



Annual report 2021-22

www.writersguild.org.uk

The Writers' Guild of Great Britain is a trade union registered at 134 Tooley Street, London SE1 2TU

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Contact us

If you want to contact any of the WGGB Officers, Craft Chairs or National 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**

Facebook: **www.facebook.com/thewritersguild**

Youtube: **www.youtube.com/c/WritersGuildGB**

LinkedIn: **www.linkedin.com/company/the-writers-guild-of-great-britain**

Join us

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

Or by phone: **020 7833 0777**

Summary

This report covers the period 1 April 2021 to 31 March 2022.

The WGGB Executive Council comprises democratically elected Officers, Craft Chairs and National and Regional Reps, in accordance with the union's Rule Book. You can find detail of the activities of these elected representatives in the pages that follow, and a summary below.

CAMPAIGNING AND LOBBYING

COVID-19

Alongside partner organisations we launched the New Play Commission Scheme (NPCS) to ensure 15 new commissions for playwrights across England in 2022. The scheme, led by WGGB in partnership with HighTide theatre company, UK Theatre and the Independent Theatre Council, has been designed to respond to the decline in new theatre commissions during the Covid-19 pandemic. NPCS has been generously supported using public funding by Arts Council England and through the Theatre Development Trust and has raised over £50,000 in donations from major writers, producers and actors. Find out more at www.writersguild.org.uk/npcs

We gave evidence to a Parliamentary inquiry and were prominently featured in the report *Supporting writers through the COVID-19 crisis* from the All Party Writers Group. Published in May 2021, it called on the Government to provide writers with greater support, recognition and

protection of copyright under the direction of a ‘Creators Council’.

In July 2021, we signed a statement calling for the urgent implementation of a Government-backed insurance scheme for theatre, which was later introduced.

Leading playwrights and WGGB members backed new digital principles for theatre launched in September 2021.

Developed jointly by WGGB and the Personal Managers’ Association (PMA), they set out the basis for playwrights’ rights for digital theatre, following an explosion in streaming and other forms of online delivery during the pandemic.

A version of the principles has now been agreed with the Royal Court, RSC and National Theatre.

Our Film Committee continues its presence on the industry-wide Screen Sector Taskforce, a BFI-organised group coordinating feedback to the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport.

We continued to lobby the Government to expand the Self-Employed Income Support Scheme (SEISS) to include the estimated three million freelance workers who had been excluded from support.

BREXIT

WGGB continued to lobby Government post Brexit to ensure writers’ voices were heard and stayed firmly on the agenda.

In April 2021 we signed an open letter to the Prime Minister from the Incorporated Society of Musicians proposing

measures to tackle the new restrictions on the creative industries as a result of the EU trade deal.

THE CLIMATE CRISIS

We supported Film Strike for Climate at COP26 and continue to put the climate crisis at the heart of all we do following a motion passed at our AGM in 2019.

We have introduced vegetarian/vegan food only at events, have switched to non-plastic membership cards and are looking at other ways to reduce our carbon footprint and that of our members, including utilising digital technology like Zoom for our events and meetings.

CUTS TO THE FUNDING OF ARTS SUBJECTS

In July 2021 WGGB joined six other trade unions in publishing an open letter to Prime Minister Boris Johnson, in opposition to proposed funding cuts to creative and performative arts subjects in the Higher Education Teaching Grant budget for 2021-2022.

We launched a series of events to support our Higher Education Network – supporting WGGB members who teach creative writing subjects.

HYBRID/PAID-FOR PUBLISHING/SELF-PUBLISHING

We have launched a report on the results of our joint survey with the Society of Authors, plus a campaign to tackle bad practice. We are also currently working on producing a guide to self-publishing.

SAVE CHANNEL 4

Channel 4's four decades as a publicly owned broadcaster is under threat, with the Government pushing ahead with controversial plans to privatise the Channel in a shake-up that could transform the landscape of British television. WGGB believes Channel 4 has been vital to the success of the British television and film industry, and we are campaigning to stop this.

#STANDWITHUKRAINE

WGGB condemns the invasion of Ukraine and has joined the global trade union movement in calling for peace and in urging all governments to reach a negotiated solution through diplomacy rather than force. We have issued a statement and we are in contact with our colleagues at the International Affiliation of Writers Guilds, the Federation of Screenwriters in Europe and the European Writers' Council so we can support their work.

We also organised a fundraiser screening of the Ukrainian version of *Paddington* in April 2022 to raise money for Ukrainian writers affected by the war, plus our EC voted on a donation of £5,000 from union funds.

PERFORMERS' ALLIANCE APPG

The Performers' Alliance All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) brings together peers and MPs and works closely with WGGB and sister unions the Musicians' Union and Equity. Throughout the year the APPG has provided briefings to Parliamentarians and Select Committees and continues to make the case to policy-makers of the existential threat that Brexit and Covid-19 pose to the creative industries.

EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY

WGGB commissioned Inc Arts to produce a groundbreaking new survey, written by ethnically diverse people, for ethnically diverse people, and the first of its kind in the UK to cover scriptwriting in film, gaming, radio, television and theatre. The results of the survey will form a report and inform the next step of our Equality Writes campaign.

We continued to run online events for under-represented writing groups.

We are currently implementing a range of recommendations as a result of an access audit.

Our Equality and Diversity Committee has supported internal and external stakeholders with their equality and diversity work.

NATIONS AND REGIONS

Our branches in Scotland and Wales continued to make headway with their lobbying work on a range of issues and you can find out more in their reports from pages 46 onwards.

NEGOTIATIONS

We negotiated a 2% rise on minimum fees for BBC writers in audio and TV, and in theatre (under our TNC agreement).

WGGB continues to engage with major SVOD players in an attempt to improve the contractual terms for writers.

WGGB continues to work with Pact on renegotiating its national film and TV agreements with the union.

ROYALTY PAYMENTS

Writers Digital Payments, set up by WGGB and the Personal Managers' Association in 2015, paid out over £1.3 million to writers for use of their work on BBC iPlayer, taking the total paid out by the scheme since it launched to over £6.8 million.

RECRUITMENT

Our membership is now approaching the 3,000 mark.

EVENTS

We ran over 20 events via the Zoom platform, including our second virtual AGM, and a new series of member-only events.

BEST PRACTICE

We launched five new sets of best practice guidelines: on the 'created by' credit in TV; on writing competitions; on digital delivery of new plays during Covid; videogames industry guidelines; plus joint guidelines with Directors UK on creating positive collaborations between writers and directors.

AWARDS

We awarded our annual Olwen Wymark Theatre Encouragement Awards and the Tinniswood Audio Drama Award with the Society of Authors.

Our Writers' Guild Awards returned for a bumper year, celebrating two years of the cream of British writing, following their cancellation due to Covid.

General Secretary's report

This time of year offers me a welcome chance to look back and reflect on the union's work over the past 12 months and my first five years as General Secretary.

And what a five years it has been. Who could have imagined that in that period we would have seen a global pandemic, a war in Ukraine and the aftershock of Brexit and all that has happened between the referendum on the UK's membership of the EU, the endless negotiations and the eventual withdrawal from the bloc.

This has been a seismic half-decade, which has also seen a cost-of-living crisis that has had a huge impact on workers' livelihoods, mental health, and much more.

As a trade union, it has been our job to rise to this challenge, and as a union for writers, I have witnessed these events through the unique filter of a creative freelance workforce negotiating unprecedented obstacles.

Our theatres went dark for the best part of two years, TV and film productions were shut down and then had to negotiate social distancing and storylines that reflected our ever-changing 'new normal'. New writing commissions dried up and while the Government support package was generous, an estimated three million freelance workers continued to fall through the gaps. This is just a small snapshot of what writers have had to face.

I am proud of what our union has achieved during this time – a heroic effort on behalf of WGGB elected officials and reps,

all volunteer writers who have pulled out all the stops to protect their colleagues during these tumultuous times, and to help sail the WGGB through choppy waters, while facing new difficulties themselves.

