

Annual report 2019-20

www.writersguild.org.uk

Contents

3 General Secretary's report

6 Chair's report

8 President's report

10 Finance report

CRAFT COMMITTEE REPORTS

11 Books

12 Comedy

13 Film

15 Radio

16 Television

19 Theatre

22 Videogames

REGIONAL AND BRANCH REPORTS

23 East Midlands

23 London and South East

24 North West (Manchester and Lancashire)

24 North West (Merseyside)

25 Scotland

27 South West (Devon and Cornwall)

28 South West (Wessex)

29 Wales

31 West Midlands

32 Yorkshire and North East

OTHER REPORTS

33 Editorial & Communications Committee

34 Equality & Diversity Committee

OBITUARIES

35 Remembering WGGB members

CONTACT US

If you want to contact any of the WGGB Officers, Craft Chairs or Regional Representatives featured in this annual report, you can find their details on our website: www.writersguild.org.uk/contact/

You can also follow us on Twitter:
[@TheWritersGuild](https://twitter.com/TheWritersGuild)

Facebook:
www.facebook.com/thewritersguild

JOIN US

If you are not a WGGB member, and would like to join, you can do this online:
www.writersguild.org.uk

COVID-19

At the time of writing and publication of this annual report, the UK was currently still in lockdown due to Covid-19.

Information was correct at going to press, but up-to-date news can be found on our website:

www.writersguild.org.uk/news

General Secretary's report

As we were gearing up to ensure writers' rights stayed firmly on the agenda during the Brexit transition, the Covid-19 crisis swept this and everything else aside in its wake – and it has been our number one priority ever since.

As a trade union we always strive to stay ahead of developments that affect our members and ensure that their needs come first at all times.

Our first response was to close our office, in line with Government recommendations and to protect the health and safety of our staff, and we have been able to set up remote working for all our staff.

It is very much business as usual, with a few minor tweaks! You can find more about the practicalities of our operation during the crisis on a special advice page for members that we have set up: www.writersguild.org.uk/covid-19-advice-for-members

This page also has lots of useful information on sources of emergency funding for writers during the crisis, and helpful pointers if you are concerned about your work, your finances, and your health, including your mental health.

We have been heartened by how the creative and arts sectors have come together, and the spirit of collective action that has been unleashed. Of course, this is the principle on which our union is founded, and we have included some ideas for online activism in our advice page. We know our members have a track record of making a noise when it matters, and we will continue to update you on ways you can get involved. Do remember to read your weekly ebulletin every Friday as it is a great way for us to keep you informed of all the latest developments.

Our members are predominantly self-employed and we were acutely aware of how vulnerable this made them right from the outset of the crisis. Collectively with sister unions in the Federation of Entertainment Unions we've been working hard to protect freelancers' rights during the crisis, and continue to actively work with employer organisations within the creative industry to restart productions as safely and quickly as possible. Much of our lobbying work with



Government goes on behind-the-scenes and we have been busy responding to consultations, submitting evidence to HM Treasury and working hard with the other entertainment unions, as part of our work with the Performers' Alliance All-Party Parliamentary Group.

We welcomed the Government's announcement in March 2020 of a financial support package for the self-employed, but we were concerned that some writers were being left behind, and that this funding wouldn't come on stream for a few more months. So we continued to put pressure to fill these gaps, and we will keep up this vital work for as long as it takes to make sure writers get the protection they need and deserve.

As part of this protection, we have created a set of best practice guidelines for playwrights. It is clear that theatre, which relies on income from bums on seats, will be the last to reopen and arguably is the worst hit sector within the creative industry. These guidelines offer practical solutions, including benchmark fees for digital work and protections for playwrights, and have been endorsed by leading playwrights and UK Theatre.

During the crisis we also signed off a new agreement with Adam Matthew Digital (ADM), a digital publisher working with the Royal Shakespeare Company on a project to digitise prompt scripts and other materials. The agreement contains rates for rights and extensions, and commits AMD to backdating terms for our writers who have already made an agreement.

In other news (yes, there is some other news!), we continue our negotiations with employers and, since the last AGM in June 2019, have been able to secure annual increases on minimum fees for our TV, radio and theatre members. We also negotiated a bespoke deal with ITV to secure a decent rate for extract use for soap writers when production stopped on the two leading soaps (you can find details of all these wins in the 'News' section of our website at www.writersguild.org.uk).

Our Craft and Regional elected representatives have been busy, as have our Officers – and I would like to thank them all. You can find out about their important work in the following pages.

Our staff have been working hard on launching our new student membership package, which has been a success. We were keen to ensure that we support writers at the very outset of their careers, and ensure their voices get heard.

We also listened to the call of young activists and joined the Global Climate Strike demonstration in September 2019. Thank you to all our members who put down their pens, switched off their laptops and played their part in marching and banner-carrying.

Our Writers' Guild Awards were a huge success this year, as they always are – with comedy legend John Finnemore taking home our special Outstanding Contribution to Writing Award. Sadly, due to Covid-19, we have had to cancel the 2021 Awards ceremony. Any money raised through sponsorship this year will be going to our Welfare

Fund to support members who have been impacted in the crisis, and our Awards will be back with a bang in 2022. Thanks to our sponsors for their loyal and continued support.

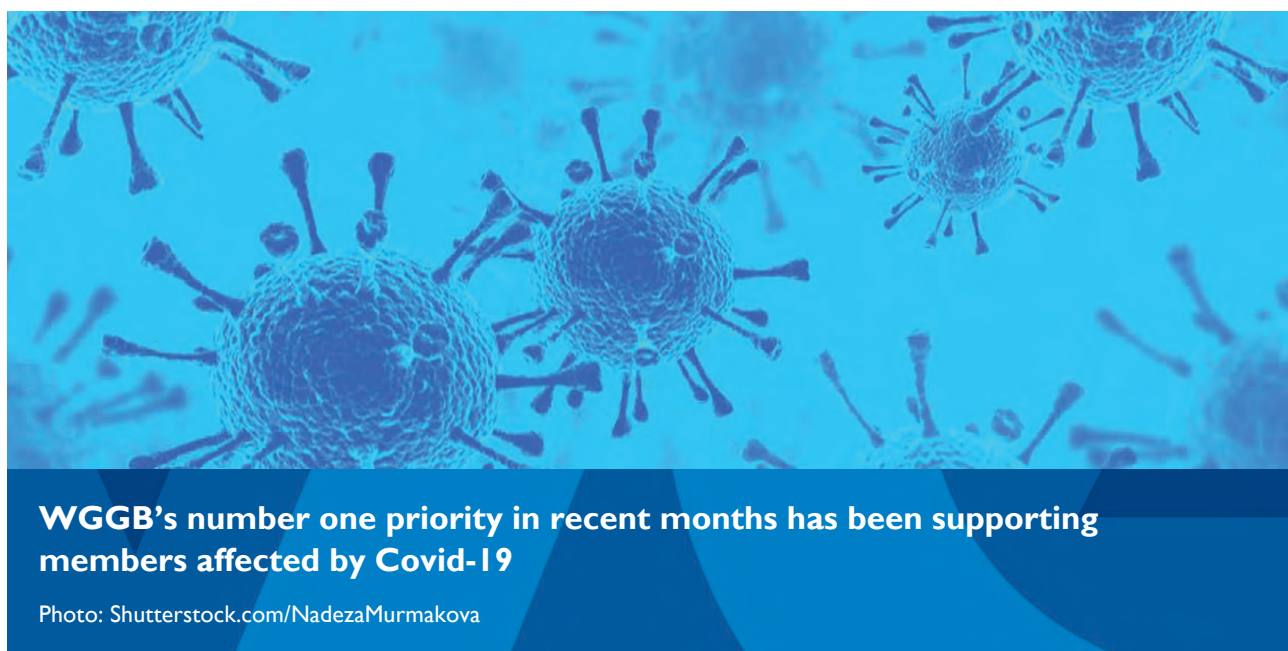
At the time of writing we are hoping that our annual Tinniswood audio drama award and our Olwen Wymark Theatre Encouragement Awards will be able to go ahead as planned – they too are a highlight of our annual calendar, and a chance to celebrate writers and those who support them.

I am delighted that this year's annual report includes an entry from our Equality and Diversity Committee for the first time. This Committee was formed as a result of our Equality Writes campaign, which was launched to tackle inequality in the screen industries. Members came forward with the idea of setting the Committee up after our campaign launched, and our two representatives Sukey Fisher and Sumerah Srivastav have been doing sterling work ever since (read their report on page 34).

They are just one example of the collective strength that makes WGGB so strong, and I would like to thank each and every member – without you there would be no union, and by working together we can move mountains.

