



Annual report 2022-23

www.writersguild.org.uk/

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

Contents

- 5 Summary
- 11 General Secretary's report
- 15 Chair's report
- 18 President's report
- 20 Treasurer's report

23 EQUALITY & DIVERSITY COMMITTEE REPORT

CRAFT COMMITTEE REPORTS

- 25 Audio
- 27 Books
- 32 Comedy
- 33 Film
- 36 Television
- 40 Theatre
- 45 Videogames

NATIONAL REPORTS

- 47 Wales
- 50 Scotland

REGIONAL AND BRANCH REPORTS

- 53 East Anglia
- 54 East Midlands
- 54 London and South East
- 56 North East
- 56 North West (Manchester and Lancashire)
- 56 North West (Merseyside)
- 56 South West (Devon and Cornwall)
- 57 South West (Wessex)
- 58 West Midlands
- 61 Yorkshire

OBITUARIES

- 62 Remembering WGGB members
-

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**

Mastodon: **@TheWritersGuildGB@union.place**

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 2022 to 31 March 2023.

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

We successfully campaigned against the privatisation of Channel 4.

We published a report into the practices of hybrid/paid-for publishers who charge authors to publish their books and launched a campaign to tackle bad practice.

We supported the TUC 'We Demand Better' campaign for a better deal for working people and took part in a day of action to protect the right to strike, which is under threat from proposed new Government legislation.

We continue to show solidarity with other unions and their members who are striking for fair pay and working conditions, including with our sister union Writers Guild of America East and West.

We have spoken out about the shake-up to arts funding in England and the impact this will have on new playwriting,

including the threat to venues like Hampstead Theatre and Oldham Coliseum.

Our Scottish Branch and members successfully lobbied the Scottish Government against plans to cut £7 billion from the budget of Creative Scotland.

We have successfully lobbied Ofcom to secure improved transparency and accountability measures for the BBC. We now continue to campaign for better terms for writers and a reversal of the recent cuts to broadcast audio drama.

We surveyed screenwriters in film and found that more than 70% had not been properly credited in the promotion and distribution of their work, and almost half said they had been belittled and excluded from their creations. We are working on a campaign to tackle this.

We regularly respond to Government consultations on a wide range of issues which affect our members.

The Creators' Rights Alliance, its members and partner organisations (including WGGB) launched the Pay the Creator Campaign.

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 continued to make the case to policy-makers of the importance of the creative industries in the UK and the creative workers who power it.

CLIMATE CRISIS

Following a motion passed at our AGM in 2019 we continue to look at ways to tackle the climate crisis as an organisation, including introducing vegetarian/vegan food only at events, reducing plastic and utilising digital technology like Zoom for our events and meetings.

THE COST OF LIVING CRISIS

We surveyed writers on the cost-of-living crisis and found that 55% said rising energy and food costs were impacting on their ability to sustain a writing career.

DIGITAL RIGHTS

Writers Digital Payments, set up by WGGB and the Personal Managers' Association in 2015, has now paid out over £6.8 million to writers for use of their work on BBC iPlayer.

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

We agreed a ground-breaking set of principles to govern the digital broadcasts of stage plays by the Royal Court, Royal Shakespeare Company and National Theatre.

EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY

We launched an Access Rider for disabled writers to reduce access barriers in the industries in which they work.

We continued to run online events for under-represented writing groups, including new networks for LGBT+ writers, disabled, deaf and/or neurodivergent members and writers returning after a career break.

We are working on a survey of writers to inform our work on ageism in the creative industries.

We are in the early stages of planning an event in October to focus on the barriers writers of colour face.

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

EVENTS

We ran over 20 events via the Zoom platform, including our third virtual AGM, and member-only training workshops.

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 page 47 onwards.

NEGOTIATIONS

We negotiated a 20% rate rise for TV writers in Wales, a 4% rise on minimum fees for BBC audio writers, a 2% rise in minimum fees for BBC TV writers and a 5% rise for ITV writers. We also negotiated a 2% rise on minimum fees for playwrights commissioned by the Royal Court, Royal Shakespeare Company and National Theatre.

WGGB continues to work with Pact on renegotiating its national film agreement with the union.

NEW BEST PRACTICE GUIDANCE

We revised our guidelines for animations writers and launched a new guide to self-publishing.

We produced a model film and TV agreement.

NEW PLAY COMMISSION SCHEME

Alongside partner organisations we launched the New Play Commission Scheme (NPCS) to ensure 18 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, was a response to the decline in new commissions as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic.

RECRUITMENT

Our membership has now exceeded the 3,000 mark.

#STANDWITHUKRAINE

WGGB condemns the illegal invasion of Ukraine and 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 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.

WRITERS' GUILD AND OTHER AWARDS

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

We celebrated the cream of British writing once again at the annual Writers' Guild Awards ceremony in London, which have been paused for 2024, giving us the opportunity to re-evaluate them.

General Secretary's report

Looking back over the past year, I'm struck by all that we have achieved on the campaigning front. In particular, our campaign to save Channel 4 from privatisation was a resounding success and in January we welcomed the news that the Government had finally scrapped its disastrous plans. Without the work of WGGB and our sister entertainment unions, the publicly owned broadcaster could have been sold to a private company, with major consequences for writers and the wider creative workforce.

Hot on the heels of this victory came another one – the Scottish Government U-turned on a plan to slash £7 million from the budget of Creative Scotland, following an outcry from unions including WGGB.

I'd like to say thank you to our members who signed petitions, lobbied their MPs, made their voice heard on social media, or got involved in other ways for both these campaigns and others we have run throughout the year.

Collective action works and there is still plenty more work to be done. We are continuing to keep the pressure up following the shake-up to Arts Council England funding, which we believe will severely impact new writing in theatre.

Workers' rights are under threat more than ever before, following Government plans to undermine the right to strike, and thanks to all members who joined the TUC Day of Action earlier this year, or who have shown solidarity with striking railworkers, teachers, nurses, ambulance workers and more.

We have also shown our solidarity with our sister union the Writers Guild of America, whose members are, at the time of publication, taking part in industrial action, following the expiration of their agreement with the Alliance of Motion Picture and Television Producers. The latter had not offered an acceptable deal for writers. We have been supporting our members impacted by the strike here and have seen an increase in writers seeking advice on their contracts.

55% of respondents to a recent survey we carried out said rising energy and food costs were impacting on their ability to sustain a writing career, which is why our negotiations on behalf of writers are so important. This year we secured a 20% rate rise for TV writers in Wales, a 4% rise on minimum fees for BBC audio writers, a 2% rise in minimum fees for BBC TV writers and a 5% rise for ITV writers. We also negotiated a 2% rise on minimum fees for playwrights commissioned by the Royal Court, Royal Shakespeare Company and National Theatre.