I salute and thank them all. And I also want to pay tribute to our staff, who became the engine that continued to drive our union from their own homes, with all the challenges that entailed. WGGB is thankfully finally returning to a new post-Covid normality, operating a hybrid system of working, meetings and events, which is allowing us to gather in person once again but also to capitalise on the opportunities Zoom and other technologies offer for accessibility and the environment.

This is just one positive to emerge from such dark times. We have seen a boom in recruitment, with membership rising to almost 3,000, for the first time in our 60-year-plus history. Our second online AGM last year saw another record turnout. And we have been delighted to meet so many more of you through our hugely popular new series of online events and through our casework which, understandably, has been incredibly busy as we have offered advice and legal support to an increasing number of writers in troubled times.

In the past year we have produced five new best-practice guidelines; negotiated a 2% pay increase for TV, audio and theatre writers; paid out (via Writers Digital Payments), another £1.3 million to BBC writers; launched a landmark New Play Commission Scheme for playwrights; and entered the second phase of our Equality Writes campaign, focusing on the under-representation of ethnically diverse scriptwriters. We've stood with Ukraine and against arts HE cuts, and campaigned to save Channel 4. We've celebrated

writers at our annual Writers' Guild, Olwen Wymark and Tinniswood awards, taken on the Wild West of paid-for publishing and campaigned and lobbied tirelessly on the continued impact of Brexit and Covid, as the creative industries begin their slow route to recovery. The march goes on.

You can read about all this and more in the following pages, from our elected Craft, National and Regional Reps themselves.

This time of year also offers me an opportunity to look ahead and there is much work to be done. Thanks to our robust finances and boom in membership we are due to expand our staff once again to include two new organising assistants, building on our organising agenda and harnessing the impressive growth in activism amongst our elected reps and committees across our nations, regions and in our different craft areas.

It is vital that we strengthen our national agreements for writers, with particular emphasis on SVOD and PACT. I will also be focussing on protecting our public service broadcasters and minimising the impact of Brexit/Covid in our industry as well as fostering relationships with other unions, writers organisations, plus agents, producers and broadcasters.

So as ever that just leaves me to make one more thank you – to you! Without you there would be no union, and by working together we can move mountains.

Stay safe, and I look forward to seeing you again at our AGM.

Ellie Peers
General Secretary

Chair's report

The world has felt like a very changeable and uncertain place since my last annual report. There have been green shoots of recovery as Covid restrictions eased meaning that live performance, film and TV productions were able to get back into full swing.

It also meant the return of the Writers' Guild Awards in February. On Valentine's Day, a socially distanced audience were able to celebrate writers from across audio, comedy, theatre, film, television, books, musicals and videogames. And for the first time, the event was streamed live to all WGGB members, and the edited highlights have been made available via our YouTube channel.

This level of member inclusion is something I will continue to passionately pursue in my remaining time as Chair. The Zoom revolution has meant we've been able to bring many of our events into the homes of our members, including our Annual General Meeting. This has meant better engagement with members living outside London, writers with disabilities, and those with economic constraints or caring responsibilities who might otherwise be excluded from in-person events.

It is why we will continue to host the majority of our Craft, National and Regional Committees virtually and I would encourage those who may not have felt able to join those Committees in the past to contact the appropriate Chair or Regional Representative. I want to thank those Chairs and their Committee members for adapting brilliantly to the new

normal and for their hard work ensuring the WGGB remains informed, responsive and effective across the Craft areas, Nations and Regions.

We will also be improving access to the WGGB for our disabled members as we implement the recommendations of an access audit commissioned last year. As ever, we welcome any feedback. We can always do better.

However, some things are still better experienced in person, and it has been heartening to see that there is still a healthy appetite for live theatre and comedy, despite doom-laden predictions to the contrary. Of course, this recovery is fragile and there is the marked absence of those who felt that a career in the theatre was no longer sustainable after the pandemic. Many theatres feel the need to play it safe with productions of the sure-fire classics, tried and tested seat fillers.

Which is why former WGGB President David Edgar and the WGGB Theatre Committee have been working hard to launch the New Play Commission Scheme to encourage not only new writing but its actual production. I am grateful to those WGGB members and staff who worked tirelessly to secure the Arts Council funding for the scheme which I believe will offer a vital lifeline for theatre writers affected by the lockdowns of the last two years.

I also want to pay tribute to the many talented reps who will be leaving us this year. My own personal experience is with the TV Committee and I have seen at first hand how our outgoing TV Chair Emma Reeves has marshalled the Committee through a transformative period in UK television production. During her tenure, BBC Studios was launched, SVOD (streaming video on demand) has gone mainstream and there

has been major changes to continuing drama in the UK, including the axing of *Holby City*.

Emma and the TV Committee have always been in the rooms that mattered during this time, with negotiating teams holding regular forums with the BBC, ITV, Pact and Netflix. Over the last 12 months, the Committee has also launched industry guidelines on the 'created by credit' and creating positive collaborations between writers and directors.

I can't imagine that the coming year will be any less turbulent for the TV industry, with substantial changes to broadcasting being explored by the UK Government. The WGGB will continue to oppose the threats to both the BBC and Channel 4. I believe they are an essential part of the UK's cultural ecosystem, although that does not mean they are above reform and scrutiny. Indeed, the WGGB are keen scrutineers.

Finally, I am happy and proud to report that WGGB is in fine fettle, with rising membership, healthy finances and a dedicated and effective staff. This year the staff have undertaken an unprecedented amount of casework and supported a great deal of campaigning, helping writers to protect their work and their livelihoods. I'm sure you will join me in thanking Ellie, Lesley, Sarah, Kate, John, Nadine (who we wish well in her new job at Unite) and Eleanor; an extraordinary team for extraordinary times.

This will be my last year as Chair of the WGGB and I have no intention of taking it easy in these last 12 months. As ever, I am happy to hear from any member, whether that be at the AGM or on a personal level. Indeed, it is the greatest pleasure of the job.

Lisa Holdsworth
Chair

President's report

What a pleasure it was to find myself hosting the 29th Writers' Guild Awards earlier this year and how fabulous it was to be back, following two fallow years due to the pandemic.

The ceremony, held on Valentine's Day at the Royal College of Physicians in central London, was a love letter to writing as it celebrated the talented writers who have soothed our souls through such a difficult period; across TV, film, theatre, radio, books, comedy and videogames.

It was wonderful to be in a room full of fellow writers IRL (an acronym I never used before) for the first time in goodness knows how long. I felt like a mole blinking in the dazzling light of good company. How splendid too that for the first time in its 60-year-plus history the ceremony was livestreamed to WGGB members. What a great achievement to be so accessible.

We have all become somewhat Zoomed out in the past two years, but this is one of the slivers of light that has emerged from Covid, as we march forward on the road to recovery. Next year we'll just need to work out how to hand out drinks to those unable to attend in person.

I am so proud of the vital part your union has been playing as the world reels from successive onslaughts. Sometimes writers can feel a tad isolated, but we are comforted that we

are not alone when we look to the inspired leadership of General Secretary Ellie Peers, Chair Lisa Holdsworth and all our other elected officials, who have given of their time so freely. Together they ensure that the WGGB continues as a bright beacon of hope for us all.

You can read more about their valiant and tireless work in the following pages, and I would encourage you to consider joining them on one of the union's many Craft, National, or Regional Committees – the activist fire at the heart of our union.

At the Writers' Guild Awards ceremony I was struck by the range of writing and diversity of talent on show, and so it is in the union itself.

WGGB welcomes every writer, whatever stage of their career, whatever medium they write for.

You are a vital part of this union. Thank you for belonging. There is no doubt that we are stronger together.

Sandi Toksvig OBE
President

Treasurer's report

I'm pleased to report that the WGGB finances are in splendid order, despite all the crises of the past two years.

The General Fund, the amount that 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 2021 WGGB financial year of £732,862. The Royalties Account (which holds funds for distribution to writers) received £35,768 and distributed £25,182 in payments to writers through 2021. A total of £65,137 was carried forward. The Welfare Fund, which provides grants/loans and assistance to members in financial hardship, continued to provide help through 2021, making a series of soft loans and grants totalling £7,922. At the end of the WGGB financial year the balance carried forward was £60,652.