And if you are reading this and are not a member yet, please do join us – we welcome writers at all stages of their careers, and just by signing up you will make a difference and support our vital work.

Ellie Peers
General Secretary





In the past year we have also heard the call of young activists in the climate movement

Photo: Kate Glasspool



WGGB launched a new student membership package in 2019

Photo: Rawpixel

Chair's report

I will admit that I was nervous taking on the role of WGGB Chair over a year ago. I was concerned that I would not be able to fill the shoes of my mighty predecessor, Gail Renard. That I would be a poor substitute for her diplomacy, encyclopaedic knowledge of our industry and her formidable lobbying skills. I should have known that Gail would remain a trusted friend and adviser throughout my first year as Chair. And for that I thank her.

Especially as it seems that what I should have been concerned about was something that none of us could possibly have seen coming. The Covid-19 pandemic has had a devastating effect on our industry. In the space of a week, it felt like everyone I knew lost their livelihoods. Diaries emptied, venues were shuttered, and the lights went off in the studios of even our most indefatigable TV and radio shows.

However, the response from my colleagues in the WGGB office was extraordinary. Working from their homes across London and even further afield, they carried on helping writers in any way they could. Our online response was almost instantaneous, with regularly updated website resources proving an invaluable first port of call for writers needing help with their finances, employment and mental health. The e-bulletin continued to be sent out, providing a vital weekly point of contact for members. Negotiations and meetings with industry bodies, broadcasters, producers and our sister unions continued, indeed they increased. Parliamentary lobbying also continued, with staff rapidly producing written evidence for HM Treasury as the impact on freelancers of the lockdown became clear.

I am enormously grateful to all the staff members for their extraordinary response to extraordinary times. I am also thankful for the work done by the WGGB Craft, Regional, Finance and other Executive Committees over the last few years. This continuing work meant your union was in an excellent shape to weather this storm. And I would like members to be assured that we continue to be in a strong position to support you through what remains a difficult time for our industry.

However, in order to protect the WGGB's resources, we have had to take the difficult decision to cancel the 2021 Writers' Guild Awards. We did this with great sadness, but I stand by the decision. The Awards are financed by industry sponsorship only and we felt that it would put our loyal sponsors, themselves dealing with the impact of the pandemic,



in an understandably difficult position. The Awards also rely on the hard work of our Craft Committees and my feeling was that they may have other more pressing priorities as we emerge from the pandemic. However, we will be back in 2022 to celebrate UK writers.

And whilst it is a little early to look for silver-linings from the Covid-19 era, I do hope that we have learnt some valuable lessons from the crisis. Starting with the value of public service broadcasting. Pre-Covid, certain politicians seemed only too happy to write off the importance of the BBC, regional broadcasting and linear television. I think they have been proved incorrect.

I also hope that the Zoom-boom proves once and for all that it is not necessary to constantly drag writers down to London for short meetings. This has always proved to be an obstacle to writers with disabilities, limited financial resources, childcare responsibilities or those who live outside of the M25. In short, the seemingly pathological need of some producers to host meetings in their posh offices has been a significant barrier to diversity and equality in my opinion. Let us hope for a change in the culture.

And the other cultural change I am hoping for is an understanding of the value of writers in our industry. Because never before have your skills been more essential. It will be your inventiveness and creativity that will rescue film, television and radio from the doldrums. You will adapt to the new reality and reflect it brilliantly in your work. If the pandemic proved anything it is how reliant society is on its stories. Never before has comedy felt so necessary. Or the escapism of a book. The welcome distraction of a box-set binge watch. The comfort of a radio drama. The collective joy of a great play. Or being transported to extraordinary worlds by a videogame.

Please, keep writing. And your union will make sure you are valued, protected and, most importantly, fairly paid as you do.

Lisa Holdsworth
Chair



The Zoom-boom will hopefully have a long-term, positive impact on writers who live outside London; WGGB has been lobbying HM Treasury during Covid-19 to ensure self-employed writers get the support they need

Photo: (top) Shutterstock.com/soul_studio; (bottom) Shutterstock.com/Claudio Divizia

President's report

Hello there. I am new to the office of President of the Writer's Guild and not entirely sure that I can report any more to you than has been presented by the fearsome office team led by Ellie Peers. I have sat in on a number of Executive Council meetings now, and each time been overwhelmed by the attention to detail of each one of the committees who oversee the work of our trade union. We are in safe hands, but the truth is we are going to need to be.

I am writing this in the midst of the Covid-19 lockdown and only too aware how many writers have been affected by it, both privately and professionally. You might think that writers are used to self-isolating at our desks, but no one is prepared to do so against a backdrop of the world coming to a standstill. Productions across the world in theatre, film, radio and TV have ground to a halt. Money has dried up, and many face an uncertain future. No one knows how the world of writing will look when this is all over. Certainly, the world of storytelling is changed forever. All stories will now be pre- or post-pandemic. The very setting of a tale will impact on its telling.

In theory, many of us should be able to make the most of this time when deadlines do not beckon, but I fully understand my writer friends who find that they simply stare at the page, overwhelmed by the barrage of news which reaches us. It is hard to close the study door on what is happening. Meanwhile, book launches are cancelled, festivals are closed, and many television commissions are fast turnarounds for incredibly low budgets, all shot by amateurs on smartphones and computers. Some of it is laudable, but there are also dangers.

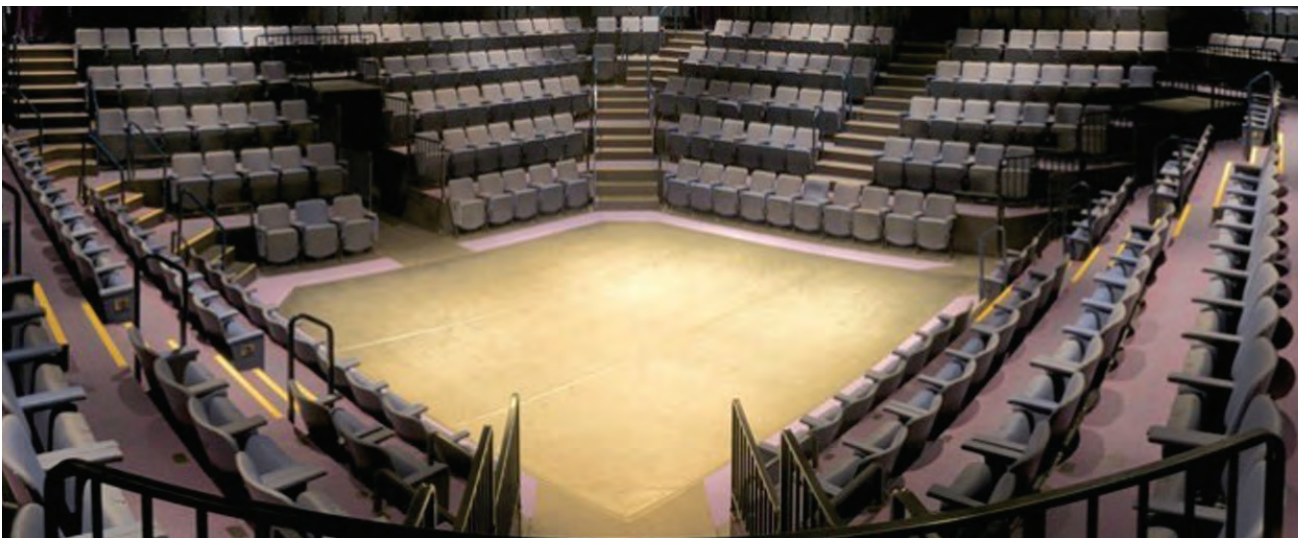
Television executives, for example, may begin to believe that all broadcasting can be made in this cheap and swift manner. These are times when, more than ever, we need the Writers' Guild to hold the line and make sure that the value of writers' work is not allowed to be devalued. I believe the craft of what our members do will win the day.



When this shocking time is behind us, then the skills of the storyteller, the thoughtful analyser of both the past and the present, will be needed more than ever. The world will want to dive into theatre, films, comedy, videogames, television, radio and books, which help us all to place the pandemic into some kind of perspective, or even just allow us to escape and not think about it at all. That skill will need to be rewarded and WGGB will be there for writers of all kinds, to make sure that is what happens.

I am currently pushing myself to write by teaming up with another member of the Writers' Guild to push each other to put pen to paper. We're writing what I call a 'Pass On' story – a paragraph each, on alternate days, trying to write a story together where neither one of us is sure where it's going. It's fun. It's helpful. Reach out to another writer. There's a whole union to choose from. We are a diverse and wonderful family of talent.