Writers' Digital Payments, set up by WGGB and the Personal Managers' Association, has now paid out a staggering £6.8 million to writers for use of their work on BBC iPlayer. Indeed, our work in the digital arena is so vital to futureproof writers' rights. We are proud to have agreed a ground-breaking set of principles to govern the digital broadcasts of stage plays by the Royal Court, Royal Shakespeare Company and National Theatre this year; and we continue to engage with the SVOD players. We have also started work on AI and its impact on writers, starting with a survey which received an overwhelming response (watch this space for further news on our work in this area).

A major highlight of our year was the launch of our landmark New Play Commission Scheme last summer – a response to the impact Covid-19 has had on the theatre sector and new playwriting in particular. 18 new commissions for playwrights across England were secured as a result of the scheme, which was spearheaded by our former President and current theatre negotiator David Edgar. He was rightfully awarded the special Outstanding Contribution award at the Writers' Guild Awards this year, in honour in part for his part in WGGB's crisis response in theatre during the pandemic.

As well as our red-carpet, Writers' Guild Awards ceremony, we also held our annual Olwen Wymark Theatre Encouragement Awards, our Tinniswood audio drama award, and a packed programme of events, for members and non-members alike, including a new series of member training workshops and networks for under-represented writing groups.

In fact, our equality and diversity work, led by our active committee, has been very busy in recent months; we launched an access rider for disabled writers, last December, and looking ahead, we are planning to tackle ageism in our industries, and the barriers that affect ethnically diverse scriptwriters.

This is just a small snapshot of our work this past 12 months, across our nations and regions and our different craft areas, none of which would be possible without WGGB's elected officers and reps, all working writers as well as volunteers, who have pulled out all the stops to improve the lot of all writers through their tireless work.

I also want to thank our staff, whose continued and dedicated hard work underpins a robust union, which continues to see

sustained member growth. I am proud to report that we have now exceeded the 3,000 member mark for the first time in our long history! This is a real achievement and our ability to reach out to new members through our Zoom events, student talks and other online means is proving very fruitful. Be assured that your union is thriving and growing!

That just leaves me to make one more thank you – to you. Your membership makes the WGGB stronger, and without you there would be no union. Working together collectively we can make a massive difference. Please do think about getting more active in your union (you can find your local or craft rep and their contact details on our website, in the Contacts section).

I also hope that I will see you at our AGM again this year.

Ellie Peers
General Secretary

Chair's report

This will be my last annual report as Chair of the WGGB as I am about to complete my four-year term of office. And whilst I am a passionate supporter of term limits as they bring about fresh thinking, new blood and renewed energy, I am still sad to be stepping down. It has been a great honour to Chair such an extraordinary organisation with its committed staff, dedicated activists and passionate membership.

It is an understatement to say that it has been a challenging four years. When I took on the job in the summer of 2019, I couldn't possibly have predicted how the WGGB and our members would be tested by world events. And I am pleased to say it has done it with great success. And I am happy to say that our union has emerged stronger, more responsive and harder working than I ever hoped it could be.

This year has seen yet more successful campaigning against the privatisation of Channel 4 and swingeing cuts to Creative Scotland. Campaigning will remain at the heart of what we do with new battles in the planning. We have also started targeted training for our Executive Council members to ensure the effectiveness of their activism.

Our engagement with our members continues to be an essential and valuable part of our work. I am grateful to everyone who has responded to our surveys looking into everything from the cost-of-living crisis to the working experiences of ethnically diverse writers. Every contact builds a clearer picture of how writers are being treated and helps us target our resources and energies effectively.

We are also working hard to include members who may have found WGGB activities difficult to access in the past due to disability or financial constraints. I would also like to thank the Equality and Diversity Committee for their work setting up networks for LGBT+ writers and disabled, deaf and/or neurodivergent members (with more to come!).

Nevertheless, there is always more that we can do and we are always happy to receive feedback about how we can make the WGGB even more accessible.

Our standing and influence within the creative industries continues to go from strength to strength. A heavy schedule of lobbying, negotiations and forums with industry bodies such as the BBC, ITV, PACT, SVOD providers, the main theatre management bodies and Parliamentarians continues.

I wish I could say that every threat to writers and their livelihoods had been curbed during my tenure. New writing for the theatre seems to be on a dangerous precipice. The closure of the Oldham Coliseum and several longstanding theatre companies in the wake of the NPO decisions made by Arts Council England are worrying. The WGGB has tried to redress the balance with the New Play Commissioning Scheme but it takes a great deal more than schemes to create a viable environment in which new talent can flourish.

We also continue to brace ourselves for more 'Brexit Benefits' and the long-term effects of sky-high inflation. Whatever occurs, the WGGB will be ready with advice and action. And whilst I am sad to be standing down from the Executive Committee, I know it remains in safe hands.

And so all that is left for me to say is a heartfelt thank you to the WGGB staff for their guidance and patience throughout my term. I also want to thank all the members of the

Executive Council, Finance Committee and the WGGB Officers for their hard work. Finally, thank you to the membership. You are all colleagues and friends, and it has been a pleasure to work on your behalf.

Lisa Holdsworth
Chair

President's report

This past year has witnessed a galvanisation of the trade union movement, and I'm proud to have seen so many fellow WGGB members standing in solidarity with workers striking for fair pay and working conditions, and marching to protect the right to strike itself.

Writers themselves are, of course, affected by the current cost-of-living crises, as a recent WGGB survey has shown. Over half of those surveyed said that rising food and energy costs were impacting on their ability to sustain a writing career, 67% reported having to use savings in order to manage day-to-day expenditure, while 37% said they had to rely on their partners' earnings.

It is no surprise that these findings led WGGB General Secretary Ellie Peers to warn that the UK faces a "serious loss of writing talent" as a result and heartening to hear that the union would be doubling down on its lobbying and campaigning work, not to mention its negotiations on pay, and indeed do everything in its power to stop this happening.

Because without writers, where would we be? Not only do they drive our multi-billion, world-leading creative industries, but they make us culturally richer, too.

This was apparent at this year's Writers' Guild Award ceremony, which I was delighted to attend once again. And also at our online AGM where I was struck by how writers bring their creative talents to bear on campaigns, negotiations and other union activity. This is evident in their outpouring of activism on social media, and I'm sure in their (more private) letters to MPs! WGGB victories like

the campaign against the privatisation of Channel 4 are just one small example of this, but there are many others in the pages of this annual report, and I'll leave your craft, regional and national reps to fill you in on all their valiant and tireless efforts of the past year, all voluntary, and all hugely appreciated.

I also want to pay tribute to the leadership of General Secretary Ellie Peers, Chair Lisa Holdsworth and our other elected officers, who – alongside WGGB staff – ensure your union is in steadfast hands.