The Finance Committee and I are always prudent with members' money. We were fearing a drop in subscription income and membership due to Covid, but both our income and membership are up, thanks to the continuing hard work of Committee members and staff. It's meant that we have comfortable financial reserves. These will ensure that we can cover staff pay and running costs for the WGGB for the next five years. We can rest easy knowing that our union will still be here for us well into the future.

Because of Covid, the majority of union Committee meetings have been taking place on Zoom, with the advantage of making them accessible to all. The same applied to our second Zoom AGM, attracting the largest attendance yet.

This all saved the union thousands of pounds in travel expenses which is being put to good use elsewhere. WGGB is able to put on more online events than ever, enjoyed by members and also a great recruitment tool.

With a growing membership comes more members' problems. We're in the enviable position of being able to hire another full-time member of staff and increase our lawyers' hours to help members.

It was uncertain if and how the Writers' Guild Awards would go ahead during these Covid times. A decision was reached at the last minute to have a hybrid version, with half the usual audience attending. We ended up with the best of all possible worlds. The awards, for the first time in their history, were made available to all members on livestream, complete with BSL interpreters. An edited version of the awards ceremony can also be found permanently on the WGGB YouTube channel. The awards are paid for by sponsorship but, on this occasion, there was the additional cost for the livestreaming and hosting of the platform. The EC and FC agreed, since it was for the benefit of the entire membership, to give the Writers' Guild Awards £5,000.

In these difficult times, some of our members had need to call on the Welfare Fund and we were able to help. I want to remind everyone that WGGB's Welfare Fund is always there for members who suffer urgent financial difficulties. There are certain eligibility criteria and full details are on the website at writersguild.org.uk/member-benefits/welfare-fund/

The WGGB was also financially secure enough for the EC to approve a £5,000 grant to the Federation of Screenwriters in Europe's new fund for Ukrainian television and film writers who tragically find themselves refugees.

All of the above is made possible thanks to the hard-working members of the Finance Committee. I want to thank Lisa Holdsworth, William Gallagher, Tim Stimpson, John Wilsher, Richard Pinner, Rupert Creed and Antony Pickthall for their wisdom, good nature and good judgement. WGGB members are always stronger when we work together.

Gail Renard

Treasurer

Craft committee reports

AUDIO

This year the pandemic once again highlighted the importance of all broadcast and non-broadcast audio drama.

Through the Radio Forum with the BBC we were able to secure a 2% increase on minimum rates for audio drama writers, under our national agreement with the corporation.

Our main focus this past year has been on the ongoing cuts to audio drama. With new commissions reducing year-on-year and the processes for finding producers and submitting work becoming ever more complex, many writers are rightly concerned about the future.

In response the Committee has started work on a campaign which is in the planning stage and we will update members further in coming months.

We have already had a meeting with Ofcom, submitted evidence to a Lords Select Committee on the future of BBC funding, and will continue to work with our sister entertainment unions.

We are also liaising with the WGGB TV and Comedy Chairs, as comedy and children's scripted TV are also facing huge cuts at the moment.

This year we once again co-awarded the Tinniswood Audio Drama Award with the Society of Authors, which went to the late Sonya Hale for *Blis-ta* and was presented at the BBC Audio Drama Awards in March 2022.

We have also hosted free online events including Writers v podcasters – how can writers survive in a podcasting universe?

Thanks to WGGB's negotiators, podcasts are now included in our radio agreement with the BBC, and the union continues to stay ahead of digital trends to protect writers' rights as technology affects their livelihoods.

I want to thank everyone on my Committee for their passionate advocacy of this vital cause.

Nicholas McInerny
Chair

BOOKS

PANDEMIC THOUGHTS ...

The pandemic has clearly been a time of complexity, disappointment and struggle for many writers. However, some have found inspiration. Covid lockdown has reminded many people of their love of books – the best friends of isolated times – and indeed, book reading and writing has enjoyed a resurgence with time on hand.

Whether books are published in the traditional way (via agents or publishers) or via self-publishing, books have re-emerged as a human's best friend, bringing solace, travel, insight, enjoyment, wisdom and entertainment to the little grey matter.

The Books Committee has been a joy to work with and we have Zoomed our way through the pandemic and beyond. Interestingly, we have realised this form of communication has eased the travel strains for some members who had to struggle their way south each time. We will hopefully continue to meet in a 'hybrid' form – sometimes in person, sometimes online. Also, we hope the Books Committee will become more of a moveable feast, travelling round and meeting in the regions in the year to come.

SELF-PUBLISHING GUIDE, HYBRID/PAID-FOR PUBLISHING REPORT AND CAMPAIGN

The Books Committee has produced a new self-publishing guide with major help from WGGB Organiser John Sailing and other staff in the WGGB office. This guide is aimed at empowering authors who wish to get their book(s)

produced, and in front of readers. It covers the pitfalls of avoiding rogue publishers and go-betweens, looks at copyright, and tackles issues of self-promotion. The Committee will be working with WGGB staff to promote the guide as soon as it is online with webinars.

We have also launched the results of our joint hybrid/paid-for publishing report with the Society of Authors. The report will look into ‘publishers’ who are opaque in their business practices, often charging writers vast sums for a poor-quality service, use aggressive sales tactics, take rights and leave writers with little or no chance of recoupling their ‘investments’. The report will form the basis of campaigning activity to stamp out poor practice and educate authors who are falling prey to this.

ONLINE EVENTS

Corinne Sweet also crept out of her authorly attic to do a webinar to members and the public on ‘Stress-busting for writers’ hosted by WGGB staff member Kate Glasspool. We hope this will be the first of several webinars for members on self-care and well-being, something much needed in these challenging times.

BEST FIRST NOVEL AWARD

The Books Committee was proud to eventually get to the fourth year of this Award, despite the pandemic interrupting last year’s Writers’ Guild Awards ceremony. The faithful jury (Nancy Boulicault, Nick Yapp and Corinne Sweet, supported by Corinne’s stalwart assistant, Rosa Garland), ploughed through 64 first novels last year and 68 this year, and finally agreed upon a very exciting and worthy shortlist of three novels: *The Lip* by Charlie Carroll (Two Roads), *The*

Manningtree Witches by A K Blakemore (Granta) and *A Strange And Brilliant Light* by Eli Lee (Quercus). The panel chose the latter unanimously and was pleased by the incredibly high standard this year.

PUBLIC LENDING RIGHT (PLR)

Understandably, this has been another tough year for libraries. Many have had to close at some time or another. To an extent, ebook borrowing has compensated for this and, on the whole, loans of PLR have held up reasonably well. The PLR system remains the same – the maximum PLR annual payment that any author can receive remains at £6,600, and the minimum payment remains at £1. The PLR rate is scheduled to increase from nine pence per loan to 11 pence. As the union's representative on the British Library PLR Committee, Nick Yapp has repeatedly expressed his wish that the existing system (now 50 years old) should be changed.

ONWARDS, UPWARDS AND SIDEWAYS

Both Corinne and Nick shall be retiring from Co-Chairing the Books Committee at this year's AGM. Nick's reason for this is that, having been born in July 1938 (on a day when the nation's inflation rate hit 18.45% – and Chamberlain and his fellow Government must have seen that coming), he feels (wrongly) that he is not sufficiently in touch with today's events and machines. He'd like to thank everyone in the WGGB Office for their support, help and patience. He'd like to thank fellow members of the union's Executive Council for their inspirations, and he'd like to thank Corinne for all that she has done during their joint Chair-ing.

Corinne's reasons are more to do with needing more time for, yes, writing. There are novels to write, screenplays and

plays and even operas to pen. She would also like to thank all the Committee members who have given their time and effort and support to the Committee. In particular, Nancy Boulicault, who has been an amazingly fast reader of an annual mountain of Best First Novels. Corinne has loved every minute of sharing a Chair with Nick, one firmly planted buttock each, on behalf of promoting and sustaining the glory of books.

THE FUTURE

The Books Committee has been growing steadily with a lovely new bunch of authors and hopefully someone will emerge from the ranks to take the helm at the AGM. The Writers' Guild Awards Books jury also needs a new Chair, and a new jury, and hopefully this will also emerge. Some people have already shown interest and Corinne and Nick will be pursuing hotly.

