

Creating without Conflict: from disbelief to dignity



#FEUDignity: unions and the arts and media industry met to discuss how workplaces could be safe from sexual harassment

After all the powerful and passionate #MeToo statements it was time for the industry to think about the practical ways to support employees and to consider ways to change the culture, said **Cassie Chadderton**, UK Theatre's head of theatre and membership development.

She was speaking on an employers' panel at a conference at RADA Studios, London, organised under the Federation of Entertainment Union's (FEU) rubric Creating without Conflict, a campaign against bullying, harassment and



Sarah Ward with the employers' panel: Tim Hunter, Cassie Chadderton, Natasha Moore & Wendy Spon

discrimination in the media and creative industries.

Next to her on the panel was **Natasha Moore**, Directors UK's lead campaigner on bullying and harassment issues. Her organisation had had to admit that the bullies and the harassers were among its ranks, she said. There was a job of

educating and training to do and an expectation that bad behaviour was called out. The process of hiring needed to be more transparent and formalised.

“We researched good and bad behaviour to discover what it looked like and then drew up a code of conduct,” Natasha said. “We found that when people were tackled they were mortified to hear that they were acting unreasonably. Admitting that there was a problem was the first step.”

The #MeToo movement galvanised unions and arts organisations to bring forward new ideas to tackle the problem: joint codes of conduct, helplines, safe spaces, focus groups, training and guidance. The FEU also launched an equalities e-course and updated its bullying and harassment guidance.

Were these measures making a difference or was something more radical needed? That was the subject of the day.



Union panel: Olivia Hetreed, Semeena Zehra, Isabelle Gutierrez & Natasha Hirst

Sarah Ward, national secretary of the media and entertainment union, BECTU, opened the conference by saying unions had long been aware that bullying, harassment and discrimination were rife in the workplace – a TUC report said more than half of women (52 per cent) had experienced sexual harassment – and that the creative industries had been identified as a hotspot. BECTU’s Dignity at Work campaign was launched just after the conference with a video to highlight its work with the British Academy of Film and Television Arts (BAFTA) and the British Film Institute (BFI) and the role union reps could play. She read out Equity’s Safe Spaces statement which members are encouraged to recite at the beginning of every new rehearsal project: everyone is entitled to work in a space free from bullying and harassment and if anyone is subject or witnesses bullying they must be free to speak out in the knowledge they will be treated seriously.

Comedian, actress and Equity activist, **Sameena Zehra**, kicked off the unions' panel. Her show at the Edinburgh Festival tackled the issue of sexual harassment and she invited Equity members to share their stories, from the rape of a woman by a comic and watched by another in his Edinburgh flat, to the day-in-day-out groping, leering, smacks on the arse and sexual innuendo women comics and actors faced from promoters, colleagues and the audience. "Unions have to be there to provide the safe space for people to be able to talk about what has happened, so they can get help and feel supported, even if they prefer their case to be anonymous," she said.



As a freelance photographer in a male-dominated world, the NUJ's **Natasha Hirst** said she felt "lucky" to have only experienced sexual harassment a few times. "It is designed to shut down voices," she said. "It stifles plurality in the media, prevents the free sharing of information and attacks our democracy. That affects every single one of us, whether we are direct targets of harassment or not.

Employers had a legal and moral duty of care for all who worked for them. "A key message for employers is that trade unions are your allies. Workplace reps have training and resources to support employers to improve workplace culture and meet their duty of care towards staff and freelancers who work for them." Sexual harassment was a health and safety issue; reps had the power to assess the risk to mental health where bullying and harassment was prevalent, she said.

Social media was a vital tool for media and arts workers, but it could make them prey to vicious trolls and those with a public profile were vulnerable to being stalked by deluded and sometimes dangerous fans. "This should not be the price of fame," said Natasha. "The police must be called in if it looks risky." The Musicians' Union set up a series of drop-in events last year for members to share their experiences and created an email address where musicians could report abuse and ask for assistance while remaining anonymous. Behaviour reported ranged from being sent explicit pictures, being forced to wear a mask and hotpants when there had been no mention of having to wear a costume and fellow musicians saying such things as: "You must have slept with half the orchestra to have got the job."



Isabelle Gutierrez, the MU's head of communications & government relations, related how she had reported someone for sexual harassment and, despite being in a secure job and having the support of her boss, it had been a harrowing experience. The perpetrator had appealed and accused her of lying. "Even with support, I ended up on medication

and had many sleepless nights. But if it had happened to me, it had probably happened to others and would have gone on happening unless he was stopped," she said.

