



## WGGB AGM 2019 DRAFT MINUTES

Monday 24<sup>th</sup> June 2019 - Unicorn Theatre, 147 Tooley Street, London SE1 2HZ.

### **Chair's Opening Remarks**

The Chair opened the meeting by welcoming members and asking anyone who didn't want to be photographed to let the photographer know. Registration numbers were checked and the meeting was declared quorate with 28 full members, though more joined later. She asked anyone who had to leave to let the EC know so that the meeting stayed quorate. She announced that election results would be tweeted by MH who would tweet what members say.

### **I. Standing Orders Committee Report**

NY said the committee had looked at the agenda and motions and that everything was in order and in keeping with WGGB rules and Walter Citrine's book on chairmanship. All motions must be proposed and seconded by full members. A proposer can speak for five minutes and other speakers for three minutes. Speakers were asked to give their name and status. A speaker can only speak to a proposal once and once to each amendment. Amendments must be written down and passed by the Standing Orders Committee. Amendments are considered in the order they are received. Full and life members may vote on motions. A two-thirds majority is needed for rule changing motions and a simple majority for other motions.

### **2. Appointment of tellers**

TW and DC were appointed.

### **3. Minutes of the 2018 AGM.**

**The Chair invited members to vote to accept the minutes. Katharine Way proposed to accept them. Gary Thomas seconded.**

**The vote to accept the minutes was unanimously carried.**

### **4. Chair's report**

GR made her last speech as WGGB chair and celebrated the work of WGGB in its 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary year. She highlighted the equality and diversity campaigning during the year. She said she was proud to be handing over at a time when WGGB had more staff and was in a better position financially. She thanked and congratulated EC members. She said the WGA dispute over packaging in the US has resulted in showrunners sending out calls for writers by Twitter, bypassing agents. She told the meeting that CDS writers, who write award winning shows in difficult circumstances and who are often strung along for years, are now entitled to a rebrief fee, thanks to WGGB. She said that if most commissioned scripts are rejected the problem is with production and not the writers. Some executives are writing scripts themselves under pseudonyms. She encouraged Guild members to contact WGGB about such practices and to take control of their own careers. She encouraged members to pay heed to new platforms.

**JW proposed to accept the Chair's report. AW seconded. The report was overwhelmingly accepted.**

## **5. General Secretary's Report**

The General Secretary said WGGB is on the right path with multiple campaigns and negotiations and increased membership but is facing the chaos of Brexit. She spoke about the strength that comes from collaborating, with other writers and with union organisations such as the Federation of Entertainment Unions, International Affiliation of Writers' Guilds and the TUC. She said that, while it is easy to pick off one writer, it is not so easy to pick off a group. For instance on soaps a producer said writing storylines was not a separate job and so did not deserve a fee. The writers stood together, communicating via WGGB and storylining is now paid for separately. Some theatres are not complying with agreements. WGGB has been challenging them and putting forward proposals to update the agreements, for instance making it easier for them to pay for unperformed plays. The right of a writer to attend rehearsals has been maintained. A play commissioned by the Royal Court, RSC or National Theatre is now paid a minimum of £13,000. Practices on soaps have improved thanks to WGGB challenging unacceptable numbers of rewrites. But it is easy for things to backslide with a change of producer or script editor. WGGB now has a reporting feature going up on the website which can be anonymous. Other issues have included an iPlayer extension at the BBC and live streaming at the National.

This is the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the PLR. WGGB members played a big part in its creation. Campaigns are to be launched on self-publishing and against professional writers working for free. Broadcasters have been saying gender equality is getting better but WGGB research showed nothing has changed in 15 years. Broadcasters are no longer denying there is an issue. The BBC now has a diversity group for writers. WGGB has been challenging Project Diamond to provide programme level data since there are huge variations in gender balance and diversity among writers from series to series. WGGB has been partnering with Equity and the MU on Breaking the Class Ceiling. The General Secretary thanked WGGB staff and the writers who give their time to build regional and craft committees, recruit new members and mentor activists. She gave special thanks to the outgoing President Olivia Hetreed who led the campaign against bullying and harassment in film and to the outgoing Chair Gail Renard who has led WGGB through many struggles including staff restructuring.