Sandi Toksvig OBE
President



Covid-19 has seen cinemas go empty, TV and film productions shut up shop and theatres close their doors. WGGB has been working hard on behalf of all its members to ensure their rights are protected and their voices are heard

Photos: (top) Shutterstock.com/EN226; (middle) Shutterstock.com/Eric Broder Van Dyke; (bottom) James Drawneek

Finance report

WGGB continues to be in good financial shape. The General Fund, the amount that the WGGB has in its main bank account for paying wages, rent, committee costs, events and other expenses, saw a balance carried forward at the end of the 2019 WGGB financial year of £624,695.

The Royalties Account (which holds funds for distribution to writers) received £23,875 and distributed £19,678 in payments to writers through 2019. A total of £51,845 was carried forward.

The Welfare Fund, which provides grants/loans and assistance to members in financial hardship, continued to provide help through 2019, making a series of soft loans and grants in excess of £4,490. At the end of the WGGB financial year the balance carried forward was £45,599. Due to the Covid-19 crisis, both donations and loans/grants have increased and this will be reflected in next year's accounts. The Welfare Fund is administered by a committee comprising of volunteer members, and it has a committee chair appointed by the Finance Committee (FC).

There is one area where we are still operating in a deficit, the position of Treasurer remains unfilled. The General Secretary is working closely with our Accountant, keeping the day-to-day finances in check and reporting directly to the FC. So if you are eligible and can spare a little time, then put yourself forward as WGGB Treasurer (email ellie@writersguild.org.uk). Our union is founded on the hard work and collective strength of our members, and this area is no different.

I also wanted to take this opportunity to thank all the volunteer members of the Finance Committee for their wisdom and diligence in managing the WGGB finances; Richard Pinner, John Wilsher, Rupert Creed, Gail Renard, Lisa Holdsworth, Tim Stimpson, Antony Pickthall and William Gallagher.

**Ellie Peers, General Secretary,
on behalf of the Finance Committee**



Members of the WGGB Finance Committee hard at work

Photo: Em Fitzgerald

Craft committee reports



Corinne Sweet (left) and Nick Yapp (right), Books Co-Chairs

BOOKS

The Books Committee has met three times since the union's AGM in 2019. We have concentrated on the following areas:

1. Self-publishing. Thanks to John Sailing, WGGB's organiser for campaigns, there has been progress in the union's work with the Society of Authors to survey authors on the current state of publishing practices, which have undertaken dramatic changes due to technological advances.

2. Establishing links with universities and colleges that run degree courses in creative writing. We see this as having one primary aim: to introduce students (and staff) on such courses to the work of the Writers' Guild and the help that it offers to fledgling book writers.

3. Continuing to monitor the funding of Public Lending Right (PLR) – the fee that the Government is required to pay to authors for each loan of a book from a public library. PLR was achieved in 1979, after a long campaign by a wonderful group of writers including WGGB members. Last year PLR celebrated its 40th birthday. WGGB sits on the steering group and we are now planning how we could celebrate the 40th anniversary of the first payment of PLR in 2024.

4. Continuing with the Best First Novel Award for the Writers' Guild annual Awards ceremony. This was our third year on the red carpet, and we were proud to honour *Cygnets* by Season Butler (Dialogue Books) as the deserving winner. We had a substantial

amount of submissions (85 new books), and there were some great entries. Two excellent runners-up were *Finally Woken* by Dean Moynihan (Book Guild) and *Something Like Breathing* by Angela Readman (And Other Stories). We are considering the launch of a Best First Non-Fiction Award in the future.

5. Immediately after the union's last AGM we gave our support to a campaign to prevent the planned closure of some 130 public libraries in Essex, which we are happy to report was successful.

And finally...

The Books Committee was established in 1974 and we would love it to evolve into a more powerful force for protecting book writers' rights. We would like to encourage WGGB members to join to help us continue to protect our work and our earnings. The Covid-19 lockdown has shown that books still have a strong and important place in people's lives and hearts. Please do get in touch with us by email on books@writersguild.org.uk

Thank you to Committee members Nancy Boulicault, Ewart Hutton, Dapo Ladimeji, Patrick O'Sullivan, Emily Vanderploeg, Julie Wheelwright

**Corinne Sweet and Nick Yapp
Co-Chairs**

Craft committee reports



Dave Cohen (left) and Nathaniel Tapley (right), Comedy Co-Chairs

COMEDY

We had been having a steady year before you know what. Most of 2020 was spent gearing up towards the Big Comedy Conference that had been due to take place in London in April. This and a networking event designed to recruit stand-up comedians on the basis that material matters as well as performance.

Aware that the whole landscape of comedy production and commissioning is changing, we had also begun to look at ways WGGB could navigate the barriers comedy writers currently face: breaking

into the industry, pensions, mental health, online content, retaining royalties, streaming, and so on. I am confident that when our lives return to some kind of normality we will be able to pursue this with renewed vigour and urgency.

Thanks to everyone who has served on the Committee this year: Brenda Gilhooly, Eddie Robson, Daniel Page, Joel Morris, Carrie Quinlan, Sian Harries, Abi Burdess, Gail Renard, Neil Forsyth and Shai Hussain. Carrie has left this year but we're looking forward to being joined by Harry Carr.

**Dave Cohen and Nathaniel Tapley
Co-Chairs**



Pensions is just one area the Comedy Committee has been focusing on

Photo: Shutterstock.com/vinnstock

Craft committee reports

FILM

This is my first report as Chair of the Film Committee. I'm honoured to have been asked to step into the sizeable shoes left behind by Line Langebek and Andrea Gibb. We are all grateful to them for their five years of energetic service. During this time they spearheaded countless initiatives, not least being a driving force behind 2018's landmark Equality Writes campaign. Thank you.

I'm writing this at a time of unprecedented global uncertainty. We can be certain of very little at the moment, but it is clear that the landscape for the entertainment industry – and for the freelance film writers who make up so much of our membership and whom the Film Committee exists to serve – will be unrecognisable by the time life starts to return to normal.

Supporting our members through the difficult months and years ahead will be the union's guiding priority, and the Film Committee stands ready to play its part.

Looking back on the past year, we advanced a number of our campaigns in positive directions. Members of the Film Committee are working closely with the new Equality & Diversity Committee, and we are playing our part in lobbying for sustained protections for writers in the post-Brexit world.

We were involved in plans for a joint Women in the Creative Industries Conference with our sister entertainment unions, which has now been postponed due to the Government lockdown. But the need to bring together action groups from across the industry on this essential subject will be no less relevant in the post-Covid world.

Following on from our work with the Time's Up and #MeToo movements, and with BAFTA and BFI on bullying and harassment, we are actively encouraging our members to use the Writers' Guild's Report It! survey on the website. The Film Committee is planning its own survey, too. Both initiatives are designed to develop a statistical base from which to launch further campaign work.



The Writers' Guild Awards are fast becoming an annual highlight. This year the voting jury had typically robust discussions as we narrowed 70 titles down to two longlists and finally to two shortlists of three. In the Best First Screenplay category, Harry Wootliff's personal, touching *Only You* took the prize over *The Fight* (Jessica Hynes) and *VS.* (Daniel Hayes and Ed Lilly). And the Best Screenplay Award went to Shola Amoo for the extraordinary *The Last Tree*, with *Beats* (Kieran Hurley and Brian Welsh) and *Stan & Ollie* (Jeff Pope) also shortlisted.

We continue to push forward our attempts to renegotiate the Minimum Terms Film Agreement with PACT. Until very recently this was top of our To Do list for the coming months. Events have overtaken us but, as with everything else in this report, once the dust settles the work will have to go on. I have no doubt that the Film Committee – now comprising a dozen of the Writers' Guild's finest – will rise to the challenges that lie ahead.

Tom Williams
Chair

Craft committee reports



The Writers' Guild Awards 2020 saw Harry Wootliff (pictured top right, with presenter Simon Beaufoy) win in the Best First Screenplay category for *Only You*. Shola Amoo (pictured bottom right, with presenter Rowan Joffe) won the Best Screenplay Award for *The Last Tree*

Photos: Matt Writtle

Craft committee reports

RADIO

The Radio Committee continues to raise the profile of radio drama across the country – seeking to recruit new members to the Writers’ Guild as well as safeguarding radio dramatists’ rights in a rapidly changing landscape.

BBC Sounds has been broadcasting for two years and is now part of the audio drama writing landscape. We continue to negotiate with the BBC as part of the Radio Drama Forum and to lobby on behalf of our members. In January 2020 we negotiated a 2.1%, above-inflation increase on minimum fees for radio writers at the BBC, backdated to 23 December 2019.