But none of this would happen at all if it wasn't for you. As a WGGB member, you are a vital part of this union; in fact, you are the union. It is our collective strength that drives our victories and I am in no doubt that we are stronger together.

I look forward to many more wins for writers, and I thank you for belonging.

Sandi Toksvig OBE
President

Treasurer's report

I'm happy to report that despite Brexit, Covid, inflation and everything else that life has thrown at us for the past year, we're still here. The WGGB finances are in fine fettle.

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 2022 WGGB financial year of £759,455. The Royalties Account (which holds funds for distribution to writers) received £22,472 and distributed £19,581 in payments to writers through 2022. A total of £68,028 was carried forward.

The Finance Committee is prudent with your money, as are the staff. All of the union's expenditures are for the benefit of members. We have more outgoings this year for the good reason that we have recruited even more members. Membership stands at over 3,000.

To service the increased membership, the union has hired more staff. We welcomed Joe Abel as Assistant Organiser – Nations & Regions; to further ensure that the Writers' Guild isn't London-centric. Tiffany Hanks-McComas has joined us as Administrator – Member Support. Eleanor Dawson has been promoted to Assistant Organiser – Craft. The WGGB now has more staff than ever; each one of the eight doing a sterling job.

Committee meetings are for the most part on Zoom. This is a considerable saving on committee members' travelling expenses; all used for the membership's good. We've been able to increase our lawyers' hours to help with additional casework, a vital part of union work.

The Writers' Guild Awards were successful this year; shining a spotlight on writers and our union. The Awards are paid for by sponsorship, with WGGB adding an extra £1,000 to provide an edited version for our YouTube channel; making it accessible to all.

I'm proud to say that for the seventh year running, WGGB has not had to put up members' subscriptions, which is incredible during these times.

The union has comfortable financial reserves, enough to make certain that we can cover staff pay and running costs for the next five years. It's important that everyone knows that we are here to stay.

WGGB has a healthy Welfare Fund, for members who need help during these difficult times. Please remember that the union Welfare Fund is always there for members who suffer urgent financial difficulties. You can check for details at www.writersguild.org.uk/member-benefits/welfare-fund/

We've also helped Ukrainian screenwriters, making a donation of £5,000 to provide emergency support through the International Coalition for Filmmakers at Risk's Emergency Fund for Filmmakers and the Federation of Screenwriters in Europe (FSE). In addition, WGGB hosted a screening of the film *Paddington* in Ukrainian; adding another £2,000 to our donation for our fellow screenwriters in the region.

All of the above is made possible thanks to the ceaseless hard work of the Finance Committee. Because our meetings are now on Zoom, they don't even get biscuits. I want to thank Lisa Holdsworth, William Gallagher, Emma Reeves, John

Wilsher, Richard Pinner, Rupert Creed and Antony Pickthall for their wisdom, good fellowship and good judgement.

More than ever, this year has shown us all the importance of trade unions and standing together to make the changes we want to see. Our greatest asset is our members. Please do your best to recruit more writers to join us.

Gail Renard

WGGB Treasurer

Equality and Diversity Committee report

The Equality and Diversity Committee has had a very busy year and are delighted that some new initiatives are now well underway.

To reduce access barriers for freelance writers in broadcasting, film, theatre, publishing and the videogames industry, we have launched the Writers' Access Rider and accompanying guidance, drawn up by our working party group of disabled writers. The rider can be used by members to raise access issues with those who engage and contract self-employed writers, to identify what adjustments can be made to remove barriers to their work. The Word template can be adjusted by each writer to detail their specific needs and can be used in a variety of circumstances.

A series of WGGB Network Groups have also been introduced, which bring together writers from underrepresented groups. These networks are a safe space for members to meet, interact and share their thoughts, ideas, and experiences with each other. We have successfully launched a Deaf, Disabled and/or Neurodivergent Network Group, and a LGBT+ Network Group, and plan to launch additional equalities networks throughout the year.

We are also organising for the WGGB to have a presence at the TUC equalities conferences.

There has been a lot of discussion about tackling ageism in the industry across our different craft areas and we are in the early stages of planning activity to address this, which our committee will be co-ordinating.

Our long-held goal for industry-wide research into the experiences of ethnically diverse writers across all sectors is currently being re-assessed. We are currently exploring how we can pursue this work and how the committee and the union can continue to champion representation.

Sumerah Srivastav and Miranda Walker
Co-Chairs

Craft committee reports

AUDIO

Post-pandemic and post-Brexit economic conditions, combined with advances in recording technology, makes this a boom time for audio listening and a challenging time for professional audio writers. The old certainty of BBC radio commissioning continues to crumble. Audible makes its own rules. Writers navigate the teeming landscape of non-broadcast production without a roadmap.

Lucy Gough and I took over as Co-Chairs in September 2022. Our aim was to revitalise the committee and involve more members in audio; to navigate around the BBC as well as negotiating with it.

The Audio Committee has since met quarterly, with each meeting split equally between BBC and non-broadcast. Four additional sub-committee meetings have addressed specific areas. We prioritised non-broadcast audio – a growing area where the WGGB needs to recruit more members. We plan a members' survey of non-broadcast audio writing and research into non-broadcast scripted audio production, with the aim of mapping the sector and establishing industry-wide best practice guidelines, including rates. As BBC radio is increasingly adopting a 'podcast' format, strengthening rates here will benefit audio writers everywhere.

Regarding BBC radio drama specifically, 2023 sees the centenary of the first BBC radio play. Our committee has been proactive in championing and defending the craft, remuneration and status of BBC audio writers. We are reaching out to other audio organisations and unions to

develop a unified front on BBC radio cuts, while at the same time seeking to work more closely with individual commissioners in BBC radio drama and BBC scripted comedy to improve communication and support the sector. We plan events around the past and future of audio drama to raise awareness of the form, encourage new writers and inform members looking to expand their opportunities for work. This is in addition to our regular BBC Audio Forum participation.

As Co-Chairs, Lucy Gough and I have benefitted from working together. We are full of admiration for outgoing chair Nicholas McInerney, grateful for his advice and continued active involvement, and look forward to the growing strength of his UK International Radio Drama Festival. We are grateful for the continuity and expertise of Lucy Flannery and Ken Bentley in Audio Forum and non-broadcast liaison, and all members old and new who have participated this year, plus the tireless support and patience of Eleanor Dawson and all WGGB staff.

The WGGB Audio Committee has again co-awarded the Tinniswood Audio Drama Award with the Society of Authors. Our first Audio Committee event of 2023 was a roundtable with all four Tinniswood finalists - Oliver Emanuel, Katie Hims, Linda Marshall Griffiths and Anita Sullivan, hosted by Audio Committee member Ming Ho. We look forward to welcoming more members to our events and broadening the horizons for audio writing and writers in 2023 and beyond.