**JT proposed to accept the General Secretary's report. DC seconded. The proposal was passed overwhelmingly.**

## **6. Finance report and presentation and adoption of audited accounts**

EP reported that WGGB is in good financial health. The balance carried forward is £579,472. A lot was spent on contract vetting. IT has been revamped. £11,000 was paid in corporation tax. EP invited interest in taking on the treasurer role. Any candidates must have served on the Executive Committee for two years at any time.

JW asked why subs income had gone down when membership had increased. It was explained that there had been a windfall in the previous year of £90,000 collected by PayPal which had not been passed on to WGGB and this inflated the income figure for that year.

KW asked whether payments previously made to WGGB by ITV were now going to Writers' Digital Payments. EP confirmed that this was the case.

**KW proposed to accept the accounts. LL seconded. The proposal was overwhelmingly accepted.**

## **7. Appointment of auditors**

The Chair explained the role of the auditors and proposed that Gillespie Inverarity & Co Ltd should be reappointed. **TS proposed acceptance of the auditors and AW seconded. The proposal was overwhelmingly accepted.**

## **8. Guest Speaker**

The Chair introduced guest speaker Saskia Schuster, Controller for Comedy at ITV, who reached out to WGGB after the publication of its equality report, which showed only 11% of writers in comedy are female. She investigated why she wasn't being pitched to by female writers. She changed her commissioning process to make sure producers were bringing female writers and characters into every show. She said the industry is beginning to change but it is very slow. Producers are beginning to see a female writer as a reason to recommend a show. Saskia Schuster is holding one open afternoon a month to meet writers who find it difficult to access production. She encouraged writers to be less humble and to BRAG in the first paragraph. She then took questions from the floor and there was a discussion about commissioning, payments and the need for a calling card script. TF asked what he could do as a man and whether he could stipulate a 50/50 gender balance if he got a room and Saskia Schuster said she would be on board with that if she was commissioning. The Chair thanked Saskia Schuster for reaching out to WGGB and for her talk, which was warmly received.

## **9. Results of elections**

The General Secretary thanked the outgoing members of the Executive Committee for their hard work, including Line Langebek and Andrea Gibb, co-chairs of the Film Committee; Jen Toksvig and David Edgar as theatre co-chairs; Piers Beckley as Ed Comms chair; Tim Stimpson as West Midlands chair; Lisa Holdsworth as deputy chair of the Executive Committee; Olivia Hetreed as president and Gail Renard as Chair.

The following were nominated and uncontested and so were duly elected:

Lisa Holdsworth – Chair

Sandi Toksvig – President

Tim Stimpson – Deputy Chair

William Gallagher – Deputy Chair

Dave Cohen and Nat Tapley – Comedy co-chairs

Richard Pinner and Vanessa Brooks – Theatre co-chairs

Nicholas McInerney – Radio chair

Tom Williams – Film chair

Jen Toksvig and Tom Fell – Ed Comms co-chairs

Corinne Sweet and Nick Yapp – Books co-chairs

Emma Reeves – Television chair

Martin Day – South West/Wessex chair

Nominations for vacancies will be invited – for instance Treasurer. The new and existing chairs were reminded of the need to re-form their respective committees and appoint members to those committees.

The meeting adjourned at 12 for an early lunch.

DC left at 1.30pm and Gary Thomas took his place as teller.

LH took over as chair from GR. She reminded everyone that if she stood during a discussion it should stop immediately.

## 10. Motions

**Motion I – Equality and Diversity representative** *to create a new seat on the EC for an Equality and Diversity representative.*

Proposer: SF Seconder: SS

This motion is supported by the EC. It is a rule-changing motion and requires a two-thirds majority.

Proposing the motion, SF said the co-chairs had been looking at WGGB's work dealing with protected characteristics. Existing officers and EC members make up the group developing into a committee. The

group represents every protected characteristic and craft area. Anyone with a protected characteristic is welcome to attend the meetings.

