

Performers' Alliance APPG inquiry:

Breaking the Class Ceiling in the Arts: An inquiry into the decline of 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 and gender. There has yet to be the same level of scrutiny associated with questions of social mobility and class. This is despite clear media, public, and policy interest, 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. At the same time, there is growing evidence of barriers to social mobility - the 'class ceiling' - in the arts. There has been awareness in recent years 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 - wouldn't make it today. There is also growing body of work which has found that social mobility in the arts is declining, and organisations and activists working in this space to reverse this.

This needs to be addressed because it is preventing talented people from finding rewarding jobs in a booming part of our economy. It also matters that our artists and writers are drawn from the widest talent pool. This will ensure the sector's continued future success, develop the quality and diversity of its output, and help to 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 does the inquiry hope to achieve?

The inquiry will seek oral and written evidence, views and experiences from a variety of stakeholders, as well as from performers with first-hand experience. It will aim to investigate the barriers that are faced by those from lower socioeconomic backgrounds from establishing a career as a musician, writer and actor, to review whether current initiatives by organisations for improving social diversity are working and best practice across the industry, and to identify practical action that can be taken by policy makers and others to affect change.

It 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.

As it will be led by the All-Party Parliamentary Group, it will engage cross-party MPs and Peers from across the political spectrum on those measures that will make a real difference in securing change. It will also be working closely with the three unions of the Performers' Alliance - the Musicians' Union, Equity and the Writers Guild of Great Britain.

Terms of reference:

The APPG will seek evidence on what measures and reforms are needed to support social mobility in the creative sector. It would particularly welcome written evidence on the following key questions:

- (a) What evidence is there to help understand problems of social mobility 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) Are there examples of best practice in the industry, and are there lessons for other organisations?
- (d) What are the most effective measures the Government and other bodies could take to ensure everyone 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.

Timeline:

- Inquiry launch on Monday 26th November.
- Five oral evidence sessions 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 dates of forthcoming sessions will be posted on the Group's Facebook page, <https://www.facebook.com/PerformersAllianceAPPG>.
- Report to be launched in the Autumn.

Oral evidence sessions: four between January and July 2019

LSE sociologist Sam Friedman and Dr David O'Brien of University of Edinburgh used the idea 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 and 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.

Each session will be structured around 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 any examples of good practice; to recommend practical measures 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 respond?

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

There is much debate and much 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 measuring systems for social mobility into 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 the decline of 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

The problem of social mobility begins 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 unequal 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.
- 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 problem of ‘London’, as well as looking at existing government scheme 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 internships, both unpaid, and the dominance of London
- Accessing higher education and professional training,
 - Accessing higher education, with the ‘median’ screen writer educated to Masters Degree level or equivalent, as both a young person and at later stages in life

- Progress that's been made by conservatoires and by drama schools to widen access, e.g. Liverpool Institute of Performing Arts (which has dropped 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) and how these 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 Tracy Brabin and Gloria De Piero's '[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:

- Recommendations for ensuring workers who do not have a financial safety net of their own can 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
 - 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, ensuring that subsidised theatre is paying the NLW, sector specific advice for the entertainment industry 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.