigate the barriers that are faced by those from lower socioeconomic backgrounds from establishing and sustaining careers as musicians, writers and actors
- Review the effectiveness of current initiatives by organisations for improving social diversity and to identify best practice across the industry
- Provide recommendations that can be taken forward by government, industry and others to affect change

The inquiry aims to build on, bring to wider attention and help to propel the growing body of work undertaken on this issue so far, such as this year's [Panic! Social Class, Taste and Inequalities in the Creative Industries](#). It will also review what has been achieved since Tracy Brabin and Gloria De Piero's ['Acting up' report](#) last year.

The inquiry will be led by the All-Party Parliamentary Group, engaging MPs and Peers from across the political spectrum on those measures that will make a real difference in securing change. The inquiry will also work closely with the three unions of the Performers' Alliance – the Musicians' Union, Equity and the Writers Guild of Great Britain.

Terms of reference:

The inquiry invites evidence on what measures and reforms are needed to support social mobility in the creative sector. It particularly welcomes written evidence on the following key questions:

- (a) What evidence is there to help understand problems of social mobility issues into the creative sector?
- (b) What challenges/barriers are faced by those from lower socioeconomic backgrounds from establishing a career as a musician, writer or performer, for example:
 - a. Learning an instrument
 - b. Breaking into a career and/or
 - c. Sustaining a career in the industry?
- (c) What best practice examples exist in the industry for tackling social mobility and are there lessons for other organisations?
- (d) What are the most effective measures the government, industry and other bodies can take to ensure that anyone, irrespective of their socioeconomic background can access and sustain careers in these professions, to build the talent pipeline?

All written evidence should be emailed to Chloe Alexander, Coordinator, Performers' Alliance APPG, on PerformersAllianceAPPG@outlook.com. Any queries to that email or telephone 07890 463116. Initial deadline of 31st January ahead of the first evidence session, but submissions will be accepted throughout the inquiry until 1st May 2019.

Timeline:

- The inquiry launched on Monday 26th November 2018.
- Five oral evidence sessions will be held between January and July 2019.
 - Regular time slots in the same room on the Upper Committee Corridor will be booked but with flexibility around availability of panel members and witnesses, e.g. 5.00-6.30 on a Monday or Tuesday (avoiding select committee meeting times). These rooms provide seating for people who would like to watch the sessions.
 - The dates of forthcoming sessions will be posted on the Group's Facebook page, <https://www.facebook.com/PerformersAllianceAPPG>.
- Report to be launched in Autumn 2019.

Oral evidence sessions

Dr Sam Friedman (London School of Economics) and Dr David O'Brien (University of Edinburgh) have used the concept of a 'leaky pipeline' to identify key points in creative careers where working class talent falls out. With the first major roadblock beginning at state school, then accessing degree level training (e.g. conservatoires, drama school) followed by the lack of financial support during that 'Is it going to happen?' period and, finally, relating to the difficulties in sustaining financially viable careers in the sector (working conditions, status, unpaid work etc).

Each oral session will focus on a critical pressure point in each of the professions covered by the APPG – music, writing and acting. This is to explore the particular challenges that are faced; to review initiatives by organisations to remove barriers, and to identify examples of good practice; to recommend practical measures that could make a real difference to securing social mobility in the sector. We will aim to have 2-3 Parliamentarians sitting on the panel for each of the evidence sessions. The main focus will be asking *what works* to address each of these challenges, and how can government and industry respond.

Evidence Session 1: Defining and monitoring class and academic research on social mobility in the sector

There is much debate and confusion over social mobility. This session will address the technical and public meanings of the term, scrutinize recent initiatives by Arts Council England, the British Film Institute and the BBC to create monitoring and measurement systems for social mobility in the arts workforce, as well as looking to examples of best practice.

To cover:

- Defining and monitoring class and social mobility, challenges around this, intersectionality
- Regional and local inequalities
- Reviewing the evidence base for changes in social mobility in the sector, including the academic research, data collected by organisations, activists and feedback from organisations working in this space.
- Progress that has been made in recent years, reviewing the effectiveness of initiatives by organisations to address the problem.