Speakers from the floor expressed approval that WGGB was using equality legislation in this way. There was clarification of the term protected characteristics and whether someone could self identify as having one.

**The motion was then put to the vote. It was passed unanimously.**

**Motion 2 – Proposed new membership criteria rules** – to clarify and simplify the rules for becoming a full member. Delete sections 5.1 (a) and 5.1 (b) and insert the following:

“5.1 (i) A Full Member shall be any person 18 years of age and over who has achieved one or more of the following statuses, subject to the discretion of the Executive Council.

- (a) Has written one or more pieces of work under contract for which payment has been received at or above the minimum rates as defined by the current agreements negotiated by the WGGB.
- (b) Has received a gross income from non-journalistic writing in any single year which totals more than £5,000
- (c) At the discretion of the relevant Craft Committee as approved by the Executive Council

Proposer: PB Seconder: JT This motion is supported by the EC. As it is a rule-changing motion it requires a two-thirds majority.

A friendly amendment was added at lunchtime: to add ‘under exceptional circumstances’ to (c).

Proposing, PB talked through the reasons for the motion. The new criteria replace the existing points based system. It allows for discretion where someone is not quite reaching the contract rates. This would help poets and videogames writers in particular. Seconding, JT said it is a simplification of the rules and a warmer invitation to potential members.

Speakers from the floor asked whether the figures applied to gross or net income and the answer was gross. Another speaker asked whether the applicant would have to wait for the next committee meeting for a decision but the proposer said it can be discussed and agreed over email as happens currently. JW asked whether the figure of £5,000 would have to be changed every year. The proposer said to change the number would mean another rule changing motion. Discussion of the motion was suspended while an amendment was drafted.

*To replace the words ‘non journalistic writing’ with ‘non journalistic and non-copywriting writing’.*

**DJ proposed to accept the amendment. LH seconded.**

JT said the amendment could only be added if copywriters are catered for by another union. The amendment was removed until there was more clarification on this issue.

Two friendly amendments were proposed.

*To add to 5.1 (i) (b): ‘which totals more than the amount defined in Appendix F to the rulebook’*

*To insert in appendix F: ‘The amount defined on 5.1 (b) of £5,000’.*

There was further discussion of the amount of £5,000 and who might be excluded by it. The proposer said applicants who did not meet this rate could be covered by other criteria. DE said WGGB wants to be as open and welcoming as possible but to prevent the Guild from being flooded with people who are not serious writers. Several speakers argued that any vagueness would be dealt with by the EC and rates of pay were not likely to rise very quickly so the figure of £5,000 would be valid for some time.

**The motion was put to the vote. There were 32 in favour and 5 against with no abstentions. The motion was carried.**

### **Motion 3: Introduction of new membership level, student membership.**

*To insert after paragraph 5.1 (v): “(vi) A Student Member shall be any person 18 years of age or over studying for a course at BA level or below who has never previously been a member of WGGB.”*

*To insert after paragraph 5.4 (iv) the following: “(v) A Student Member who is in benefit shall be entitled to attend General Meetings of the Guild and may speak on any matter but may not vote; and shall be entitled to services and benefits of the Guild at the discretion of the Executive Council.”*

*To replace the words “Candidate/Group Membership” in the title of section 23.12 with the words “Other Membership Categories” and to insert the words “Student Members” between the words “Candidate Members” and “Group Members” in the paragraph so that it reads “The level of subscription payable by Candidate Members, Student Members, Group Members and Affiliate Members shall be decided annually at the discretion of the Executive Council.*

Proposer: PB; Seconder: MD. This motion is supported by the EC. It is a rule-changing motion and requires a two-thirds majority.