The conference discussed the main reasons for people being too afraid to speak out. A large proportion of the people working in the media and arts are freelance. The work is precarious. The harassment usually takes place when there are unequal *relationships* in the workplace: who will be believed you or the popular presenter, Nobel-prize winning author, or Hollywood director? According to a BECTU survey, 42 per cent said they feared it would have a negative effect on their career if they complained. Many of the members who spoke to the union helplines or sought help did so on the condition of anonymity.

Is the power dynamic underlying predatory behaviour the reason why most of the perpetrators are men? Do men also need to be educated to call out bad behaviour?



Cassie Chadderton said: "The cult of personality and the power imbalance it creates becomes a particular problem in theatres where at least 45 per cent of the workforce is freelance. There needs to be practical action and procedures in place to break this generational cycle of abuse."

Olivia Hetreed, president of the Writers' Guild of Great Britain,

said: "We have to get away from putting up with unacceptable behaviour because it is part of the "creative temperament". Unions can tackle workplaces

where bullying and harassment flourish and can provide a safe space for our members to report their experiences.”



Tim Hunter, BAFTA’s head of learning and events, said 30 organisations had now signed up to a new set of principles and guidance developed with organisations across the film, games and television industries, including BFI, BECTU, Equity, Pact, The Production Guild, Women in

Film & TV, the Writers’ Guild, the UK Screen Alliance and UK Interactive Entertainment. The Cinema and Television Benevolent Fund opened a telephone helpline for people working in film and television to complement Equity’s service for actors.

High-profile names, such as actors Emma Watson, Gemma Arterton, Jodie Whittaker, Gemma Chan, and producers Barbara Broccoli, Rebecca O’Brien and Alison Owen, gave their support.

“The focus is on prevention and how productions can create an atmosphere which prevents incidents from escalating,” Tim said. “We wanted to provide clear and practical information for employers, so they understood the law, their responsibilities, and we are piloting training to help them develop their own policies on how to recognise and challenge inappropriate behaviour.”

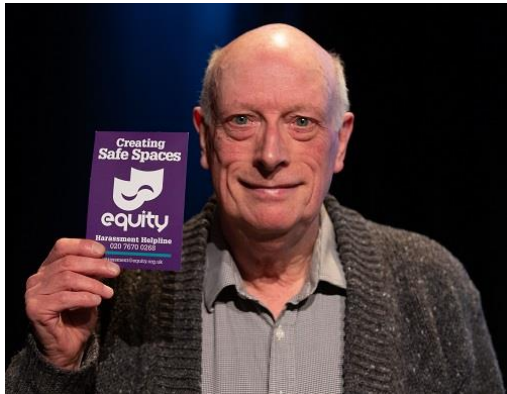
Another problem was pay, said **Ian Manborde**, Equity’s equality and diversity organiser. “The culture of working for nothing and getting paid work being a favour is the gateway to exploitation,” he said. Being broke also made it harder to walk away from a job or gig or refuse work even if faced with inappropriate behaviour.



Wendy Spon is on the board of the Casting Directors’ Guild. She said her organisation had issued a code of conduct in the light of the Harvey Weinstein scandal and she noted that Equity had suggested that all casting sessions should have a third person in the room along with the performer and casting director or director and casting

sessions be held only in appropriate workspaces – not hotel bedrooms. Wendy

said there needed to be greater clarity about working practices and that the safety of actors must be paramount.



Wrapping up the event, actor and Equity vice-president, **Ian Barritt**, said: “A lot has been achieved over the past year, but the momentum must continue. It must not be last year’s issue; let’s keep pushing and campaigning.”

After the morning event, union reps and officials were invited to a practical training event. Vicky Phillips, from Thompsons

Solicitors, and Richard Unwin, from the Metropolitan Police, talked about the law relating to sexual harassment. They were joined by Helen Ryan, from BECTU, and Jo Laverty, from the MU, for an exercise where reps and officials were given a set of case studies based on real incidents and discussed how a union would respond to them. The day ended with a session on mental health from Chris Manning, of UPstream Healthcare.



Federation of
Entertainment Unions

BECTU is part of Prospect and represents workers in broadcasting, cinema, film, digital media, independent production, leisure, theatre and the arts.

Equity is the UK trade union for professional performers and creative practitioners. The Musicians’ Union represents more than 30,000 musicians working in all sectors of the British music business.

The National Union of Journalists is the voice of journalism and media workers in broadcasting, newspapers, magazines, books, public relations and new media, including photographers and illustrators.

The Writers’ Guild of Great Britain represents writers in TV, film, theatre, radio, books, poetry, animation and videogames.