Books are here to stay. They may 'hybridise' and 'interface' with screenplays, blogs, podcasts, and who-knows-what-else, but the good old hand-held paper book – self-published or not – is a firm fixture in the psyche of these four nations.

We sincerely hope the Books Committee continues to flourish and encourage the proper recognition, payment and protection of anyone who picks up their quill to have a good scrawl.

Nick Yapp and Corinne Sweet
Co-Chairs

COMEDY

The Comedy Committee has had several focuses this year, continuing last year's work.

BROADENING ACCESS AND REPRESENTATION

Progress on this front has been slow, but we have recently welcomed some new members to the Committee and look forward to having our first meetings with them soon.

SKETCH SHOWS

We had a meeting with the new Head of Comedy Jon Petrie to discuss, among other things, the future for sketch shows on the BBC. We pointed out that the decline in scripted comedy meant that there were far fewer opportunities for new writers and new performers, and Jon confirmed that there was no theoretical barrier to new sketch shows, but that producers hadn't approached them with the right formats.

WRITER-PERFORMERS

Our outreach to writer-performers is going well with a number joining WGGB, and some more outreach events planned for the near future.

If you'd like more detail about the way we're going about these, and what we have planned for the future, do drop me a line at comedy@writersguild.org.uk

Nathaniel Tapley
Chair

FILM

Can we get Covid out of the way? Please, let's get it out of the way. 2021 was, in some respects, a tougher slog than 2020. Too many false dawns, new shutdowns, Government support in retreat and a film and television industry still trying to define itself as more than just a service facility for US studios and streamers. But through it all, the Film Committee kept meeting – eight times in 2021, all still, maddeningly, online – and kept discussing the needs of our members.

First among these was our continued commitment to finding new ways to bring awareness of the climate crisis to our work and working practices. Various discussions and activities took place around the COP26 gathering in November 2021, although more can and must be done. The wider industry's response has been to find energy and waste savings during physical production. But we are the writers, we choose which stories to tell, and we must lead this change.

The Film Committee continued to engage with the BFI, hosting a roundtable with the Development Fund in April, during which we presented them with questions and testimonies from our membership. We hope this will lead to closer relations between our two organisations.

We also worked with WGGB staff and the BFI Diversity and Inclusion team to conduct a thorough equality and diversity analysis of development funds awarded by BFI over the past four years. The results of this were illuminating – it's not all bad news – and the recommendations offered by WGGB provide a clear template for improvement at the BFI, under new Director of Film Fund Mia Bays. We await the results of her 'listening tour' with interest.

We continue to encourage Pact to enter meaningful conversations with us as we seek to renegotiate our (1992) Minimum Terms Agreement for film. We are straining every sinew to push this forwards in 2022, whilst exploring any and all other avenues to improve the contractual basis under which members operate. We supported WGGB staff in developing a new model film option agreement, which shows what can be done when you put your mind to it.

We enjoyed working with our friends at Directors UK to publish *Creating positive collaborations*, a guide to productive and healthy working relationships between writers and directors. We have continued to engage with industry stakeholders such as BFI and BAFTA on the important issues of diversity and representation, and bullying and harassment.

Alistair Owen, author of *The Art of Screen Adaptation*, hosted WGGB Zoom interviews, in partnership with Creative Essentials, with seven screenwriter subjects from his book: Moira Buffini, David Nicholls, Lucinda Coxon, Christopher Hampton, Sarah Phelps, Deborah Moggach and our own Olivia Hetreed. I also hosted a Q&A with my agent Sean Gascoine in December 2021. All told, these Zoom events attracted nearly 2,000 registered attendees, with another 1,000 views on the WGGB YouTube channel. Further events are, of course, planned for 2022, some even perhaps IRL.

We celebrated two years' worth of Writers' Guild Awards in February 2022. From a packed and high-quality field, we eventually gave our top prizes to two films from the 2020/2021 awards cycle, Simon Blackwell and Armando Iannucci winning Best Screenplay for *The Personal History of David Copperfield*, and Emerald Fennell winning Best First Screenplay for *Promising Young Woman*. J Blakeson, Paul

Laverty, Remi Weekes, Theresa Ikoko and Claire Wilson were among the other nominees.

In all, this was another busy and invigorating year of activity by the Film Committee. Speaking personally, I take continued solace from both the work we do, and from spending time in the company of this Committee's talented and passionate members. Thank you.

Tom Williams
Chair

TELEVISION

After two long years of lockdowns and restrictions because of the Covid-19 pandemic, TV production is now back in full swing, albeit with regular testing and interruptions for isolation putting an added strain on overstretched resources. However, the impact of Covid will be felt for many years to come.

Due to a combination of Covid-related factors, including productions relocating to the UK from other countries, people leaving the business or changing careers, and the glut of postponed and remounted shows fighting for space with new commissions, we are seeing a shortage of trained and experienced staff in production roles. This is causing problems for many productions; the pandemic exacerbated a problem which was already caused by the ever-expanding number of independent companies and streamers. More producer training is needed urgently.

Inevitably, the need for constant testing and isolation has increased production costs, so it is very much to the credit of WGGB negotiators that they managed to establish a 2% increase in minimum fees for BBC TV drama and sketch writers (effective from 23 December 2021).

The impact of the last two years cannot be overstated. I know that many of our members will be feeling exhausted, as I am myself. The pandemic itself, and the measures taken to contain it, have taken a heavy toll on our mental health. But despite all the negatives, some positives have emerged. Like many families and organisations, WGGB has made good use of video-conferencing facilities such as Zoom for our own meetings, for the Writers' Guild Awards and for craft and career-focused events for members. Adopting a hybrid model

for meetings in future will allow more people to take an active part in WGGB's work without having to travel – and livestreaming our Awards will make them more inclusive.

WGGB's 'Write On' series of virtual free events via Zoom continues to thrive. The television craft sector has offered some wonderful panels and conversations with prominent writers and agents.

Many are still available to watch on the WGGB YouTube channel. As well as fascinating insights into the craft of professionals at the top of their game, there is plenty of 'nuts and bolts' advice. For example, WGGB Organiser John Sailing and I hosted a video session about the union's online resources available for TV writers, including rates and agreements, best-practice guidelines and various campaigning resources. This video, and many more, can be found in the 'Write On' section of the website and on YouTube.

23 September 2021 saw the launch of WGGB's *The 'created by' credit: A good practice guide for TV writers and those who work with them*, which has been several years in the making. Produced in consultation with writers, showrunners and union activists from several countries, the guide aims to clarify the role and definition of a TV series creator, and to bring UK practice into line with the highest international standards.

It includes definitions of key terms such as 'pilot screenplay', 'series pitch document' and 'series bible' and explores how to approach joint authorship and co-authorship, adaptations, copyright law and more. It also provides some easy-to-understand sample scenarios to help writers, commissioners, producers and others navigate the process. The guide can be found on the WGGB website in the resources section.

And on 28 September 2021, the WGGB and Directors UK jointly launched *Creating positive collaborations: writers & directors*. This document was drafted by members of the TV Committee, the Film Committee and Directors UK, and was a great example of positive collaboration in itself! Addressing the changing roles of directors and writers as the lines between high-end TV and film become increasingly blurred, *Creating positive collaborations* encourages directors and writers everywhere to make an extra effort to connect, to respect each other's work and to inspire each other.

Although WGGB negotiates minimum rates with broadcasters, we are aware that most writers are paid significantly more – but we don't know much detail about who gets paid what. And so, at the suggestion of one of our TV Committee members, we have launched an online survey where writers can log details of their fees anonymously. This has very important implications for diversity and inclusion – and simple fairness. I encourage all members to fill in this form, which is fully anonymised and GDPR compliant. You can find it in the campaigns section of the WGGB website, under 'Have your say'.

Additionally, earlier this year, WGGB and Inc Arts conducted a survey into the experiences of ethnically diverse writers of television, film, gaming, radio and theatre. WGGB's Equality Writes campaign played a vital role in exposing the under-representation of female screenwriters in television and film in 2018. This current piece of work will mark the next phase in the campaign.