Proposing, PB explained that the reason for offering the new membership category is that WGGB is often asked for it and other FEU unions have it. Students would have low cost entry with limited services and no contract vetting or legal advice. The category would apply to students studying at BA level. The suggested rate is £30 a year. Speakers from the floor welcomed the proposal, saying it supported students in taking their writing seriously and would sell the idea of a trade union in the entertainment industry to them. On the other hand, Olivia Hetreed expressed concern that writers at BA level will not necessarily go on to a professional writing career. In the detail of WGGB rules no one can be excluded from contract vetting. EP clarified that MA students would need to be candidate members. This category is for aspiring writers. AW proposed an amendment and discussion of the motion was suspended while the wording of the proposed amendment was agreed.

*To add to 5.1 (b):’ with the exception of contract vetting, external legal advice and casework’.*

JT supported the motion, which would help WGGB's aim of developing a stronger relationship with academic institutions. It would lead to future candidate members and support peer development. LL added it would increase the diversity of the membership.

**LH proposed to vote to accept the amendment. It was unanimously with 37 in favour.**

The amended motion was then debated. Speakers from the floor discussed issues of inclusion. SF said the industry has high walls, even for people from cultural insider backgrounds. TS said young people should be encouraged to know they have rights. DE said it would be morally important to be clear on the website about what student members are getting. LG clarified that the new category would include students on very short courses below BA level. A member could stay as a student member until they needed contract vetting etc. Direct debit would not be available to avoid admin costs.

**The motion was put to the vote and overwhelmingly passed with 35 in favour, 1 against and 1 abstention.**

**Motion 4: Clarification on eligibility criteria for General Secretary seat on the Executive Council (EC) compared with other EC seats.**

*To insert at the end of Rule 13.2 the words “The eligibility criteria for the General Secretary are different and are covered under Rule 21.”*

Proposer: GR

Seconder: LH.

This motion is a rule-changing motion and therefore requires a two-thirds majority.

A friendly amendment was proposed to replace 'he/she' with 'they' as in 'unless they have been a member of the Guild'.

GR explained the difference in status between an elected EC member and the General Secretary who is both elected and an employee.

**The motion was put to the vote and passed unanimously.**

**Motion 5: Clarification on election and term for General Secretary compared with other EC seats.**

To insert the words “(except for the General Secretary)” after the words ‘Each member of the Executive Council’ in Rule 13.3 and to insert the words “The election and term for the General Secretary is different and is covered under Rule 21” at the end of Rule 13.3.

Proposer: GR.

Seconder: LH.

This is a rule-changing motion and requires a two thirds majority.

**The motion was put to the vote and passed unanimously.**

**Motion 6: Lobbying Government to establish minimum terms and conditions for those in receipt of public funding.**

*This AGM resolves to work alongside Equity and other willing members of the Federation of Entertainment Unions (FEU) in lobbying government to make use of recognized industry minimum terms and conditions be obligatory for theatre producers who are in receipt of public funding through such schemes as Theatre Tax Relief or Arts Council funding.*

Proposer: JT

Seconder: DM.

This motion is supported by the Theatre Committee. It is not a rule changing motion and therefore requires a simple majority.

Proposing JT said Fin Kennedy had started the campaign In Battalions in response to cuts in ACE funding which were affecting the production of new plays. This led to the introduction of Theatre tax relief, which allows theatres to claim, back 25% for touring productions and 20% for others. However the companies benefitting are not obliged to have union agreements. The motion proposes ACE funding should be contingent on appropriate agreements being used.

**The motion was put to the vote and passed overwhelmingly with 35 in favour and 1 against.**

**Motion 7: Support the young people's climate crisis strike on 20 September.**

Friendly amendment: to delete ‘and we will strike with them’ and insert ‘and we will support their strike’. Speakers from the floor discussed what it would mean to support the strike without joining in and the possible legal obstacles to striking without going through the correct procedures. There was also discussion about whether the union has voted on an unrelated political topic before. LH said WGGB made a statement

on the bombing of Syria and on Salman Rushdie. OH said members can make individual decisions over whether to strike. Other unions have declared climate emergency and are active.