**Nicola Baldwin and Lucy Gough
Co-Chairs**

BOOKS

Last year, we reported that Covid lockdown had reminded people of their love of books and that there had been a resurgence of book reading – and writing. We’re now seeing the results of that new writing in a busy, competitive market. And yet writers face ever mounting challenges.

In December 2022, CREATe published the results of a survey of 60,000 UK-based authors, which made depressing reading. It found that typical earnings among self-employed people for whom writing is the primary occupation have dropped by 38.2% in real terms since 2018, which was itself part of a “sustained downward trend over the past two decades”.

While this affects all writers, the report also found that, ‘Women, black and mixed-race authors, the very young and very old all earn less than their respective counterparts’.

There were additional concerns about worsening conditions in contracts, over copyright, etc.

The Books Committee has been fully engaged in these issues, with practical efforts made to support new writing from diverse backgrounds, to explore the autonomy offered by self-publishing, and to campaign alongside other organisations to prevent further narrowing of the field.

BEST FIRST NOVEL AWARD

For the fifth year running, the Books Committee oversaw the Best First Novel category for the Writers’ Guild Awards. Our jury – Martin Day, Tim Glencross, Merle Nygate, Qaisra Shahraz, Cerriann Taylor and chair Simon Guerrier – valiantly worked through 47 submissions from a diverse range of authors, and from publishers big and small. The shortlist was

particularly strong: *Braver* by Deborah Jenkins (Fairlight), *An Olive Grove in Ends* by Moses McKenzie (Headline) and our winner, *The Return of Faraz Ali* by Aamina Ahmad (Sceptre).

Aamina then took part in an online event with last year's winner, Eli Lee (author of *A Strange and Brilliant Light* (Quercus)), in what we hope will become a tradition in handing over the baton – and help give this award more of a legacy. We've also been looking at other ways that our award can better support and promote new writers.

SELF-PUBLISHING GUIDE

Our step-by-step guide to self-publishing for authors, ably overseen by former Books Co-Chair Corinne Sweet, launched on 7 October 2022. Corinne took part in a very successful online launch event with Merle Nygate (also from the Books Committee), WGGB Organiser John Sailing and Orna Ross, founder of the Alliance of Independent Authors. The result has been lots of ongoing conversations with writers and publishers – much of it very positive.

We're already looking into the potential of a follow-up guide for writers on working with illustrators in self-published work. And we're working on a project to self-publish our own book as evidence that our guidance really works!

HYBRID/PAID-FOR PUBLISHING REPORT AND CAMPAIGN

Last year also saw the launch of *Is it a steal?*, a joint report with the Society of Authors, investigating the world of hybrid/paid-for publishing which exposed bad practice among companies that charge writers to publish their books. It detailed aggressive marketing tactics, manipulative sales

approaches, unclear contracts and publishing processes and services that fall far short of expectations and value. The report also included the findings of a survey which found that 94% of writers who had paid to have their book published lost money, typically in the thousands. WGGB and Society of Authors are calling for reform of the hybrid/paid-for publishing sector and you can find out more, including how you can get involved, at:

www.writersguild.org.uk/wggb_campaigns/is-it-a-steal

PUBLIC LENDING RIGHT (PLR)

The pandemic had an unusual effect on PLR, the scheme by which authors receive payment for loans of their books from libraries. The amount paid each year varies because a fixed budget is divided up by the total number of loans over the previous 12 months. Lockdown meant much fewer loans overall, which resulted in a much higher payment per loan. Yet the higher rate seems to have balanced the drop in loans – so the payments received by authors have generally been in step with previous years.

After nine years representing the Writers' Guild, Nick Yapp attended his last meeting of the British Library Advisory Committee for the Public Lending Right on 31 October 2022. Simon Guerrier attended his first PLR meeting in February 2023 and is keen to see how WGGB can better support libraries more generally.

EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES

In response to a member's query, the Books Committee got the union to join ALCS and other book-sector bodies in calling for the Government to halt plans to develop comprehensive education resources from Oak National

Academy. The concern is that this would limit the scope for learning for students, the range of options available to teachers and the opportunities for work available to writers. It also risks politicising the curriculum.

The union's Executive Committee voted in favour of action in December, and WGGB co-signed a letter to the Department for Education, and continues to take an active role in this matter.

IN THE REGIONS

We're continuing to meet online over Zoom, which has enabled a number of new members to join the Books Committee from around the country who couldn't otherwise make in-person meetings in London. Indeed, the London-centric focus of UK publishing has been noted several times – and we're making efforts to address this in the way we operate.

Online events such as our interview with two winners of the Best First Novel Award have proven successful and we are looking to do more such events, covering a range of topics. In addition, the Chair of the Books Committee attended several Guild-related events in London in the past few months, but will also take part in Manchester-based 'Macfest' in March and attend a PLR meeting in Leeds later in the year.

IN FUTURE

The Books Committee is engaged and enthusiastic in working for Writers' Guild members and authors more generally in these challenging times. We cover a lot of ground and our meetings can be lively – most recently debating the potential threats (and opportunities) to the books industry presented by AI. There is lots to be got into. We are getting into it.

Simon Guerrier
Chair

COMEDY

This year the Comedy Committee met less regularly, but addressed a few issues:

BROADENING ACCESS AND REPRESENTATION

Membership of the committee became more diverse this year, but there remains a lot more work to do. Outreach to writer-performers continued and led to some new members joining the WGGB.

SKETCH SHOWS

The committee continues to push the BBC and other broadcasters to commit to more money for sketch shows. Our belief that sketch shows provide important access to production and new talent for writers early in their careers was represented to Ofcom in their consultation this year.

If you'd like more detail or would like to join (or chair!) the committee, do drop me a line!

Nathaniel Tapley
Chair

FILM

2022 saw the Film Committee – some of us, at least – meet in person for the first time since pre-Covid. The IRL-Zoom blended meeting we held in September was, to be honest, not entirely successful (lots of shouting/hand waving/sore necks etc), and Zoom will remain the standard going forwards. But the joy of being in the same room as my wonderful, talented, generous Film Committee colleagues was an enduring memory of a long and productive year of work in 2022.

We met five times as a committee in 2022, to discuss the various announcements and pronouncements, white papers and wizard wheezes, of three different Conservative administrations, and ended up – like the rest of the country – broadly back where we started: Film4 still in business, the BFI still hanging by a thread, BAFTA still #sowhite and the British film industry still in a state of existential crisis.

We continued our negotiations with PACT over updates to both the (1992) Minimum Terms Agreement for feature film writing, and to the (1974) Screenwriting Credits Agreement, both well overdue a new lick of paint in 2023.