As my second consecutive term as TV Chair is coming to an end, I must step down at the 2022 AGM after over seven years in the role, if you include my stint as Acting Chair! In

this time, I have learned more than I ever wanted to know about bad practice in the industry, but I have also had the opportunity to compare notes with colleagues from all over the UK, and, thanks to the International Affiliation of Writers Guilds (IAWVG), from many other countries. There are many people out there, not only in our unions, but in production companies, who seek to promote good practice and to enshrine it in the form of guidelines and agreements.

The last seven years have been hard work but I'm proud of what we have achieved in this time. We have fought battles on behalf of specific groups of writers on certain shows, but we have also campaigned more generally for a fairer and less abusive industry. We have urged companies to consider the impact of their actions on writers' mental health, by signing up to guidelines which should protect writers against bullying and against unrealistic and antisocial deadlines. We have constantly advocated for under-represented groups of writers, and demanded 'jobs not schemes'. We have lobbied against unpaid trials and shadow schemes, on the basis that they are inherently discriminatory (only available to those whose finances and life circumstances permit them to take part) and that they place the burden unfairly on freelance workers rather than on production companies.

Change happens slowly – but it is happening. The stock answer which we often met seven years ago – 'that's just television, if you're not tough enough, get out' – is no longer relied upon as it once was. Of course, there is a difference between saying the right things and doing the right things, but I believe that we are moving (albeit glacially) in the right direction.

My successor will have many challenges. The attacks currently being made on the BBC and Channel 4 are of great concern. These broadcasters are major employers of UK writers, and provide a vital role in training and recruiting new writers. Although it is our job as a union to challenge employers – and we often find ourselves frustrated with them – it would be nothing short of disastrous for UK television writers if we lost them entirely. I urge our members, wherever they stand on (or off) the political spectrum, to support the BBC and Channel 4. As long as they exist, we can campaign to make them better.

Finally, I would like to thank the WGGB staff, my fellow activists on the Executive Council, and everyone who has served on the TV Committee over the last seven years. Your commitment, talent and passion is inspiring. And to all our members, thank you for being part of WGGB. It's been an honour to serve you.

Emma Reeves
Chair

THEATRE

The main thrust of our work on the Theatre Committee (TC) during these 12 months has been to develop and consolidate our approach to the significant challenges, hardships and profound threats our industry has faced over the last two years. This includes advocating for and supporting our theatre writing members and their well-being; lobbying Arts Council England (ACE) to step up to helping us in that; monitoring and (attempting to) regulate the fast-moving hybridisation of our work regarding streaming and online theatre; and reaching out to all our members, through our Regional and National Committees, whilst looking to collaborate with kindred, partner organisations who share our concerns.

But firstly I'm delighted to relay the good news of 2021/22, in areas of our work that we can celebrate wholeheartedly.

THE NEW PLAY COMMISSION SCHEME (NPCS)

At the end of 2021 a re-application was submitted to ACE for £35,312 to enable this WGGB-initiated project to go ahead, in partnership with the Independent Theatre Council and UK Theatre. Having already raised over £50,000 in donations from writers, directors and producers, plus a grant of £10,000 from the Theatre Development Trust and £5,000 from the publishers Faber, the ACE funding was still vital for us to deliver the scheme. And we are delighted to announce that this application has been successful, which green-lights the NPCS to enable the commissioning of 15 new plays in England, over half of which are to be produced outside of London, with targets for women, writers of colour, LBGTQ+

and disabled writers and those who are socio-economically disadvantaged.

Since hearing this news the steering committee has had its first meetings with producers of the scheme HighTide, and all but one of the original selection panel (made up of a majority of women and writers) have agreed to take part in the process. But it has to be acknowledged that none of this would have been possible without the indomitable efforts, influence and conviction of our own David Edgar!

WRITERS' GUILD THEATRE AWARDS

This was a particularly uplifting event for theatre, after a harrowing two-year break due to the pandemic, and was a real pleasure for all those attending, whether in the flesh, live onscreen or joining in on catch-up. So, a huge thanks to all those who battled to make it such a brilliant success. With over 50 entries for Best Play and over 20 for Best Play For Young Audiences, I'd also like to extend special thanks to our stalwart panel of judges: Michael Bryher, Amelia Bullmore, Poppy Corbett, Lisa Evans, Tracey Goddard, Vicky Ireland, David James, Brian McAvera, Debbie McAndrew, Nick Wood, Jan Woolf and Michael Wynne.

Best Play went to Kevin Dyer for *The Syrian Baker*, Best Play For Young Audiences to *Whatever Happened to the Jaggy Nettles?* by Martin Travers and Best Musical Theatre Bookwriting to Chinonyerem Odimba for *Black Love*.

THE OLWEN WYMARK AWARDS

Once again, we were delighted to present our annual awards for the encouragement of theatre writers, on 4 March 2022 at the Almeida Theatre in London. The winners in the 17th

year of the awards were artistic directors, executive producers and mentors in the theatre industry, all of whom were undaunted in the face of the pandemic and united by their compassion, generosity and dedication to bringing the best new writing to the stage. They are:

Bill Cronshaw, theatre director, nominated by WGGB member Caroline Summerfield for supporting her through the Covid-19 closure of theatres.

Graeme Thompson, Interim Executive Producer of Live Theatre Newcastle, nominated by WGGB member Olu Alakija for developing his short plays.

Liam Shea, Director of CampFire Theatre, nominated by WGGB member Nicholas McInerny for his support of his play *Gregory's Ashes*.

Tamara Harvey and Liam Evans-Ford, Artistic Director and Executive Director of Theatr Clwyd, nominated by WGGB member Alun Saunders for their work supporting freelancers in their local community.

EVENTS

We contributed to some of WGGB's online series of free Zoom events for writers, which launched in the first lockdown and have proved very popular. For example, in July 2021, Suba Das, Artistic Director of HighTide Theatre, explored how the pandemic has forced theatre practitioners to innovate, leading to a flowering of new works and ventures. He was joined by playwright and screenwriter Vinay Patel (*True Brits, Murdered By My Father*) and by playwright, screenwriter and Artistic Director of tiata fahodzi

Chinonyerem Odimba (*Unknown Rivers, Princess & The Hustler*).

ARTS COUNCIL ENGLAND

On a more circumspect note, although our continued discussions with ACE have seen progress, with them now recognising the vital and overwhelming contribution of freelance practitioners to the theatre ecology, we are unconvinced that writers are receiving their share of this support – or figure sufficiently in ACE’s priorities. And this is an impression compounded by the lack of transparency in their publicly available information and analysis.

Ostensibly, it seems there is a real commitment to offer more help to freelance practitioners, who are the essential backbone of the industry; with ACE’s Director of Strategy, Michelle Dickson, pledging greater financial assistance for *those who aren’t on salary, as well as those who are*.

So, in the wake of this, the TC met with Neil Darlison, ACE’s Director of Theatre in December 2021, to review how much real support playwrights are getting in the current climate – given the fact that writers can’t directly benefit from their Developing Your Creative Practice fund, plus the issue of the unnecessary complications of the project application process. Also, we challenged the effectiveness of ACE’s mission to widen its reach (regarding diversity and inclusiveness) or combat the culture of entitlement that has plagued theatre to date, not least the prevailing issue of ageism in our industry.

Whilst Neil Darlison affirmed that there was more latitude for individual artists to take the initiative for particular projects – especially in under-represented regions and communities – we asked for more transparency in ACE’s

information, to ensure that writers were getting their fair share of the pie. As a result, he's undertaken to look into how playwrights, specifically, are benefitting from ACE's project grant funding.

However, when we asserted that we believe companies who purport to be supporting new writing (especially National Portfolio Organisations) should ring-fence money for this, apparently such an approach doesn't figure in ACE's thinking. A policy that we intend to keep challenging as inadequate and complacent in the current climate.