**The motion was put to the vote and carried overwhelmingly with 37 in favour and 2 abstentions.**

**Motion 8: Call for WGGB to declare a climate emergency and publish a statement**

*The AGM resolves to declare a climate emergency and the WGGB will put a 'Culture Declares Emergency' statement on its website in line with other culture creators. From now on, we will work to put the climate crisis at the heart of all we do. In doing this we recognize the existential threat that climate breakdown threatens. We recognize that a hospitable/liveable climate is a basic/primary need that all humans (whether writers or not) need to live, work and play.*

Proposer: LL. Seconder: OH.

*The motion is not a rule-changing motion and requires a simple majority.*

Proposing, LL said she did not see the motion as a party political issue. WGGB would encourage our members to tell the truth and promote discussion through their work. We would use our voices to publicise climate injustice and acknowledge what art can do in terms of responding.

**A friendly amendment was proposed to add "subject to approval by the Executive Committee" to the motion after the words 'culture creators'. This was agreed.**

PB asked whether the motion, if passed, would mean WGGB's Chair couldn't fly to attend a conference. Speakers from the floor argued that words must be matched with action. JW said members would need to see the statement before agreeing on it. OH said 400 arts organisations have signed to support the emergency. She said being carbon neutral is the issue, not flying somewhere to attend a meeting. Thinking about the issues is different from telling writers what to write.

**SSa proposed an amendment to cut the motion after 'subject to EC approval'. PB seconded. The amendment was put to the vote and passed overwhelmingly with 33 in favour, 4 against and 2 abstentions.**

Speakers from the floor discussed the amended motion, suggesting it should be referred to the EC for detailed discussion and that it should include concrete action.

**The amended motion was then put to the vote and passed overwhelmingly with 39 in favour, 1 against and 1 abstention.**

There was a tea break. The meeting resumed at 3.45pm.

EP read out the rule about WGGB's non-political status. It is not party political but much of what WGGB does is political eg speaking to cross party MPs about Brexit.

## **11. Annual report.**

### **Books**

NY spoke about PLR which provided £2m in 1979 for books borrowed from the library. The figures lag behind. It should be £11m by now but is about £8m. The books committee is discussing what would be a fair payment. The committee is working with JS on rogue publishers. Some of these have nominated books for the WGGB awards but these are not award winning material. The committee is also getting in touch with creative writing courses and asking them if they would like speakers. TF suggested Books liaise with Ed Comms over outreach.

MJ, speaking from the floor, raised the issue of the threat to Essex libraries. There is a campaign going on.

JT said WGGB should avoid making qualitative judgements about other members' work. Two speakers from the floor said it was hard not to feel devalued as writers of self-published books.

GR congratulated the Books committee which was defunct for many years.

### **Film**

TW asked anyone interested in joining the film committee to get in touch with him. OH said she had an email from AG thanking everyone on the committee and from Paul Laverty saying he was sorry he couldn't be there. AW asked to OH to thank AG on the Guild's behalf.

### **Theatre**

DE wanted to underline the work of JT in setting up the relationship between WGGB and the Dramatists' Guild of America. She is also working on The Working Playwright, a theatre writer's handbook. He said it was the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the first agreement with the TMA in 1979. Peter Hall said the agreement would lead to a reduction in the production of new plays but 15% of plays produced were new then and 55% now. It's now worth playwrights' while to stay in theatre. There are problems with UK repertory theatres and touring companies not complying with agreements. It is now easier for theatres to do non-commissioned work due to a new agreement. The committee has also been working on live streaming – WGGB didn't have

an agreement in that sector but suddenly discovered the National Theatre had made agreements with individual writers that their plays should be streamed in schools for nothing. These issues are on their way to being sorted out.

JT said the bedrock of the theatre committee's work is the agreements that have been done by DE, EP and LG. JT thanked the negotiators for their work. It's difficult to go into rooms and tell potential employers they are doing things wrong. LH invited people who would like to negotiate to contact her.

AW said there is an issue with the Vaults festival. It is being covered by a VR company and online rights are being signed away.