In October I was lucky enough to attend the World Conference of Screenwriters in Copenhagen, along with members of the EC and fellow Film Committee member, former Co-Chair and proud Dane, Line Langebek. This was an invigorating and inspiring opportunity to meet employees and volunteers from writers' guilds around the world, to share knowledge and compare strategies (particularly regarding SVOD revenues). I learned a lot, and look forward to seeing how WGGB continues to evolve in line with its international partners.

Three days after returning from that, I joined a number of the Film Committee in preaching the WGGB gospel at a networking drinks at London Film Festival, which the Writers' Guild had sponsored. This proved a fantastic opportunity to reach new members in a 'target-rich environment', and our indomitable President had them eating out of her hand with a well-judged message extolling the benefit of strength in numbers in this notoriously lonesome career.

At this event, we also teased the results from a film writer survey we had conducted (well picked-up in the trade press) which showed that 70% of UK film screenwriters had not been properly credited for their work at some point in their career. These and other data will inform our campaigning work in 2023 (see below). The event was judged both a success and a lot of fun, and we hope it opens up opportunities for further engagement with LFF in 2023 and beyond.

The day after that (October was a busy month, it seems), I joined Sukey Venables-Fisher and Emma Reeves (TV Chairs past and present) to discuss TV and film option agreements, in an online event to accompany last year's publication of a new template film option agreement.

The Writers' Guild Film Awards were keenly contested and robustly debated, as ever. Without giving too much away, the Best First Screenplay category often proves a more competitive category than Best Screenplay. Writers earlier on in their careers perhaps have more licence to 'swing for the fences', in order to establish themselves in the industry. From a strong field we ended up giving the awards to two deserving book-to-screen adaptations, Best Screenplay to

Ben Power for *Munich – The Edge of War*, and Best First Screenplay to writer-director Rebecca Hall for *Passing*.

In their infinite – if occasionally suspect – wisdom, the Film Committee saw fit to re-elect me as chair at the summer's AGM, so for better or worse they are stuck with me for the next three years. Having spent my first 'term in office' basically trying not to foul up too badly, I now feel emboldened to take my supermajority out for a ride and see if we can't do something meaningful with it.

To that end, I tasked the Film Committee to bring me their Big Ideas for the years ahead, be that challenging poor behaviour by producers, calling out the deficiencies of the auteur system, or looking to screenwriters to lead a creative response to the climate crisis. As I write this, the Film Committee is developing a concerted campaign of action across multiple fronts, informed by hard data and bitter experience. But we want to be judged by our actions not our words, so (cliff-hanger alert) do make sure to check back here in 2024 to find out how we got on.

Thanks as ever to my incredible, hard-working and yes-sometimes-hard-drinking Film Committee. It's great fun, and a great privilege, to work with you.

Tom Williams
Chair

TELEVISION

This has been a year of great change in television and within the Writers' Guild. My predecessor Emma Reeves retired last year as TV Chair after seven years; she's a hard act to follow, though she couldn't have made the transition gentler and is still very much active in the union and on the TV Committee. She changed the map for TV writers in her time in office: all of us say a heartfelt thank you. We have a strong, engaged TV Committee, a good mix of ages and experiences across the industry. Thanks to them too for all their voluntary work over the past year, which has been indispensable. Thanks as well, it goes without saying, to General Secretary Ellie Peers and the other officials, a good deal of whose time is taken up with TV negotiations and general hassles, and an especial welcome to Eleanor Dawson (WGGB Assistant Organiser – Craft) as our dedicated link person between officials and committees.

Our work on the TV Committee covers a diverse, and large, group of WGGB members. Some do only TV, many work also in features, theatre, audio, books and games. We have big writers doing high-budget original shows, we have Candidate Members finding their best way into the business, we have specialist adaptors, we have writers who work mainly on continuing and returning shows, we have specialist children's writers, we have animation writers, we have young writers, older writers, writers returning after career breaks and writers with protected characteristics, declared and undeclared. Representing everyone as well as we possibly can is demanding and the landscape of funders, commissioners and producers is changing at speed.

The threat of Channel 4 privatisation has gone away for now but was a disturbing instance of an idea with almost no support within the industry, no proper planned outcome but enough political will to damage a uniquely important terrestrial broadcaster when it least needed that. WGGB was one of the strong voices that helped Channel 4 fight off the threat. At the same time it's not easy to be reminded how fragile our livelihoods can be. The Broadcasting White Paper remains a priority for us, and the union's detailed scrutiny and lobbying is vital again.

While Covid hasn't disappeared, TV production is back to its pre-Covid levels in most areas (though tactical cuts have been slipped in). In others there's an explosion of new investment and work. While it's very good to see WGGB members and screenwriters in general thriving, this is a pressure point where changes are potentially worrying. The Writers' Guild has mature, effective relationships with terrestrial broadcasters but that's not so advanced with streamers, who in several cases are resistant to unions. For well-agented writers that's OK but for newer writers it may not be, and there are too many buyout agreements which don't give writers a long-term stake in their own work. WGGB continues to work to establish fairer terms of business but that won't happen overnight and we face considerable resistance. Streamer commissioners are looking increasingly for a single director per season to author a show and that's part of a pattern – not universal, but widespread enough – which risks eroding a writer's presence, screen credits and income. We're joining forces with the Film Committee's Respect the Writer campaign to raise awareness of what's going on and find positive ways to ensure proper collaboration between writer, director and

producer, in line with our models of good practice – which can only be good enough when all parties buy in. Bonanzas are exhilarating but dangerous.

It's important also to reiterate that the Writers' Guild is a community of and for writers, not just a deal-making organisation. The impacts of Long Covid and the skyrocketing mental health problems of the past few years among the whole population affect freelancers like us disproportionately. Our working lives don't easily allow for downtime and we can feel grimly alone when the job's not going well. Add in the impact of more than a decade's austerity and the cost-of-living crisis: too many writers have either been forced out of the business altogether or have needed to drop back to working part-time. For every great success there's a quiet smash-up and that can be the same writer at different stages. WGGB is here to support writers with their contractual issues, and as TV Chair part of my job is to help too. Please don't stay quiet if you need us; everything's in confidence of course. And we have sources of support for mental health on our website too, under the Resources section.

There's plenty of positive news. In January we celebrated outstanding work at the first full-sized Writers' Guild Awards ceremony since the lockdowns. The list of WGGB members who've won or been nominated for other awards would be too long for this report. The TV Committee has a close working relationship with the Equality and Diversity Committee who are working on addressing career shapes and access to the business for writers of colour, via data that's been gathered. The launch of the union's Access Rider scheme will be important in TV as elsewhere. We also hope to look together at ageism in TV and other WGGB areas.