Following a report on ageism in our industry written by Jarek Adams in 2016, it has been clear for some time that writers in their 40s and 50s onwards do not enjoy the same support as younger practitioners. And that, if you're over 30 and not an established playwright, it can feel like you've missed your chance, especially when differentiated writing competitions, submissions, career development programmes and festivals are still being rolled out, reinforcing the fallacy that 'new writing' is largely the domain of young writers. Neil Darlison agreed that this was a serious issue in our industry and that he would support a grant application for us to further research and interrogate this.

NEGOTIATIONS

One of the most significant developments in theatre during lockdown was the increase in digital delivery. Last year, WGGB established contractual arrangements for National Theatre Live (streamed to cinemas and available for schools) and National Theatre at Home (streamed to devices on a subscription or pay-per-view basis). But it is clear that many other theatres – including those who streamed archive

recordings of shows during lockdown – are seeking to monetise this service.

So, in the summer, our negotiating team collaborated with the Personal Managers' Association (PMA), representing the agents, in drawing up some 15 principles that should be in any agreement or contract on digital delivery of a writer's work for the stage, whilst also gaining endorsement from a number of WGGB playwright members – including Caryl Churchill, Tom Stoppard, April De Angelis, Lucy Kirkwood and Roy Williams OBE. And we have successfully completed negotiations with the TNC (the National Theatre, the RSC and Royal Court) plus continue to negotiate with UK Theatre, to finalise terms for the online delivery of all plays written for the stage. The principles we insist on are (a) separate negotiations for each form of digital delivery, with upfront payments and royalties, (b) different deals dependent on the reach (in time and space) of broadcast, and (c) a guarantee that rights will always be under limited licence, and never subject to buy-outs, with the only exceptions being for some educational purposes. But we also argued strongly that writers should not be *obliged* to agree to digital delivery, and that – if they did – it was by separate licence and should be paid for.

'HOW ARE YOU DOING?' SURVEY

Jan Woolf organised this excellent initiative last summer – giving us a profound insight into, not only the anxieties, hardships and issues this pandemic has subjected our theatre writing members to, but also your admirable spirit and resourcefulness – and we have now set up a working party to organise a series of hybrid events, where writers can present and discuss their work.

And we were delighted that Matthew Bulgo, from the WGGB Welsh Committee, could join us at our November TC, to begin what we hope will be an ongoing liaison with our National and Regional Committees. Following a mutual exchange of current information about our work, we discovered (not surprisingly) that we shared many of the same issues and challenges – in trying to give support to our members in the new landscape of attrition, risk-averse programming and online work. And also in lobbying our respective Arts Councils! We are, therefore, hoping for this to become a regular feature of our meetings going forward, looking to invite the Scottish and Regional Committees, to share our mutual concerns.

Finally, I'd like to acknowledge our Theatre Committee and heartily thank them for the sterling, selfless work they have contributed to our cause throughout this difficult period. They are Amelia Bullmore, Poppy Corbett, David Edgar, Lisa Evans, Tracey Goddard, Debbie McAndrew, Brian McAvera, Alan Spence, Jen Toksvig, Nick Wood, Jan Woolf and Michael Wynne.

Richard Pinner
Chair

VIDEOGAMES

Victor Ojuel joined Samantha Webb as Co-Chair of the Videogames Committee this year, picking up the reins from Andy Walsh. Both Victor and Samantha would like to thank Andy for his sterling work.

Despite continued restrictions and challenges facing the whole of the country around Covid-19, the Videogames Committee has had another busy and productive year, both in increasing the profile of WGGB in the game industry and in providing game writers with safe, engaging events.

In April 2021 we held our second online videogames writing mini-festival, this time sponsored by Articy, which saw five different panels on writing for indie games, interactive writing portfolios, dialogue as text, creating narrative in procedural worlds and implementing game narrative. These are now all available on the WGGB YouTube channel where they have received just under 2,000 views.

The Committee completed its gargantuan task of revising our guidelines for game writers and those who work with them. These were launched in November 2021, alongside the results of our survey of game writers, which showed that over 50% of game writers had experienced bullying and harassment.

The union has been dealing with an increasing number of game writing members seeking legal representation, advice and support in an industry which has an entrenched reputation for opposing trade union recognition and for allowing bullying, harassment and discrimination, including sexual predation and misogyny, to flourish.

WGGB represented a number of members employed in the narrative team at Fusebox Games in the past year, where dozens of staff were told they faced losing their jobs, weeks after raising concerns about content in a game.

The new guidelines aim to establish best practice and encourage fair, productive and safe workspaces for those involved in the creation of interactive narrative in the games industry. The 29-page guide also serves as a handbook for games writers, both emerging and established, and for those who employ them, and you can find them in the resources section of the WGGB website.

Finally, we were delighted to be back at the Writers' Guild Awards following a two-year break because of Covid, and to award Jon Ingold for *Overboard!*

Samantha Webb and Victor Ojuel
Co-Chairs

National reports

WALES

As we emerge from the ravages of the pandemic, it is evident that Covid has had a devastating impact on artists in Wales, as elsewhere, and this impact is still being felt throughout the creative industries, in spite of the positive support of Welsh Government with whom the creative unions had regular and constructive dialogue at the time. It is to be hoped that the good relationship built during the pandemic between Welsh Government and ourselves will continue, with a particular emphasis on support for freelancers. We would also like to take this opportunity to thank officers of the other creative unions in Wales for the co-operative working relationship we have enjoyed during difficult times.

One issue we are trying to address is that there seems to be an impression, particularly in screen funding sectors, that everything is “back to normal”, mainly because there has been a boom of sorts in filming in Wales, and an evident shortage of crew, which is interpreted as success. In actual fact, freelancers in Wales are far from back to normal. Not only has the ‘boom’ not meant new work for many of those who lost opportunities during the pandemic, Welsh and Wales-based writers in particular very rarely get a look-in. And for those who are working in the sector, it has often meant longer working hours and an increase in creeping bad practice. Add to this the fact that many productions are still being affected with post-Covid cuts, and the situation for writers is far from ‘normal’. A recent survey by Cultural Freelancers Wales/Llawryddion Celfyddydol Cymru, *Road to Recovery* (2021), has revealed that 92% of freelancers said

their work had been negatively affected by Covid, with 49% losing 80% or more of their work in 2021, while almost a quarter of respondents were uncertain whether to continue with careers in the cultural sector. Freelancers make up about half of the cultural workforce in Wales.

We have been active on many issues: initiating discussions on a pan-Wales safety at work/harassment/bullying protocol with the other creative unions in Wales, Arts Council Wales and Creu Cymru (which represents Welsh companies and venues). We have re-established regular meetings with officers at Arts Council Wales, and also with National Theatre Wales, with the intention of improving communication and understanding between these bodies and the wider artistic community over certain issues. We have been involved in negotiations with BBC re rates and are also involved in a long-overdue overhaul of rates and agreements with Teledwyr Annibynnol Cymru, representing Welsh independent TV producers, which we are hoping to be near to finalising. And we have also been in conversation with S4C regarding the future of writing for the channel.

One major impact to television writers in Wales is the formalising of the cut from broadcasting four to three weekly episodes of continuing drama *Pobol y Cwm* (having already gone from five to four during Covid). S4C instigated this cut, citing additional costs for shooting under Covid conditions, ageing equipment and a desire to invest and develop digital content. The series has therefore gone from a pre-Covid 250 episodes a year to 150 episodes a year: cuts which clearly affect the 28 writers (as well as 22+ directors) plus crew, script editors, actors, production staff etc. This is an overall loss of about 50 hours of scripted drama on the channel. We have emphasised to S4C that these hours should not

disappear to be replaced by digital content of unknown quality, content and budget. Now that BBC funding – and therefore S4C funding – has been frozen, this situation is unlikely to improve. We are also in negotiation with the series producers re the editorial process, and discussing ways of improving/changing working practices affecting writers brought in due to Covid restrictions which now need to be reviewed. (S4C's annual budget will be frozen for two years and will then rise with inflation for three years. S4C will receive an additional £7.5 million a year in funding from 2022 to support the development of their digital offering.)

In terms of training, Cult Cymru (Creative Unions Learning Together) has continued to offer an improved variety of courses to members. In addition, 10 Well Being Facilitators have now been appointed, who will offer support in the screen sector to crew and cast on productions, and information and guidance to production companies and producers. This will hopefully be extended to other creative sectors following this pilot.