The Radio Committee was delighted that John Finnemore won the Writers’ Guild Outstanding Contribution to Writing Award at the 2020 Writers’ Guild Awards, which certainly drew attention to the contribution that radio makes.

We also continue to run the Tinniswood Audio Drama Award with the Society of Authors, which is presented each year at the BBC Audio Drama Awards. This year the winner was Ian Martin for his audio drama *The Hartlepool Spy*.

Ironically, radio drama is one of the few art forms that is proving resilient in the Covid-19 pandemic. While television soaps have halted production, *The Archers* continues to be produced. And although the International Radio Drama Festival in Canterbury has been postponed until this autumn



(a festival which has been sponsored by WGGB), all the entries have been made available via the festival website for a limited time:

www.radiodramafestival.org.uk

There is a unique opportunity at the moment to assert the value of radio drama as a medium that can respond to events and create a conversation, as well as providing a huge archive of material for audiences to listen to, enjoy and be comforted by. With the BBC’s role as an institution made more central in the Covid-19 crisis, so we feel that radio is central to that role.

I would like to thank my Committee members for their active support, commitment and good humour – Nichola Baldwin, Steve Chambers, Lucy Flannery, Martin Jameson, Katharine Way, Phil Nodding, Gillian Richmond and Keri Davies.

Nicholas McNerny
Chair



While the production of TV soaps have been cancelled during Covid-19, Radio 4’s *The Archers* continues (pictured: Hanbury Church, Worcestershire, the fictional setting for the audio drama)

Photo: Shutterstock.com/DavidHughes

Craft committee reports

TELEVISION

Television writing is a large and diverse craft area and one of the largest in the Writers' Guild. Broadcast television work may seem well-paid, and indeed it is – for those writers who are consistently employed. But like most writers, we are freelancers, living from contract to contract and enjoying few of the protections offered to employees (such as the ability to challenge unfair dismissal). There are many pitfalls, which can leave experienced and highly skilled writers struggling to pay their bills. The impact of the current Covid-19 pandemic is an example of this, with productions forced to shut up shop overnight.

Changes of personnel at the top of shows or commissioning teams can leave a writer out of favour and out of a job, perhaps after many years or even decades of loyal service. So, of course, can the cancellation of long running series, as is happening now due to the lockdown. Where shows, such as continuing drama, employ a large pool of writers, some writers can be effectively on zero-hours contracts – but they also have to keep up with the show's development while they wait around for their next commission. And almost all television writers are expected to keep writing pitches, treatments and spec scripts for free. As a result, the high fees for broadcast work do not reflect the full picture of a TV writer's working and financial life.

Our members work on every type of scripted show, and at every level. We are here to support all of them, especially in these difficult times. We are currently lobbying Government and talking to broadcasters on our members' behalf to ensure they are not left behind in Covid-19 financial packages, and that their rights are protected. We will continue to advise, support and listen to our members throughout this period of crisis and beyond.

NEGOTIATIONS

We have successfully negotiated a 2% increase in BBC and ITV minimum fees, which more than keeps pace with inflation.



For BBC writers, minimum fees for serials and series rise to £11,400 per hour, while teleplays rise to £12,420 per hour and sketch material rises to £115 per minute (effective from 18 November 2019).

For ITV, the minimum fee paid for a one-hour drama rises to £14,342, while the attendance fee rises to £122 per day (effective from 13 November 2019).

PITCHES, TREATMENTS AND SCENE-BY-SCENE BREAKDOWNS

Concerns were raised this year by our members who felt they were being expected to provide an unreasonable amount of work prior to commission on certain shows. We spoke to the producers involved and clarified that, as per WGGB agreements, only a brief pitch (less than a page, ideally just a paragraph) should be unpaid; if shows want more details of a storyline worked out, they must pay 10% per outline and 25% per scene-by-scene breakdown. The shows in question agreed.

WORKING AS, OR WITH, A WRITER-SHOWRUNNER

We are currently working on a set of best practice guidelines for working with writer-showrunners. This is aimed at producers, writer-producers and episode writers. Having sought advice from many people with experience in working in this area, in Britain and internationally, we have put together a draft set of guidelines for consultation and editing.

On 16 November 2019, we held a training day to educate UK writers about what it means to be a showrunner, including working with other writers.

This was run by US showrunner Jeff Melvoin and included prominent writer-showrunners from the UK and US as guest speakers. It was a fantastically informative day – thanks to WGGB Chair Lisa Holdsworth, who brought the whole thing together so brilliantly, and to our creative partner Emma Frost.

THE ‘CREATED BY’ CREDIT

‘Created by’ credits (or shares thereof) and the resulting claims to ownership of intellectual property are often a bone of contention between writers, producers and production companies. The definition of ‘creator of a series’ is vague. As a result, people who are not actual creators receive this credit, whether due to undue pressure on the rightful creators or due to the misunderstanding of the role and definition of a TV series creator.

This means that more powerful writers, producers and even performers can claim to have ‘created’ a show when they have had minimal input – and the less powerful can be deprived of their rightful credit.

WGGB is currently developing its official policy on the subject. In the interests of clarity and fairness, we wish to join our sister Guilds in formulating official guidelines for our members. Guilds such as those of Israel and Spain have begun to tackle the problem, taken legal advice and framed their own policies. We have looked to them for help and guidance, as well as consulting with our own members.

We are currently drafting an official set of guidelines. When it is complete, we intend to run an official WGGB campaign to push for writers to receive their rightful recognition in creating shows.

CONTINUING DRAMA SERIES – BBC

WGGB is now regularly meeting with the BBC heads of continuing drama series, and engaging in constructive dialogue to be sure that all producers and script editors on these shows are aware of the agreed WGGB / Personal Managers’ Association guidelines to which they signed up. These guidelines cover the process and best practice of working with writers and can be found in the ‘Other guidelines/resources’ section at www.writersguild.org.uk/resources

Although we know that working on these series is extremely challenging for all concerned, we believe that most producers are trying in good faith to follow good practice, and that, where shows fall short of their responsibilities to writers, lessons are learned in order to avoid repetition in future. As always, we can only respond to what our members tell us, so we encourage our members to let us know about their experiences on continuing drama – good and bad. Do feel free to email tv@writersguild.org.uk

CONCERNS FOR CBBC AND CBEBBIES

The BBC is seeking amendments to its operating licence which would allow it to make 50 fewer hours of children’s programming on its linear channel, including dropping *Newsround*, except online. At the same time, writers working on CBBC and CBeebies shows have reported a worrying drop in publicity and online support for their shows. Along with Directors UK, we have raised the issue of CBBC and CBeebies shows being removed from the ‘most popular’ lists on iPlayer. With the BBC facing challenging times in many ways, it seems that co-operation across the Federation of Entertainment Unions will be needed to protect BBC’s children’s programming.

ENVIRONMENTAL CONCERNS

WGGB writers have backed calls for more plotlines about climate change and environmental issues in TV drama. The future of our planet is not too political for drama – it affects all of us and we can use powerful human stories to engage people with current concerns and the potential for positive change.

THANKS

Thanks as ever to the TV Committee for their commitment and hard work. The current Committee members are Sally Abbott, Jenny Davis, Neil Forsyth, Henrietta Hardy, Sarah Louise Hawkins, Lisa Holdsworth, Maggie Innes, Martin Jameson, Darren Jones, Rob Kinsman, Dominique Moloney, Debbie Moon, Sophie Petzal, Gail Renard, Amy Roberts, Jude Tindall, Katharine Way and Miranda Walker. If you would like to influence WGGB’s work in television, please contact tv@writersguild.org.uk – we always welcome new activists!

Emma Reeves
Chair

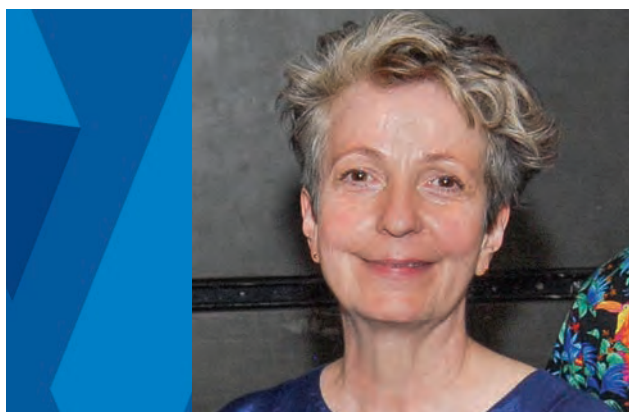
Craft committee reports



In 2019, WGGB backed calls for more environmental plotlines in TV, negotiated pay increases with broadcasters, including the BBC, and ran a training day for members on what it means to be a showrunner

Photos: (top) Shutterstock.com/Krivosheev Vitaly; (middle) shutterstock.com/mikecphoto; (bottom) Lisa Holdsworth

Craft committee reports



Vanessa Brooks (left) and Richard Pinner (right), Theatre Co-Chairs

THEATRE

When we took up the baton from David Edgar and Jenifer Toksvig, who stepped down as Co-Chairs of the Theatre Committee last June after a very successful three years, no one could have forecast how the Covid-19 pandemic would close theatres, with such a devastating impact on the income and future prospects of playwrights in the UK.