The TV payment monitoring survey which Emma Reeves initiated will also push ahead this year: all we know for sure about our members' incomes are our agreed minimum rates (but most fees paid are higher) and what can be inferred from union subscription bands. Anecdotally we believe for example that writers for children and animation often earn at lower rates, but without proper data we don't have enough to act on. Sharing our incomes has been a taboo for too long: please consider seriously taking part in the survey when it comes round again. Everything will be anonymised.

Let me end by borrowing Emma's words in her final report as TV Chair: it's been an honour to serve you this year and will continue to be going forward. I'm privileged to be trusted with the job in challenging times.

Sukey Venables-Fisher
Chair

THEATRE

For the last 12 months the Theatre Committee (TC) has continued to develop and bolster our approach to the challenges that surround our industry and confront our members, in the wake of the continued Covid crisis and the current financial hardships. This includes advocating for and supporting our theatre writing members, who are still very much on the frontline of this malaise; lobbying the Arts Council England (ACE) following their recent (and very selective) review of NPO funding; looking to regulate the fast-moving hybridisation of our work, regarding streaming and online theatre – and reaching out to all our members, whilst looking to collaborate with partner organisations who share our concerns.

But firstly let us celebrate the good news of 2022/23!

THE NEW PLAY COMMISSION SCHEME

Having successfully raised around £50k in direct donations from writers, actors and producers, alongside grants from Arts Council England, the Theatre Development Trust and the publisher Faber, we are delighted to say that this scheme is well under way. And, as a result of our partnership with UK Theatre, the Independent Theatre Council (ITC) and HighTide, 18 new plays are in the process of being commissioned, with the prospect of over half of them due for production outside of London.

As part of NPC's commitment to equality, equity and diversity, a key number of awards were reserved for writers under-represented in the theatre writing community. Under the resolute chairing of David Edgar, we are monitoring the

progress of these commissions, to ensure they are finessed to the spirit and the letter of WGGB contracts.

WRITERS' GUILD AWARDS

This was, as ever, a highlight of the year and the first time since the Covid lockdowns that we convened to celebrate without any attendance restrictions. With some 45 entries for Best Play and 15 for Best Play For Young Audiences, the winner of the former was Ross Willis, with *Wonder Boy* and the latter, Vivienne Franzmann's *The IT*. With special thanks, of course, to our trusty panel of judges: Olu Alakija, Michael Bryher, Amelia Bullmore, Poppy Corbett, Lisa Evans, Tracey Goddard, Vicky Ireland, David James, Brian McAvera, Debbie McAndrew, Nicola Wildin, Nick Wood, Jan Woolf and Michael Wynne.

THE OLWEN WYMARK AWARDS

Once again we were delighted to present our annual awards for the encouragement of theatre writers, on 22 February 2023 at the Garden Museum in London. The winners in the 18th year of the awards were artistic directors, producers and mentors in the theatre industry, all of which were united by their kindness, innovation and dedication in nurturing writers. They are: John and Viv Berry, directors, nominated by WGGB member Alan Spence; Matt Brinkler, producer, nominated by WGGB member David Kent; Porl Cooper, producer, nominated by WGGB member Rachael Halliwell; Pádraig Cusack, producer, nominated by WGGB member Jennifer Lunn; Carl Miller, writer, nominated by WGGB member Susannah Pearse; Peter Leslie Wild, director and producer, nominated by WGGB member Lucy Gough. Co-Chair of the Theatre Committee, Poppy Corbett, who

attended the event, said to the winners: “At a time where the Government are intent on the decimation of the humanities, along with brutal cuts to the arts, and the ongoing pandemic, it feels more important than ever to support writers, and we thank you so much for providing a raft of hope in these difficult artistic times.”

EVENTS

The Theatre Committee has continued to support the Writers’ Guild with our events for members and the public. Last year, our Co-Chair Richard Pinner interviewed Kevin Dyer, who won the WGGB Award for Best Play in 2022 for his play *The Syrian Baker*. The interview explored his extraordinarily long and varied career. On 11 January 2023, Co-Chair Poppy Corbett led an ‘in conversation’ event with writer Tom Morton-Smith about his writing career, and recent success and collaboration with the RSC, *My Neighbour Totoro*. A recording of both of these conversations are available to view on the WGGB YouTube channel.

COVID, INFLATION AND HARDSHIP FALLOUT EFFECT ON OUR MEMBERS

The ongoing Covid pandemic, rising inflation and cost-of-living crisis continues to present challenges to the theatre industry, and our members. The Theatre Committee continues to try and think of ways to help and support our members in accessing funding and support. We recently ran a survey which asked questions about how our members engage with Arts Council England, and this received some illuminating results. One of our key focuses now is to host an event with ACE representatives to help demystify the possible funding streams that are available for playwrights.

ARTS COUNCIL ENGLAND

This year ACE published their three-year review and revision of funding for NPOs (theatre organisations they revenue-fund) and the Theatre Committee consistently attempts to challenge ACE's approach to new writing. For, although this review reflected a progressive support regarding diversity – in its regional, community and ethnic reach – it contained much that was of concern to our members. With producing theatres like Hampstead Theatre and Oldham Coliseum cut altogether and with many of the beneficiary companies having no new writing track record, we are currently in the process of interrogating the effect on our work.

In the survey mentioned in the previous section, we discovered that around one-third of our members who had applied for ACE funding in the last five years had done so as sole practitioners. More than 60% of respondents didn't find the grant application process at all straightforward and nearly 30% of those receiving ACE support said that their fees were lower than the ITC minimum rate for a play under 30 minutes. Hence the need for an event with ACE, which can address these issues.

NEGOTIATIONS

The Theatre Committee continues to negotiate on behalf of all playwrights with theatres and theatre management bodies. One of the most significant developments in theatre during lockdown was the increase in digital delivery. We are in ongoing negotiation with UK Theatre on digital clauses for our Agreement. These negotiations are continuing, with some progress made, and some clauses agreed. In collaboration with our agent colleagues, we are also in

ongoing discussion with the National Theatre to consider revisions to the NT Live and NT at Home Agreements, in accordance with our ground-breaking digital principles negotiated with the National, the RSC and the Royal Court. We have a good relationship with the ITC, and we have a new sub-group made up of members of the Theatre Committee and other writers, who are ready to negotiate a new version of the outdated ITC Agreement.

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

Poppy Corbett and Richard Pinner
Co-Chairs

VIDEOGAMES

This year the Videogames Committee has gone through a period of restructuring. Samantha Webb stepped down as Co-Chair and the committee thanked her for everything she's done. Happily, she is staying on as a committee member. Andrew Walsh has joined Victor Ojuel as Co-Chair. This has prompted a series of discussions about the future goals for the committee and how we should tackle some of the issues present in the videogames industry.