## **Radio**

MJ praised NMc for doing a fantastic job. The ground is shifting very fast and the committee is trying to keep up with it. It used to be single plays and classic serials but radio has moved into long form original material (podcasts). Companies are not budgeting for development on long form material. They are wanting a huge amount of free work. It is uncharted territory and people are getting exploited.

KW said BBC Forum hired the London Eye for the day for a meeting about BBC Sounds yet it had floated the idea of reducing the writer's fee on 45 minute plays to 43.5 minutes. Writers are the poor relation and they are trying to make them even poorer.

TS said he invited Jason Phipps, the BBC's Commissioning Editor of Podcasts, to come to the AGM last year but he would not engage with writers. Podcasting is not engaging with more traditional radio drama.

## **Videogames**

AW said they had been holding a series of socials. Members are welcome to attend.

## Regional reports

### **Wessex**

MD said he is looking for anyone interested in getting involved.

### **West Midlands**

TS said he is interested in hearing from anyone with experience of living in a City of Culture as Coventry will be UK City of Culture in 2021.

## **Ed Comms**

TF is actively recruiting for this committee. JT said they have been working on the membership criteria and supporting Sarah Woodley in the communications area. PB said they are creating a flow chart for members about when it is acceptable to work for free. The committee works on communications inside and outside WGGB.

## **Wales**

JW asked how the EC came to its decision about the letter from Welsh playwrights protesting at the commissioning policies of the National Theatre of Wales. The letter has been contentious and the playwrights criticized for being seen as critical of the company's artistic director who is Asian. EP said WGGB supported some parts of the letter but did not agree every play commission should go to a Welsh playwright. WGGB criticizes the demise of Welsh language work and the reduction of drama at S4C. Maybe the company should consider Welsh writers first. They are being used as a last port of call or as translators. JT said the funding for Welsh writing got subsumed into the National Theatre of Wales. GR and EP said WGGB should keep out of any personalization of the issues. Julie Wilkinson thanked the EC for their clarification.

That concluded the craft and branch reports.

LH said the EC is looking for a Scottish branch rep.

**KW proposed to accept the Annual Report. GR seconded. The proposal was overwhelmingly accepted.**

## **12. Election of Standing Orders Committee**

LH thanked the committee for keeping people in the paths of righteousness. Four new members were elected for next year. The members of the committee are now NY, LL, GR, OH and KS.

## **13. Any Other Business**

A member asked to go to a radio drama commissioning meeting and was told not to. MJ said the radio committee needs to address this. Some writers get in the room and some not. KW suggested inviting Alison Hindell to a WGGB event. TS said he had already done so and she was fantastic.

LL asked whether LL and OH could come to an EC meeting and present the draft of the climate emergency statement.

DJ reminded members about the Olwyn Wymark award for encouragement of new writing in theatre which is just opening for nominations.

SSa asked whether the AGM could be paper free. TW suggested a screen with motions amended as you go along. AW said the environmental cost of a projector is higher than that of a few members. He suggested leaving the detail to the EC.

### **Closing remarks by the outgoing president**

OH said she had been on the EC for 10 years and president for the past six. She has seen changes after a tumultuous period. Finances used to be terrible in different ways. There have been two moves since the King's Cross office. The financial situation has improved. Ghosts disappeared from the membership system thanks to tremendously hard work by staff, officers and volunteers. GR, AW, Robert Taylor and KW have given incredible service. Staffing has been restructured. New members are doing new kinds of writing. It's important to identify those things and persuade the producers that they have to pay writers. OH said WGGB has made a real contribution to gender equality. It makes a difference to how people see the union. WGGB represents members in difficulty – speaking as a union we can say difficult things to powerful people. Awards are important in encouraging writers. Six years ago it was important to emphasise storytelling and it is even more important now, for instance in how we take responsibility for the climate change story. OH said she is happy to leave WGGB in the hands of Sandi Toksvig. LH proposed a vote of thanks to GR and OH with a small present.

LH ended the meeting at 5pm. She thanked everyone for coming and reminded people who would like to be involved in committees to get in touch.