Finally, our monthly meetings on Zoom have kept information and membership ticking over, and improved access for members. We also continue to invite various speakers to contribute input and experience after meetings.

Once again, we would like to thank members who have kept us informed of the many and ever-changing issues they face, and also the WGGB Officers for the continued support they offer in addressing crucial issues for writers.

Diolch,

Manon Eames and Anna-Lisa Jenaer Co-Chairs

SCOTLAND

This year has been filled with ups and downs, and as a new Scottish Chair I truly feel I have had the proverbial baptism of fire, having begun to learn the ropes whilst coping with the effects of the pandemic and its effects on the writing industry. Overall, the Committee has made good progress both with the Government and with our relationships with other unions as we work together to promote change towards fair pay and sustainability. I am especially grateful to Committee members Grant McGregor and Nicola Cully who have supported me in my new Chairship.

STUC AND THE SCOTTISH GOVERNMENT

Fortnightly meetings between the creative industries unions and the Government, chaired by the STUC, have continued throughout 2021, and relationships between unions continue to strengthen, with the WGGB Scotland being represented by Bill Armstrong and Grant McGregor. This group of unions meeting together has recently changed its name, moving from the Cultural Affiliates group to the Creative Industries group. It was agreed that the latter might give more gravitas and move away from the endemic tendency not to take culture seriously as an economic priority.

Moving forward in 2022, the Creative Industries group will meet with the Government once a month with an agreed agenda beforehand. The group will also meet on its own the week before, which allows for strategy planning to happen beforehand as well as affording an excellent opportunity for members of different unions to strengthen their relationships and realise shared issues and experiences. It is clear that a sustained and coordinated approach from many unions is

beginning to chip away at the red tape of the Government. We will build on this platform, now it is established.

LOBBYING THE SCOTTISH GOVERNMENT

Bill Armstrong, Grant Mitchell and the creative industries unions have continued to lobby the Scottish Government for a commitment to the principle of fair pay, and in doing so have uncovered what seems to be a systemic lack of understanding about the writing process and what constitutes 'work'. After acknowledging that all work must be fairly paid and committing to this principle in the Government's published Culture Strategy, Angus Robertson, Cabinet Secretary for Culture, has refuted the idea that initial research and development, often taking weeks and months, should be paid. He stated that it is just a part of the job.

On the Government website there is very clear documentation including flow charts detailing after which point in development it is unacceptable to ask people to work for free. Although disappointing, this knowledge of the Government's inherent lack of understanding of a writer's job and perhaps the creative process as a whole is something we can build on and it is hoped that through persistence and education we can clarify that all of a writer's work is work.

Unfortunately, post-pandemic recovery is being used as an excuse for low or no pay, allowing organisations to water down agreements, or stretch the amount of work they are asking for. The Creative Industries group will continue to hold the Government accountable for its part in this.

CREATIVE SCOTLAND AND SCREEN SCOTLAND

The first point to make about Creative Scotland is that over the last two years it has prioritised allocating and administrating the emergency funding that the Scottish Government released for those working in the arts. This funding has been a lifeline for many creatives and with Creative Scotland working fast it has been possible to go from the point of application to having money in the bank in under a week.

Understandably this may have resulted in other Creative Scotland processes moving slower than usual, but in our opinion Creative Scotland has functioned extremely well during this time and should be commended.

The new application form for the Creative Scotland Open Fund has been launched and seems much more accessible and appropriate for writers. It is still early days, but Creative Scotland is proactive about helping writers access their funding application and have offered to participate in an online event for WGGB members.

One area for improvement, both for Creative Scotland and Screen Scotland, is the availability of data relating to who their funds are distributed to and for what projects. It is possible to find, after some digging, who has received funding, but any more details are patently lacking. Transparency of Creative Scotland and Screen Scotland with their data published in an accessible format would be extremely helpful in identifying if writers are successfully accessing funding and what kind of projects are being favoured.

Scotland is committed to being a world data leader, and the ideals of open data should also apply to Creative Scotland and Screen Scotland, so we will continue to request that these organisations are open with their data.

SUSTAINABILITY IN THE FILM INDUSTRY

Whilst in discussion with Mairi Claire Bowser, the newly appointed Screen Sustainability Manager for Bectu Vision, it became clear how strong the link is between an environmentally sustainable TV and film industry and investment in preparation and development. Much of the waste towards the end of a production due to reshoots, story changes and lack of money etc could be avoided if there was just sufficient investment in the writing and script development in the beginning.

This is just one more reason to spend time on script development before anything is filmed, and to open the channels between producers and writers to create projects which are streamlined and feasible from the beginning, identifying potential issues while it is still monetarily and environmentally economical to fix them. Lack of investment in development at the start leads to paying extra for it later on.

A NOTE TO THE FUTURE

It is wonderful to see that finally the pandemic restrictions are lifting and that the writing industry is opening up again. There is a real buzz and a feeling of excitement in the air in Scotland (perhaps it's just spring), but I would like to think that we are beginning to make real strides with uniting unions and becoming a recognised presence that the Government needs to listen to. I look forward to seeing what next year holds!

Suzy Enoch
Chair

EAST ANGLIA

In the first full year of the newly established East Anglia Branch, we've continued to hold events on Zoom, and in November 2021 we had our first real world meeting, launching an ongoing relationship with Norwich Theatre. As well as a union meeting, where we had a welcome address from Artist Development Coordinator, Jez Pike, members were able to network during a buffet lunch and attend a rehearsed reading in the studio at Stage Two.

In April this year we built on this relationship and staged an evening of rehearsed readings of members' work in the studio at Norwich Theatre Royal. I've continued to make contact with other arts organisations in the region, and in May we will have a stall at the National Centre for Writing in a publishing fair as part of the Norfolk and Norwich Festival.

Stephen Keyworth
Chair

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

I would like to take the opportunity to thank my Co-Chair and partner-in-crime Teresa Howard, another musical theatre writer, with whom I have worked since our election last year to re-energise the region and encourage more engagement from members. Teresa has recently decided to stand down from the post so she can devote more time to various work commitments. I am very happy to continue as sole Chair for the region and have an excellent Committee of eight representatives who are passionate about continuing the drive to help you all at the Writers' Guild.

The London and South East region is by far the largest of all the union's regions with 1,657 members (56% of the total membership), and may I add that 40 new members have joined since we took up the role of Co-Chairs. We were aware that the region did not have an active Committee for some time, so it was important that Teresa and myself embarked on creating a vibrant and passionate Committee of writers to help to continue to support the work of WGGB. Our Committee members have come together in a series of meetings, some online and some in person over the past six

months, where we have been discussing a number of initiatives which we hope to develop throughout the year.

We reached out to our connections at Arts Council England (ACE) and Teresa and myself hosted a very successful panel event last year, Arts Council grants and how to get them. The event received 161 sign-ups, despite being held in the middle of the summer holidays, and unlike most of the online events it was open to WGGB members only. The panel comprised of speakers Neil Darlison, James Trevelyan and Erica Campayne from ACE, who gave a presentation on applying for grants, and how to demystify the process of winning one, and then we took questions from the audience. We were thrilled with the response and hope you managed to gain great insights into the process to aid you in securing some well needed support.

We look forward to planning another online event in the next six months and we will be hosting an in-person meet-up for regional members later this spring.

Nina Kristofferson
Chair

NORTH WEST (MANCHESTER AND LANCASHIRE)

In uncertain times, we need the WGGB more than ever. It has been great to see the wealth of resources offered online by the union, from talks to advice sessions. I know many North West members have benefited from these sessions. I have been able to help writers in the region with specific issues and signpost to other support.

Do continue to 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 email me 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.

SOUTH WEST (DEVON AND CORNWALL)

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 South West Devon and Cornwall Chair vacancy in the subject field.

SOUTH WEST (WESSEX)

Despite time constraints, and the ongoing pandemic, over the past 12 months I've tried my best to stay in touch with members in the region and have even had some meetings, both in-person and virtually. There has been a range of approaches from film-makers, production companies and others based in Bristol, and I've tried to share relevant information with members in a timely fashion. I've also had many membership enquiries, which I'm hoping translated into new WGGB members!