Session 2 - Learning an instrument

Social mobility challenges can begin from an early age. Much of the issues associated with early years and school age development for performers can be captured in one core example- learning an instrument. The ability to play an instrument is fundamental for working as a musician, from orchestras to bands, and this session will cover access to this opportunity. In turn, the findings will then be related to similar barriers encountered by other types of performing arts, for example access to drama and theatre facilities for aspiring actors.

This session could cover:

- Learning to play an instrument – accessing tuition and instruments, and how this is supported in schools – and progression in music. To reflect on skills needed in different musical genres.
- Starting out in a career in music – access to rehearsal space, opportunities to perform, support with marketing and promotion.
- A review of the current state of arts education in schools

Session 3 - Breaking into a career

The first few years of an arts career are perhaps the most crucial. This session will particularly focus on breaking into a career in **writing**, looking at the sorts of barriers associated with access to networks, financial support, and the issue of ‘London based opportunities’, as well as looking at existing government schemes to support early career creatives. In doing so, it will bring in relevant issues relating to careers in acting and music.

This session could cover:

- Barriers in accessing training and the difficulties faced during the ‘Is it going to happen?’ period.
- The problem of unpaid internships and the dominance of London based opportunities
- Breaking into a career via online platforms, e.g. YouTube, Vlogging
- Accessing higher education and professional training:
 - Accessing higher education - the ‘median’ screen writer is currently educated to Masters Degree level or equivalent. Access as both a young person and as a mature student.
 - Progress that’s been made by conservatoires and by drama schools to widen access, e.g. Liverpool Institute of Performing Arts dropping its application fees, Open Door (a non-profit) that helps talented young people who do not have financial support to gain a place at one of the leading drama schools.

- Careers advice and guidance on creative careers and pathways into them.
- Recruitment and commissioning practices. The Writers Guild has documented difficulties of getting that first commission – of often years of rejection and failure, and of often being asked to undertake significant development work for free.
- Existing Government schemes and creative careers (e.g. Apprenticeship levy, New Enterprise Allowance), current results and how proven elements can be potentially expanded to enhance participation in writing careers.
- Access to finance and networks, the question of ‘who you know’

Session 4 - Sustaining a financially viable career

This session will build on the work in session 3, but particularly focus on sustaining careers in **acting**. Acting is potentially a highly rewarding and high profile career. However, the labour market for actors can be highly precarious and uncertain. The session will therefore build on the [‘Acting up’ report](#), which focused on school and early career challenges, by examining the problems of sustaining and maintaining a career in acting. These issues are not unique to actors, and the discussion will connect to the relevant issues relating to careers in writing and music.

This session could cover:

- Challenges and recommendations for workers who do not have a financial safety net of their own to sustain financially viable careers in the industry.
- Endemic low pay and no pay within these sectors:
 - Median incomes in these professions, and practice of no pay;
 - Poor enforcement of – for example – National Minimum Wage legislation;
 - Minimum Income Floor element of Universal Credit for self-employed claimants.
- Incomes from intellectual property rights, e.g. from streaming, downloads and YouTube - which enables artists and creators to be rewarded for and derive an income from their creativity
- Issues relating to self-employment. The creative sector has been referred to as the original gig economy and there are issues relating to being self-employed that make it difficult to sustain careers in the sector, such as:
 - maternity and paternity pay and leave
 - sick pay schemes
 - enforcement of rights to holiday pay
 - Tax/ NICs
- Barriers to career progression faced by parents and those with caring responsibilities

Session 5 – Response from Government/other responsible bodies

This session would provide an opportunity to ask the Government/ other responsible bodies about issues that have arisen during the inquiry and action that is needed.

Possible witnesses, eg:

- DfE minister
- HMRC – enforcement of employment rights and National Minimum Wage by producers.
- BEIS minister – how to improve the recognition of the employment status entertainment industry workers etc.
- DWP minister – improving the rights of self-employed workers, Minimum Income Floor for self-employed workers.
- DCMS - how cultural policy and arts funding might address the leaky pipeline.
- Low Pay Commission.