Most playwrights work in the subsidised theatre sector and while permanent theatre employees may be furloughed, the freelance creative workforce – the backbone of UK theatre – is now financially distressed and at existential risk.

All playwrights are self-employed and many struggle to maintain a sustainable income from writing for the theatre. They are commissioned ahead of programming decisions and so writers whose new works may have been picked up for development this spring – providing an income to see them through the year until production – have suddenly had their livelihoods removed. Some theatre writers develop their work through diverse routes, often via Arts Council grants. The Edinburgh Festival, which has been cancelled this year, is another seedbed for new writing.

At the time of writing, Chancellor Rishi Sunak has announced a financial support package for the self-employed, with effect from June 2020. It offers grants based on 80% of a person's profits from the past three years (or less if they haven't recorded profits for three years). Those who have not submitted a tax return in 2019 or earlier aren't eligible for the support. The Arts Council has also set up an

emergency fund, which offers grants of up to £2,500 for individual creatives.

While we welcome these measures, the Theatre Committee knows that playwrights will fall between the gaps, especially newer writers who were not in a position to submit a tax return last year, or individual creatives who may not be able to give evidence of prior public subsidy – a qualification for the £2,500 Arts Council grant. As a means of supporting these writers, we are urging individual theatres who are bidding for emergency Arts Council funding to support new writing in those bids and, by extension, playwrights.

Many theatres are streaming past work during the Covid-19 crisis. This is a welcome source of income for playwrights with high-profile back catalogues and we are currently negotiating a fair package of remuneration with UK Theatre. However, UK audiences fed a digital diet of re-runs will be hungry for new work when theatres re-open and we want this anticipated need to be identified by all theatrical managements in their emergency planning – as new writing will continue to require development finance to facilitate post-Covid-19 productions on stage.

If all new writing goes dark at the same time as the theatres do, there will be nothing to light when it's all over. We need therefore to support playwrights now and feed the future of UK theatre.

Prior to the Covid-19 lockdown we had had a busy year. Last summer we surveyed WGGB theatre members to help us focus on the best way we can serve them and received over 100 responses, which was very encouraging, and will help inform our strategy going forward.

Craft committee reports

Theatre Committee member and former Co-Chair David Edgar continues to lead our negotiating team. We are close to an agreement with the National Theatre with regard to payments and rights on the live, repeat and educational streaming of their shows. We are even nearer to an agreement, to enable royalties to writers for making Royal Shakespeare Company (RSC) prompt books available for study, through a formalised collective agreement.

However, negotiations with UK Theatre (UKT) are still somewhat at an impasse, regarding a raft of proposals designed to make our Agreement more user-friendly for theatres (notably on studio theatre rates) as well as improving terms for playwrights (notably on rehearsal attendance). Surprisingly, given the benefits to theatres as well as playwrights, after five years of meetings this has still not resulted in the modified agreement the Writers' Guild originally tabled being signed off yet.

Covid-19 has made these changes even more potentially attractive, but currently our negotiations are focused on best-practice guidelines for playwrights and theatres during the emergency. We are also talking to the TNC theatres (National Theatre, RSC and Royal Court).

We held our annual Literary Managers' Forum at York Theatre Royal on 22 November 2019, with more than 40 theatres – including Leeds Playhouse, the National Theatre, Royal Exchange, Manchester, Hightide and Sheffield Theatres – represented on the day.

The forum kicked off with 'provocations' from writers Karla Marie Sweet and Rukhsana Ahmad, followed by responses and a discussion from a panel, featuring Stephanie Surr (Chief Executive of Nottingham Playhouse), Tom Bird (Executive Director of York Theatre Royal), Paul Robinson (Artistic Director of Stephen Joseph Theatre, Scarborough) and Stuart Allen (Senior Producer, Derby Theatre), with questions and comments from the audience.

The panellists were asked about their respective theatre's output and what they perceived were the greatest challenges for new writing. All were committed to it in some way, including artist development schemes, programmes to showcase 'companion pieces' by female playwrights alongside main productions, and commissions that were of relevance to the local community. However, the speakers highlighted the problems of filling main spaces and the need for more money for development.

The afternoon also featured an energised discussion around cultural appropriation, with opinion divided between those who felt writers should only write about contexts in which they had 'lived experience', and those who felt playwrights had the right to write outside their own experience.

The 2020 Writers' Guild Awards saw our stalwart panel of readers consider a total of 61 scripts for the Best Play and Best Play for Young Audiences categories. And they chose two remarkable pieces as the winners: the brave and original *Wolfie* by Ross



The Olwen Wymark Theatre Encouragement Awards were a highlight of the Theatre Committee's calendar once again and the winners were announced at the Almeida Theatre in London in February 2020

Photo: Kate Glasspool

Craft committee reports

Willis and the engaging *The Canary and the Crow* by Daniel Ward. The Best Musical Theatre Bookwriting Award this year went to *In the Willows – The Hip Hop Musical* by Poppy Burton-Morgan.

At the start of the year, Arts Council England (ACE) launched its draft 10-year strategy plan, *Let's Create*. Although the Theatre Committee applauds the prioritising of work for children and young people, we are concerned about the apparent mismatch between the rhetoric of ACE aspirations and the support it can give to artists, given the much-flagged squeeze on its funds. We have a prospective meeting with ACE and are focused on identifying a handful of recommendations. We will report back to members on these.

On 14 February 2020, our annual Olwen Wymark Theatre Encouragements Awards lunch was held at the Almeida Theatre in London. The worthy recipients were Matt Grinter (Theatre Royal Bath), Nina Hajianni and Kevin Dyer (Action Transport Theatre), Greg Mosse (Criterion New Writing scheme), Nina Kristofferson, Tessa Walker and Mike Poulton. And, as ever, this delightful event was organised, with great flair and dedication, by David James, a former Chair of the WGGB Theatre Committee, and WGGB staff member Kate Glasspool. So we thank them for this.

And, indeed, thanks to all of our dedicated and enthusiastic team on the Theatre Committee: Amelia Bulmore, Poppy Corbett, David Edgar,

Lisa Evans, Tracey Goddard, Roy Kendall, Debbie McAndrew, Brian McAvera, Alan Spence, Nick Wood and Jan Woolf.

Finally, at the time of writing this report, the UK and the world is in uncharted territory. A virus which limits the free movement and association of people has both a current and future impact on the making of, and audience for, theatre. The dust will settle on a changed world and an impoverished economy. Playwrights in the UK rely largely on public sector support for their work, and the re-shaping of that sector and this society over the years ahead will result in a collective re-appraisal of value systems. We must continue to make the case for the need for stories and for our unique ability to articulate common experience, in order to sustain the profile of theatre writing. Major shifts in process and form will be inevitable where theatre buildings themselves may or may not reopen. Our collective purpose then, perhaps, is to find a seat at the decision-makers' tables, seek out new ways of working and ensure our voices are heard when the reconstruction process begins.

Vanessa Brooks and Richard Pinner
Co-Chairs



WGGB is negotiating an agreement with the National Theatre on payments and rights for playwrights on streaming of shows

Photo: Shutterstock.com/ClaudioDivizia

Craft committee reports

VIDEOGAMES

This year the Videogames Committee has been really busy increasing the profile of the WGGB in the videogame industry. Aside from supporting the work necessary for the Writers' Guild Best Writing in a Video Game Award, the Committee has been progressing key initiatives aimed at increasing recruitment and opening up the videogames industry to a wider range of writers. We have attended talks and events to promote the work of the WGGB and continue to promote the union's work on social media.

The Committee has moved forward with a global survey of narrative working standards and conditions in the industry. We last ran such a survey when the first WGGB Videogames guidelines were produced and our intention is to revise the current guidelines once we've processed this new data. To date, we've had around 500 responses and counting, which should allow us to get a clear picture of how writers are being treated in this sector. It is hoped that revised and updated guidelines will be available later this year.