Alongside these discussions we've organised a series of events aimed at providing information and support to our members as well as raising the profile of WGGB within the videogame narrative community.

This programme of events got off to a great start, gaining €1,000 in sponsorship from the script software company Articy. To open the new series of events, the committee was keen to hold its first networking gathering since lockdown. This was timed to coincide with the AdventureX conference when a lot of games writers descend on London. Previous networking events have been incredibly useful in informing the committee about the state of the UK industry, promoting the WGGB and increasing awareness of our videogames guidelines, and this one was no different. It was also rewarding to hear how much these gatherings have been missed in their absence and how significant they have been to the writers who've attended in the past.

Following this, last November saw an online 'in conversation' event with Antony Johnston, which can now be found on the WGGB's YouTube channel. 2023 also saw a return to London South Bank University, rekindling the popular annual talk the committee has organised there for over a decade.

Originally scheduled for 2022, weather, strikes and illness delayed the event until February 2023. We're already in the planning stages for further events and initiatives and look forward to bringing these to the WGGB in the near future.

Alongside these events, the committee has continued to provide information and advice to WGGB members and those who've come to us for help navigating through the world of interactive narrative.

Andrew S. Walsh and Victor Ojuel
Co-Chairs

National reports

CYMRU / WALES

It has been another busy year, and one which has presented many challenges across many craft sectors, but WGGB Cymru/Wales continues to raise issues wherever possible and to represent members across the board, and still meets regularly with the other creative unions in Wales to discuss and share information and concerns. We also seem to be currently working against a background of many fundamental changes in patterns of funding, commissioning and personnel which makes it even more difficult.

Obviously, the impact of Covid continues to be felt, in particular in the theatre and broadcasting sectors. At the time of writing, Arts Council of Wales (ACW) have not announced their upcoming funding decisions, which will be based on a changed pattern of funding. We have had two very productive meetings with the new Chief Executive of ACW, Dafydd Rhys, at which we have enjoyed frank and open discussion of various issues, including the threat to the already limited opportunities for producing 'new writing' in Wales, the current funding models, the precarious financial position of some existing theatre companies, and the apparent collapse of the once busy touring circuit in the country. However, it remains to be seen where (and how) the inevitable axe will fall.

In broadcasting too, the cut to BBC/S4C continuing drama *Pobol y Cwm* from 250 episodes to 150 has resulted in over 15 Welsh language writers losing regular TV writing work, and has dealt a pretty devastating blow to employment

opportunities in TV for both emerging and established writers. Along with General Secretary Ellie Peers, we had a meeting with S4C's Chief Content Officer Llinos Griffin-Williams, at which we raised several matters, including the *Pobol y Cwm* cut, the limited opportunities presented by co-productions for writers based in Wales, the low level of their drama budgets, and also the implications for writers of the channel's concentration on developing digital rather than linear content in the future.

On a more positive note, we have almost finalised a successful re-negotiation of the WGGB contract with TAC (Teledwyr Annibynol Cymru/Welsh Independent TV Producers). Although there remain a few outstanding details to confirm regarding secondary use etc, we have agreed on updated categories and wording for the agreement, as well as a 20% uplift in minimum fees from January 2023, and a significant increase in children's TV fees, which were very low.

We have also been active in many other contexts, including a presentation at a Wales TUC Congress fringe meeting on the future of broadcasting in Wales; giving evidence along with the other creative unions to a Welsh Government Expert Panel exploring the establishment of a Shadow Broadcasting and Communications Authority; and raising problems facing members of creative unions (especially freelancers) with Wales TUC.

In terms of training, Cult Cymru (Creative Unions Learning Together) has continued to offer an improved variety of courses, and the 10 Well Being Facilitators who were appointed last year have been offering support in the screen sector to crew and cast, as well as information and guidance

to production companies and producers. CULT is also working on establishing a network of Mental Health First Aiders, and also recently secured funding for the re-establishment and training of Union Learning Reps, one of whom has been appointed from WGGB membership to work for our members in Wales.

We continue to meet monthly on a fairly informal basis on Zoom, so any members who have not yet attended are very welcome – look out for the emails every month. We have also had a series of guest speakers at our meetings throughout the year, who have provided a wealth of information, advice, experience and networking opportunities. 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.

Finally I would like to welcome Alun Saunders as my new Co-Chair, following Anna-Lisa Jenaer's relocation to Scotland. I would also like to thank Anna-Lisa for her help and constant support in the past.

Diolch,

Manon Eames and Alun Saunders
Co-Chairs

SCOTLAND

This past year, as we have emerged from Covid restrictions, our focus has been on reconnecting and readjusting ourselves back into the physical world! We have organised events in-person and virtually and are pleased to have received positive feedback from Scotland's writers. In parallel to this, we have continued our lobbying of the Scottish Government and working with other trade unions to improve conditions for writers. In general, we have accomplished all of our goals for this year, so feel in good shape to continue the work of the WGGB.

STALL AT EDINBURGH FRINGE

This year, with the return of the Edinburgh Festival Fringe in all its glory, we were proud to represent the WGGB at their major industry event, open to all fringe participants. We spoke with many members of the playwriting community and encouraged them to join the union. It was also a great chance for members of the WGGB, including past and present committee members, to reconnect whilst running the stall.

CHANGE OF GOVERNMENT

First Minister Nicola Sturgeon's resignation was unexpected, as was Deputy First Minister John Swinney's announcement that he was stepping down. We will continue to engage with the devolved Government under new First Minister Humza Yousaf, to advocate for writers in the region.

CREATIVE SCOTLAND Q&A

WGGB Scotland hosted an online Q&A, facilitated by Norman Bissell, regarding the new, simplified application

process to their Open Fund. The new application form was developed with input from the WGGB, and so it was great to be able to now introduce it to our writers. At the end of the event attendees were much clearer about the application process, especially the fact that writers were encouraged to contact Creative Scotland and discuss how to best complete the application form, before any submission was made. I believe this will encourage many more writers to apply and hopefully be granted funds to complete their writing projects.

MEMBER MEET-UPS

We held an in-person Christmas meet-up and it was wonderful to hang out and chat about all things creative. Although it was strange to not wear masks, it was refreshing to connect with fellow writers, and we hope to plan more face-to-face events next year.

We now also hold online monthly meet-ups for our members, which are growing in popularity and helping to connect the extremely dispersed writers in Scotland. Each meet-up tends to attract up to seven writers, and will hopefully grow as we all get to know each other.

CAMPAIGN TO REVERSE CREATIVE SCOTLAND CUTS

WGGB and sister unions joined an emergency campaign led by Campaign for the Arts following the Scottish Government's announcement that it was going to make a £7-million budget cut to the arts funding of Creative Scotland.