With my (absolutely metaphorical) Wessex Writers' Guild hat on, I was able to meet with award-winning Bristol indie Indefinite Films, and with Wildseed Studios. The latter ran a seed funding initiative in autumn 2021 and I was able to email local WGGB members in case they had something to submit. In January 2021 I had a Zoom call with the Bristol-based BFI Network Talent Execs and we discussed a huge number of initiatives and projects that I think could be of interest to Wessex members at different stages of their careers. They also sounded keen to potentially partner with WGGB for the right sort of film event, balancing the contacts I've started to build within the Royal Television Society West of England area.

The first Working Class Writers Festival took place in Bristol in October 2021. I did try to get the Writers' Guild involved in some form, but the programme was already set in stone by the time I was made aware of it via a contact at the local TUC. I've also emailed members regarding our Yorkshire Chair's sterling work to oppose the Government's plan to privatise Channel 4 (is 'ruin' too strong a synonym? I think not).

I have also reached out to Wessex members regarding my departure from the role. I've had chats and meetings with a few interested individuals – gratifyingly, no one wants the region to fade away again – and I'm sure whoever steps into my (equally metaphorical) shoes will, as they say in Bristol, do a gert lush job. (I should stress that there is more to the wide and diverse Wessex region than Bristol – and I don't even live there myself – but it does feel like an emerging powerhouse for scripted content of all kinds.)

It's hard to believe that my mandated six years is pretty much up. I became Chair (of a Committee of one) with enormous trepidation but have been supported superbly by both the union as a whole and by my fellow writers. It has been an absolute privilege to represent them. I've met some amazing people, had some wonderful experiences and will even miss the EC meetings (especially the in-person ones, which is quite an admission for an introvert to make). To misquote Tom Baker, just before he fell off a radio telescope and regenerated into Peter Davison, it's the end, but I hope the moment has been prepared for.

Martin Day
Chair

WEST MIDLANDS

The last year has been challenging for everyone. Events that we hoped to bring to fruition just couldn't happen. The ongoing impact of Covid-19 drained mental health, creativity and optimism.

During the summer of 2021 we began planning an event in association with the Screenwriters Forum that we hoped to hold at Birmingham City University in the autumn. The aim was to set a new agenda and connect writers and decision-makers in the regional industry. At the time, Covid-19 seemed to be abating, and we were looking at an in-person event, in line with the university's guidelines. The return of Covid meant plans had to be put on hold indefinitely, however.

I had hoped to engage with students at the University of Worcester, through my role as a Royal Literary Fund Writing Fellow, but the campus was like a ghost town. Many staff and students simply did not attend campus. Those members of staff I did meet commented on the lack of students willing to travel to campus. My opportunities to engage with staff or students were therefore extremely limited.

In coming months we're likely to revamp the committee, which will include an East Midlands recruitment drive. The West Midlands Committee intends to continue planning practical events for local members, both online and in person, whichever seems most appropriate. To this end, we'll continue to work with the University of Worcester, Script Sirens and the Royal Television Society.

Martin Sketchley
Chair

YORKSHIRE

It's been an enormous pleasure to represent the WGGB in Yorkshire for another year. I very much enjoy helping our region's members with whatever challenges or problems they face.

It's certainly a relief to see life returning to our region's creative institutions – it's inspiring to see theatres large and small with their lights back on, showcasing new work; to see film and TV production in the region head back to somewhere near pre-Covid levels; and to see books, radio plays and videogames starting to reappear in greater numbers.

But it's also evident that Covid has created financial and creative stresses in sectors of our industry that are already struggling, and outside of London, it always feels like creatives are hit harder than any others. I've heard alarming stories of writers being asked to work for little or nothing, or to work outside normally agreed guidelines "because of Covid". Let's be clear: Covid is not and can never be an excuse for not being paid properly. It's been a timely reminder of just what the Writers' Guild is here for, and the power of a union in standing up to exploitation.

I mentioned in last year's report that I hoped that working remotely/online has forced a democratisation of access for regional writers in an industry that is still too dominated by London-centric institutions and opportunities. It does feel like that is a shift that is becoming permanent – no one raises an eyebrow at having an online meeting – and I hope that's a genuine positive that stays with us, because it has such an impact on regional writers with low incomes and/or writers with disabilities or access issues.

At the WGGB, we have found the opportunity to engage with a greater number of members via online events has been profound, and I'd love the chance to run another regional Zoom event with a uniquely Yorkshire perspective. If you work in a sector you feel hasn't been represented by our Zoom events, or you have an idea for an event, please do get in touch.

Finally, we separated the Yorkshire and North East regions into two different roles – anyone who lives in either would agree that they are two very distinctive cultural and geographic regions! We're still looking for a North East rep to represent our members from that part of the world. Regional roles can be as big or small as you make them – first and foremost, you need to be a first point of contact for members and their questions, issues and problems. Do you think that could be you, or do you know a member who might fit the bill? Let us know.

I'm always inspired by the creativity of the Yorkshire region, and the way that creatives support and encourage one another. Long may that grow and continue! Meanwhile, if I can help in any way or offer any advice, I'm always delighted to hear from our Yorkshire members. Email me on yorkshire@writersguild.org.uk

David Allison
Chair

Other reports

EDITORIAL AND COMMUNICATIONS

We are happy to announce the launch of the following project in 2021.

COMPETITION OR CUT-PRICE COMMISSION?

This new publication addresses an issue that is common in many craft areas: commissions being labelled as competitions in order to excuse the poor terms and conditions being offered as a 'prize', doing a disservice to both commissions and competitions. We consulted with our Craft Committees and hope that our new publication will help writers across the board make more informed decisions about when to put their work forward for something that will genuinely benefit them, and when to leave well alone.

The publication was well received by our members and other writers, received coverage in the media and continues to get good engagement on social media.

GOING FORWARDS

The Editorial and Communications Committee is now a responsive group which can rise to specific occasions where other committees require our support, but remains otherwise dormant and in awe of the work of the rest of the union.

Jenifer Toksvig and Thom Fell
Co-Chairs

EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY

In its second full year, the Committee is moving at a pace.

Following on from last year's WGGB membership survey, the Equality and Diversity Committee are delighted that their long-held goal for industry-wide research into the experiences of ethnically diverse writers across all sectors is well underway. The research, conducted by Inc Arts, has been made possible with support from ALCS and the results are due in the coming months. The results of this important work will input into the planning of future campaign work for the Committee and the union in championing representation.

Connected to this, the Equality and Diversity Committee recently discussed in depth the use of the term BAME and for the moment have voted to continue using the term for purposes of information monitoring and statistics, to be in line with other unions. WGGB specific engagement with writers on identity has already transitioned to a self-selective approach. In the meantime, we hope for a better industry standard adoption and will continue to review our position as the conversation develops and once recommendations are received from Inc Arts as part of their research.

This past year the Committee has seen the creation of a new working group to better focus on the issues affecting disabled writers. The group have been a great source of support, as well as sharing their experiences with industry through several highly successful and profile-raising Zoom events. They have advised directly into matters and initiatives targeting disabled writers and, additionally, it is a great source of pride for the Committee that each member of the working group is currently actively working.

The Equality and Diversity Committee continues to provide input at executive level and into ongoing WGGB initiatives such as the recently launched New Play Commission Scheme, as well as supporting and advocating for matters arising from the union's casework and liaising with colleagues from other Writers' Guild Committees.

If you think you could help the Equality and Diversity Committee on this vital and important work, we are always looking for new, committed members. You don't have to have any experience, just passion! Email ED@writersguild.org.uk to register your interest.

Sukey Fisher and Sumerah Srivastav
Co-Chairs

Obituaries

WGGB has sadly lost some long-standing members in 2021-22, 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/).

Bob Baker (1939-2021)

Eric Chappell (1933-2022)

Stephen Churchett (1947-2022)

Barry Cryer (1935-2022)

John Finch (1925-2022)

Kay Mellor (1951-2022)

Eric Sanders (1919-2021)

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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.

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