The Committee's networking events have continued (prior, of course, to the Covid-19 lockdown) and attracted up to 90 people to each evening. These events have been incredibly useful in terms of informing us about the current state of the UK industry, promoting the WGGB and increasing awareness of our videogames guidelines. This has led to an increase in the number of videogames writers recruited into WGGB. Whilst we've seen an improvement in the diversity amongst attendees, we are committed to finding ways to improve inclusivity going forward.

Our annual panel event took place in December 2019 and covered the 'do's and don'ts' of videogames writing and was followed by a networking event. This partnership with London South Bank University and the International Game Developers Association has been going for the best part of a decade. Having started as a one-off, it is now a fixture in the calendar and the Committee is immensely grateful to all those who have made this panel talk such a positive and inspirational fixture.



Against this positive news, the videogames industry has seen its own #MeToo moment that has only served to shine a light on the continuing discrimination, sexism, prejudice and abuses of power that can happen to those employed in the creative industries. There is much work to be done to protect those suffering this abuse.

As is the case with other media, Covid-19 has seen a pause in project development for many companies with some writers seeing projects postponed, or their jobs lost. It will take time to see what impact this has on the UK. Brexit is also a big concern and it is clear that this threatens many of the opportunities that support our members. The loss of free movement could have an extremely detrimental effect on both companies and individuals. As a committee we are extremely concerned about how this will affect those working in videogames narrative.

If you're a WGGB member writing in videogames and would like to join our committee or find out more about our work, we'd love to hear from you, so do drop a line to games@writersguild.org.uk

Andrew S. Walsh
Chair



The Videogames Committee is currently revising its guidelines for games writers

Photo: Shutterstock.com/para

Regional and branch reports

EAST MIDLANDS

The priority for the region is the reinvigoration of the Committee and election of a new East Midlands Chair. Anyone who is interested in leading WGGB's work in the area (or indeed would like to make a contribution to the Committee) should email admin@writersguild.org.uk for an update/further details (please put East Midlands Chair vacancy in the subject field).

LONDON AND SOUTH EAST

With my third term as regional rep coming to an end, I am hoping that – in the near future – things will be back to how they were before the Covid-19 crisis. I do look back fondly on times past, when I used to not worry about going outside and had the luxury of seeing friends without a nagging cough or sore throat meaning impending doom and isolation.

I am happy to report that membership numbers are up in the London area, and have been steadily increasing, thanks to the hard work of many, especially the WGGB staff. The new student membership package has proved popular as well.

I continue to receive emails from members in the region on a wide range of subjects, and have been very happy to help them. We also held a successful



regional event for students at London South Bank University, shortly before lockdown.

Be assured, we will be back to normal event planning as soon as it's safe to do so.

Here's to a brighter future!

Gary Thomas
Chair



WGGB staff with students at London South Bank University at our event in March 2020, just before the Covid-19 lockdown

Photo: Nadine Edwards

Regional and branch reports

NORTH WEST (MANCHESTER AND LANCASHIRE)

I was really pleased to be elected as Chair for North West (Manchester and Lancashire). After a slow start, due to personal circumstances, I look forward to connecting with everyone in the coming months and finding out how we can best support each other in the region.

As we face a time of great uncertainty as an industry, we need the WGGB more than ever.

I am looking into ways we can support each other virtually, with the hope we will soon be able to meet face to face. Do feel free to contact me about any writing issues specific to you or your area. I can't promise a resolution, but I can promise my attention. You can drop me a line on manchester@writersguild.org.uk



Rebekah Harrison
Chair

NORTH WEST (MERSEYSIDE)

The Chair of this Committee is currently vacant. Anyone who is interested in leading WGGB's work in the area (or indeed would like to make a contribution to the Committee) should email admin@writersguild.org.uk and put Merseyside Chair vacancy in the subject field.



Manchester is just one of the cities in the North of England where WGGB represents writers

Photo: Shutterstock.com/trabantos

Regional and branch reports

SCOTLAND

When I took over the Chair of the Scottish Committee in November 2019, I knew I was facing a very steep learning curve. As a Canadian who has lived most of his adult life in London, my knowledge of Scotland was limited to my grandfather's stories of his childhood in Govanhill. Beyond a fleeting visit to Glasgow as Chair of the Television Committee some years back, my grasp of the problems facing Scottish writers was woefully inadequate.

I knew stepping into Ali Rutherford and Julie Ann Thomason's shoes would be a challenge, but I never imagined how vertiginous the learning curve would be. I write this report in the third week of quarantine, as desperate as anyone else for answers about our future.

In 2008, Obama's economic advisor, Rahm Emanuel, said every crisis is also an opportunity. It was true then and is no less true now. The key is in how we grasp this challenge. It may take a catastrophe before real change can happen in human societies, but it doesn't mean it will. Or that the right lessons will be learned.

It has been sad and frustrating over the past few weeks that the Scottish Committee newsletters and updates on emergency funds and other vital information we have been sending out only reach a fifth to a quarter of the writers in the country. Many of those who never saw the point of a trade union or thought themselves beyond the need of its support and organisation now find themselves in dire straits with no idea who to turn to. I fervently hope that all writers come through this in good health and relatively unscathed. And that, as the crisis fades, we remember how weak we are as individuals and how much stronger we can be as we rebuild our industry if we join forces as a union and work together.

I also hope that we permanently embrace the technologies that are keeping us connected at the moment and that we realise their enormous potential beyond this crisis. Getting people together for meetings in rooms and halls in big population centres was a powerful organising tool – in the last but one century. We have far more powerful tools at our fingertips now, tools which can vastly extend our reach and make us stronger than ever.



SCOTTISH COMMITTEE

Given the size of the country, and the dispersion of writers across its length and breadth, it has been a challenge to contact, let alone meet and organise our members. However, in March, eight writers across almost all the craft areas and from the Shetlands to the Borders 'met up' via Zoom. Without having to waste time, money or carbon on long journeys, we held a meeting as efficient and as far-reaching in its discussions as any I have ever attended in the flesh. In fact, far more focused and efficient. The enthusiasm of those who attended was enormous. Their depth of knowledge and experience is beyond value. And their commitment to meet regularly for the foreseeable future means we have an effective and fully functional Committee. I am profoundly indebted to Áine King, Norman Bissell, Jillian Mannion, Ali Rutherford, Julie Ann Thomason, Grant McGregor and Jules Horne. With their combined energies, I believe we can make a real difference in the years to come.

LOCAL MEETINGS

For the duration of the crisis, in the absence of being able to travel or meet, we will be organising virtual meetings of writers around the country. Even after the crisis is over, we hope to make them regular events, both to complement local events and meetings and as a way of joining up far-flung writers who can't always make it to meetings but would like the opportunity to meet other writers and to network.

CREATIVE SCOTLAND

Top of pretty much every conversation I've had with Scottish writers centres around the problems they've had accessing funding.

Regional and branch reports

The recent report to the Scottish Government on Creative Scotland, *Putting Artists in the Picture*, revealed a deep unease across the creative industries about the inadequacies in Creative Scotland's funding processes – and an awareness at Creative Scotland and in the Scottish Government that things need to change.

Clearly there are issues here, which we intend to raise with Creative Scotland and others over the coming year.

COVID-19

In early April, through a consultation by Culture Counts, the WGGB submitted a request to the Scottish Cabinet Secretary for Economy, Fair work and Culture, for Universal Basic Income to be made to freelance workers not covered by the UK Government's provisions. We have lobbied MPs and MSPs to recognise that freelance workers cannot wait until June for relief from the complete lack of work. The situation is fast changing and keeping on top of it and keeping our members informed has been a challenge.

SCOTTISH CREATIVE INDUSTRIES

There is a pressing need for a shift in mindset in Creative Scotland and in the Scottish Government's policies towards the creative industries. Their consistent relegation to the realm of 'culture' indicates a deep, fundamental lack of understanding of their enormous economic and societal potential, how the entire cultural landscape operates as an ecosystem, and how it must be seen and supported holistically.

Arguably it is stopping the Scottish creative industries from fulfilling their potential and that potential will be sorely needed if the economy is to recover from the current crisis.

I sincerely hope that this report finds all our members safe and well and not in financial hardship. Even with social distancing, we can remain connected and stronger together.

Bill Armstrong
Chair



WGGB members from the Shetlands to the Borders are meeting up via Zoom during Covid-19 to discuss issues affecting the creative industries in Scotland

Photo: Shutterstock.comStefano_Valeri

Regional and branch reports

SOUTH WEST (DEVON AND CORNWALL)

My recovery from ill health, plus a pressing deadline for completion of the editing of my new book, both contributed to the restrictions on my participation in the progression of plans for the region this past year.

Happily, I have now made a full recovery and the editing of my book is again on schedule, and I now anticipate being in a position to get the South West (Devon and Cornwall) region active again, pending developments with Covid-19, of course.

When the lockdown is over, I look forward to meeting up with lots of members during the coming 12 months and supporting them in the region.



Please do feel free to contact me about any WGGB issues specific to you or the WGGB South West (Devon and Cornwall) area. You can contact me by email on: swdc@writersguild.org.uk

Malcolm Kat
Chair



Meet-ups for members in Cornwall and Devon will get underway as soon as the Covid-19 lockdown is lifted

Photo: Shutterstock.com/IanWoolcock

Regional and branch reports

SOUTH WEST (WESSEX)

It remains my absolute privilege to continue to represent and serve the fabulous and talented writers in the Wessex region. While I'm not sure any of us are ready for a formal Committee quite yet, a plea at the 2019 WGGB AGM means I feel at least 10 per cent less of a one-man band.

I've met with union members who are interested in organising informal evenings of conversation, support and readings from unpublished work, and with Tom Williams of the Film Committee, I sketched out plans for a more formal screenwriting event in Bristol. Inspired by Channel 4's decision to create a hub in Bristol (complete with its own drama commissioner), I envisaged an interview-based evening to explore what it's like being a scriptwriter (or writer/producer) in our region. WGGB members Ashley Pharoah (*Life on Mars*) and Dan Sefton (*Good Karma Hospital*) are happy to be involved, and Channel 4 is keen to be represented as well.

The plan was for this latter event to be a joint Writers' Guild/Royal Television Society (RTS) evening, at the Watershed, in April 2020. Fiona Francombe, Studio Director of the Bottle Yard Studios in Bristol, was hoping to chair, with the RTS' Suzy Lambert effectively producing the event. Of course, Covid-19 knocked everything on the head, but the intention remains undimmed and the relationships I've built up are strong and valuable. When this event finally takes place (it's a matter of timing, not likelihood), I'm pretty sure it will be the biggest event the Wessex region of the Writers' Guild has organised in the past 25 years.



As well as new links with the West of England RTS centre, we've continued to talk with the TUC in the region. As a result of these contacts, I was invited to the Old Vic in January for the official launch of the Channel 4 hub. The event was hosted by the Mayor of Bristol and it was great to be able to discuss the work of WGGB with a variety of industry people, academics and politicians. There was a palpable sense of 'Let's keep talking and we'll see where it takes us'.

Now well into my second three-year stint as Wessex Chair, I've been able to attend most of the Executive Council meetings in London, and continue to keep in touch with individual members via email and deal with any incoming queries that I can. I'm not absolutely sure things will ever return to normal after Covid-19, but looking ahead I am keen to do what I can to further increase the profile of the Writers' Guild in the area.

Martin Day
Chair



WGGB attended the launch of the Channel 4 hub in Bristol this year

Photo: Shutterstock.com/Sion Hannuna

Regional and branch reports



Manon Eames (left) and Anna-Lisa Jenaer (right), Co-Chairs

WALES

Writers in Wales continue to be at a disadvantage compared to those elsewhere but there are glimmers of hope as a number of series produced in Wales, such as *Keeping Faith*, *Bang* and *Hidden*, are now reaching a wider, non-Welsh speaking audience.

However, series that are filmed back-to-back in Welsh and English can cause problems for Welsh-language screenwriters when episodes are originated in English, as their role is then often relegated to ‘translators’ rather than creators of original content. The increasing popularity of European subtitled series should mean that an English language version as well as Welsh would become unnecessary. This would be welcomed, as frequently the demands of back-to-back production have an impact on the production values of both versions. However, the financial pressure on companies to co-produce impacts this directly. S4C was the initial commissioner/co-production partner for the above series, and although the BBC also eventually invested in them, the Committee is still having to monitor English language original drama actually commissioned directly by BBC Wales, as it is thin on the ground. We receive regular complaints from members that far too much of the talent in the productions which BBC Wales does produce comes from outside Wales.

In particular, the Committee and WGGB members were concerned by the departure of Simon Winstone as Head of Drama for Wales at BBC Studios, and the news that he would not be

replaced. WGGB General Secretary Ellie Peers raised the matter on our behalf with BBC Studios Productions who responded that they are currently reviewing scripted leadership overall, and working on plans to deliver more drama from the Nations and Regions. Of course, at the time of writing, Covid-19 is placing huge pressure on the sector, but we will continue to monitor developments and work hard on behalf of screenwriters in Wales.

On a positive note, Helen Perry at BBC Writersroom Wales continues to promote Wales-based writing through the Welsh Voices and Wales Writer in Residence programmes. She also organised the BBC Writersroom Wales Festival in November 2019. While this is to be applauded, it remains the case that forging a writing career in Wales is really only achievable through regular work on the only Wales-based continuing drama series, *Pobol y Cwm*, or continuing drama series produced in England.

Meanwhile, a new deal regarding S4C’s drama output on digital platforms is in the process of being incorporated into WGGB’s TAC/S4C agreement and will be backdated to 1 December 2018.

In theatre, a spate of successful Welsh-origin productions at the Sherman Theatre, Cardiff, legacy of the artistic directorship of Rachel O’ Riordan, who left the Sherman last year, have been a positive development. At the time of writing, the theatre sector is facing an unprecedented challenge due to the Covid-19 lockdown. We can only hope that, once normality has resumed, this progress will continue under the Sherman Theatre’s new Artistic Director Joe Murphy, who came to speak to Welsh members shortly after his appointment. He spoke

Regional and branch reports

of his desire to turn the Sherman into the Royal Court of Wales and focus on original Welsh content, and prior to Covid-19 he had announced an exciting season which included plenty of Welsh-based writing talent. We are also hoping to meet with the new Artistic Director at National Theatre Wales, Lorne Campbell, when he has settled in post. And we are planning to re-establish regular meetings with Arts Council Wales theatre officers during 2020, to keep writers' perspectives and profile on their radar, and to ensure that they receive the support they need in the challenging times that playwrights currently face due to Covid-19.

The Committee continues to liaise with writers from other Celtic nations. In November 2019, WGGB theatre representative Alun Saunders was invited to attend the Ceangal/Dolen conference at Theatre Scotland in Glasgow, organised by Theatre Gu Leor, a gathering of artists and theatre makers working in Irish and Scottish Gaelic and Welsh. The conference was a fantastic opportunity to build relations between companies, bodies and individuals working in minority languages.

In publishing, the Committee noted with sadness the closure of Gwasg Gomer's publishing department after 127 years in operation. Gomer will continue to produce and print books but its demise is an indication of the great pressures facing the literary sector in Wales.

The handful of stalwart Welsh Committee members continue to do their best to address all these challenges for the benefit of all writers in Wales. However, we are still having to appeal to members to become more actively involved with the union and

with fighting for their rights, ever more important at a time when writers are facing an unprecedented challenge to their livelihoods. Covid-19 aside, writers in Wales, as elsewhere, are still being expected to do unpaid development work and the scarcity of opportunity means that they feel they have no option but to tolerate the situation. Once the Covid-19 lockdown is lifted, we hope to continue to try to hold recruitment events to encourage writers to get more involved in their own futures.

As ever, the Welsh Committee would like to thank WGGB General Secretary Ellie Peers and her team for their hard work, support and commitment in helping achieve better conditions for writers in Wales.

Finally, many members will have been saddened by the news of the passing of Terry Hands, who gave so many artists in Wales such opportunities when he came to Clwyd Theatr Cymru in 1997. He was driven, committed, passionate and skilled, and although he retired a few years ago, his influence on Welsh theatre will not be forgotten. Diolch, Terry.

And at the time of writing this report we were devastated to learn of the death of Othniel Smith, our loyal Committee Secretary for over 20 years, and Siôn Eirian, another stalwart of our Committee. You can read obituaries on the WGGB website (www.writersguild.org.uk/category/obituaries) and we send our sincere condolences to Siôn and Othniel's family and friends. They will both be hugely missed, not least by the Welsh Committee.

Manon Eames and Anna-Lisa Jenaer
Co-Chairs



Covid-19 is throwing unprecedented challenges at writers in Wales and the Welsh Committee has been continuing to work hard on their behalf

Photo: Shutterstock.com/Stephen Rees

Regional and branch reports

WEST MIDLANDS

I took over as Regional Representative for the West Midlands during this year, and what's struck me most is just how much our region is plugged in to the national Writers' Guild. While it's true that both of the union's Deputy Chairs are on our Committee, the real factor underpinning the strength of activity in the West Midlands is the level of support we receive from the national office in terms of our aims for local members.

Any change in Regional Representative comes with a chance for review. This year we have divided our time between planning our usual events, and examining the things we do – and with whom. There have also been some changes to the Committee, with the introduction of new blood. This brings not only fresh views on and contributions to our regional activities, but also ensures diversity in what is one of the most ethnically diverse regions in the country.

One of the most important factors contributing to West Midlands' level of activity is that we work so closely with other arts organisations in the area. This year, for instance, we again supported the Royal Television Society with its extremely successful careers fair for school leavers, held at Edgbaston Stadium. A direct result of this was new membership, as fledgling writers took advantage of WGGB's new student discounted package. We also spoke and ran events at the National Writers' Conference for Writing West Midlands.



While organisations such as Arts Connect, Screen Central and many others remain important to us, we've cultivated new connections, including working with the Commonwealth Games' Cultural Programme. This programme is set to run in the West Midlands from March to September 2022, and I'm proud to say that the Writers' Guild is already actively involved. The Games represent an opportunity for the region's members, and we have worked hard to ensure the programme pays industry rates.

That sums up our year, and really the Writers' Guild: we are about creating and finding opportunities for our members, and making sure writers are paid fairly for the work they do.

As well as all of the above activities, our 'Networking' social events remain a regular calendar highlight (currently on hold at the time of writing as a result of Covid-19), encouraging those active in the region's creative industries to gather for informal drinks and chat. Why not join us some time?

Martin Sketchley
Chair



Birmingham is just one of the areas the West Midlands Committee has members in

Photo: Shutterstock.com/trabantos

Regional and branch reports

YORKSHIRE AND NORTH EAST

It continues to be my pleasure to represent the WGGB in Yorkshire and the North East. I very much enjoy helping our region's members with whatever challenges or problem they face. If you have anything I can help with, or any constructive feedback, please don't hesitate to get in touch by email: yorksne@writersguild.org.uk

It's been a busy year for the region, with Channel 4's Leeds base up and running, and with a host of new arrivals to the region in the wake of the channel's move – with both the trade body PACT and the National Film and Television school opening their first out-of-London offices in the region, along with a number of new indies. There is already a sense that this can only lead to more opportunities for creatives in the region, particularly in offering opportunities and training to new writers – for example, via Screen Yorkshire's Beyond Brontës scheme. As so many of us know, finding a first foothold in the industry is often the toughest thing. Living a long way from the capital has often been seen a disadvantage in getting ahead, so it's heartening to see real, practical changes occurring.



However, for writers in every discipline, these are very challenging times. We are all used to uncertainty in our working lives, but nothing on this scale. I hope that writers in our region feel like the WGGB is there for them, not just right now, but in the months ahead. It's important that regional voices continue to be heard, and that means they need support during hard times.

Here's hoping that we can continue to pull together and use our voices and our creativity to make sense of this unprecedented time.

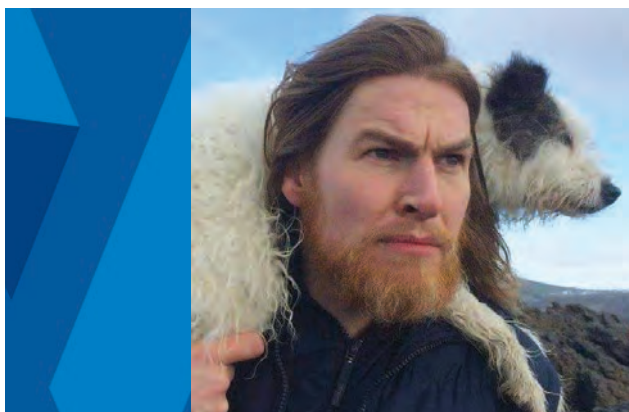
David Allison
Chair



Leeds is just one area WGGB represents in the North East

Photo: [Shutterstock.com/SAKhanPhotography](https://www.shutterstock.com/SAKhanPhotography)

Other reports



Thom Fell (left) and Jenifer Toksvig (right), Co-Chairs

EDITORIAL AND COMMUNICATIONS

The Editorial and Communications Committee has seen a change this year, with Jenifer Toksvig and Thom Fell taking over as Co-Chairs from Piers Beckley. Whilst two bums to one chair is a little uncomfortable, and we cannot hope to live up to Piers' amazing work, we are slowly finding our way around.

INTERNAL COMMS

For example, it is particularly important that every committee is connected to the hub of the Equality and Diversity Committee, to ensure that their important work underpins everything we do.

Regional Representatives can provide a crucial local connection for Craft Committees who are considering anything involving a specific writer or company. Their connectivity within the main framework of the union is just as important as their connectivity to the members in their region.

Our aim is to ensure that these internal conduits of communication are accessible, and actively deployed.

In other news...

FREE IS NOT AN OPTION

We will soon have a comprehensive collection of craft-specific, flowcharts guiding writers through the choppy waters of whether or not they should work for free.

WELCOME PACK AND CHAIR TRAINING

Sitting down in a Committee Chair can be a daunting task, particularly for those who don't have any practical training in running formal meetings. With that in mind, we are preparing a Welcome Pack of basic information, as well as some training sessions to help members carry out their practical duties and achieve the best-practice models to which we aspire.

ACADEMIA

As for the future, we anticipate connecting with the new WGGB Higher Education Network of members, to consider the complex world of writers working in academia.

The 'communications' part of Editorial & Communications is obviously fundamental to what we do, as a union and also as writers. We encourage members to reach out to us about any aspect of comms within (or without) WGGB. The best way for us to know what needs addressing is for you to let us know.

Thom Fell and Jenifer Toksvig
Co-Chairs

Other reports



Sukey Fisher (left) and Sumerah Srivastav (right), Co-Chairs

EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY

The brand new Equality and Diversity Committee exists to advise the Executive Council (EC) on issues facing professional writers from groups and communities currently under-represented in the creative industries and to suggest strategies to address the disparity.

It moved from a working group to a formalised Committee in June 2019. Thereafter we were both appointed and took our seats on the EC as Co-Chairs.

In the short time the Committee has been operating, it has engaged in the following:

- Actively recruited members to join the Committee.
- Been a voice for equality and diversity issues that include providing comment to industry media.
- Performed an analysis of the diversity make-up of members within the Writers' Guild.
- Liaised with other WGGB Committees and external organisations to share knowledge and best practice where our agendas align.



The Committee is currently across the following WGGB projects:

- Project Diamond
- Report It!
- Equality Writes
- Stop Think Commission
- FEU Women in the Creative Industries event (now postponed due to Covid-19).

Following the tragic death of George Floyd and the worldwide Black Lives Matter movement the WGGB joined many others in observing #BlackOutTuesday. The Equality and Diversity Committee is formulating an action plan to best support our BAME members and the issues they face. Should members wish to input into the discussion please contact:

ED@writersguild.org.uk.

We also urge anyone who has suffered racial discrimination to utilise our Report It! survey and let the Writers' Guild know. All instances reported can remain anonymous if preferred. Go to www.writersguild.org.uk/report-it.

If you think you could help the Equality and Diversity Committee in our vital work we are always looking for new members. You don't have to have any experience, and it only takes a few hours each quarter. Just email ED@writersguild.org.uk to volunteer.

Thanks to the following people who served on the Committee this year: Mike Elliston, Faisal Qureshi, Guleraana Mir, Leonie Abrahamson, Tracy Goddard, Shai Hussain, Annalisa Dinnella, Kay Stonham, Samantha Horley, Chaand Chazelle and Gary Thomas

**Sukey Fisher and Sumerah Srivastav
Co-Chairs**

Obituaries

WGGB has sadly lost some long-standing members in 2019-20, who have contributed to the strength of the union over many years. We would like to remember all of the following members, listed below (obituaries can be found on our website: www.writersguild.org.uk/category/obituaries/).

Othniel Smith: 1962-2020

Charles Wood: 1932-2020

Terrance Dicks: 1935-2019

Peter Nichols: 1927-2019

Delyth George: 1960-2019

Alan Drury: 1949-2019

Terence Frisby: 1932-2020

Wally K. Daly: 1940-2020

Siôn Eirian: 1954-2020

**Published by Writers' Guild of Great Britain,
134 Tooley Street, London SE1 2TU, June 2020**

The Writers' Guild of Great Britain has made best efforts to ensure all information in this annual report is correct at the time of going to press.

Design: www.savageandgray.co.uk

Please contact us if you need a large-print or text-only version of this report.

Email: admin@writersguild.org.uk

Tel: **020 7833 0777**