Over 15,000 people signed the petition against the cuts and the Scottish Government swiftly revoked the plans.

Although this is a victory, there are lots of strikes on pay and conditions in Scotland in almost all sectors, and given that the arts are often considered expendable, I feel that the battle is not yet won. We'll just have to take every day as it comes.

SCOTTISH TUC

As part of creative unions' joint meetings with the Scottish Trades Union Congress (STUC), WGGB teamed up with sister unions and organisations the Scottish Society of Playwrights, the Society of Authors in Scotland and the National Union of Journalists, to confront the shocking reports from ALCS and Literature Alliance Scotland (LAS) on the decline in author and writing-related income.

Through this we were able to secure undertakings from the Scottish Government of meaningful union input into grant applications scrutiny around how organisations in receipt of funding are accounting for the Fair Work Principals.

We will be holding Government to this in the coming months, and continuing to apply pressure, particularly around factors we think disadvantage writers in the application process, like producer-focused commissioning models, and day-rate accounting that doesn't meaningfully reflect the value of our members' work.

We continue to be a vocal and active part of the STUC/Federation of Entertainment Unions (FEU) coalition in Scotland.

Suzy Enoch
Chair

EAST ANGLIA

During Year 2 of our fledgling East Anglia Branch, we essentially did more of the same! We continued to hold meetings and events with speakers online, but also met in Norwich and Colchester.

We've built a relationship with Norwich Theatre, and in April 2022 we spent a day working in the Theatre Royal Stage Two studio, in the evening presenting *Imperfect Storms*, a show of WGGB members' works-in-progress, featuring an exciting range of material, including extracts of musical, screenplay and verbatim theatre. The writers involved got a lot out of the process, and the performance was received enthusiastically by our contacts at the theatre and the public audience. As I write this early in March 2023, we're getting ready for *Imperfect Storms II* at the end of this month, and at our last meeting we were talking about ways to capture some of this work on audio.

We're continuing to reach out to writers and related organisations in the region. In May 2022 we ran a stall at a publishing fair at the National Centre for Writing and we'll do the same this year. We've made contact with the East Anglian Branch of the Royal Television Society and are thinking about how best to make use of these relationships.

As ever members should feel free to contact me with their issues or questions via ea@writersguild.org.uk.

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 committee for their hard work and ongoing support. We are currently eight-strong with room for a few more to join. The London & South East (LSE) region is the largest of all the union's regions, with 1,745 members (1,337 in London and 408 in the South East) with an increase of 88 new members from last year, so we're looking at around 50% of the WGGB membership in total.

As a committee we have focused our efforts on in-person events and tackling ageism in our industry. Our work and discussions around ageism have been very lively and they are still ongoing. Our views will help the WGGB to shape how we move forward, navigating and targeting specific age groups that require additional support. What that support looks like will come out of a WGGB survey, which will be coming out over the coming months. So please look out for our ageism survey as we would appreciate your support on this moving forward.

We are still going through some difficult challenges, and we need the WGGB more than ever. The union has been creative in supporting members who have benefited from

online talks, workshops, events, screenings, caseworker guidance and more. Many of you have been reaching out to me with your concerns or general queries. Please keep writing in with your questions and I will continue to support you with your specific needs, sharing my knowledge to help you.

We are looking to hold more in-person meet-ups to build our community to support each other, enabling discussions, collaborations and the opportunity to just simply talk and make new connections. The most recent of these took place on 23 March 2023 in London. For those of you who still prefer to meet online for various reasons, we are looking to host some online meet-ups as well.

If you are interested in joining our committee, please do let me know, with a brief note as to why you would like to join. You can email me on londone@writersguild.org.uk

Nina Kristofferson
Chair

NORTH EAST

At the time of publication, David Napthine had been duly elected as Chair of the North East region. Watch out for news from the region in your weekly ebulletin.

NORTH WEST (MANCHESTER AND LANCASHIRE)

The priority for the region is the reinvigoration of the Committee and election of a new 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 Manchester and Lancashire Chair vacancy in the subject field).

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)

In November 2022 I went to the Go West! 2 Screen Summit held at Bristol's Arnolfini as part of a University of the West of England's (UWE) research programme into Bristol and the South West's changing production profile.

The first Go West was finalised in 2017 when Bristol was mainly producing natural history and animation. Now, with Bottle Yard Studios and an amount of drama production companies emerging, there is a desire and need to produce more scripted content for Channel 4, BBC and BFI. A new Screen Fund is being discussed with greater focus on original scripted content, which will support more indigenous film production in the region.

I met and talked to Andrew Spicer from UWE regarding a meeting with their MA scriptwriting students to discuss WGGB and encourage students to join.

Alongside Joe Abel (WGGB Assistant Organiser – Nations & Regions) I met with new writers at the Bristol Old Vic Theatre School earlier this year. And we also had a successful meet-up at the Watershed Theatre.

Head of Bath Spa University Screenwriting MA, Robin Mukherjee, has also agreed to meet, as has Dee Hughes, Head of the Screenwriting Department at Bournemouth University. The plan is that I go and talk to their students about the role of WGGB and the benefits of membership.

In addition, I have been in discussions with the director of the Ustinov Studios at Theatre Royal Bath and the Everyman in Cheltenham about various writing initiatives.

I am making inroads into various Wessex writers' groups, including film offices in the region, and have also made connections with the President of Equity and their South West Branch.

If you're a member in the region and interested in getting more involved in your union, do drop me a line:

wessex@writersguild.org.uk

Sarah Swords
Chair

WEST MIDLANDS

It's been an exciting year for the arts in the West Midlands. The long tail of Coventry City of Culture bled seamlessly into the Birmingham 2022 Commonwealth Games and its accompanying cultural festival. It was great to see the incredible creativity and diversity of our region finally getting the spotlight it deserves. Remarkably the games came in under budget, with the leftover funds going to the legacy charity United By 2022. Some of this money is earmarked for cultural projects. The West Midlands Branch is pursuing conversations with United By 2022 and other regional bodies to urge that a portion of these funds is used to support new writing.

The branch has maintained its membership of Culture Central, the collective voice for the creative sector in the West Midlands. We also continue to participate in the More Than a Moment pledge, and its commitment to dismantling, "the systems that have for too long kept Black artists and creatives from achieving their potential in the arts and cultural industries". In addition, we took part in Birmingham

Hippodrome's 'creative conversation', during which we were invited to suggest ways that the Hippodrome can better support local writers, be it offering free rehearsal / performance space, or small commissions etc. The above is all work in progress, but the branch is determined to continue to highlight the needs and importance of freelancers in the region. As part of this, we have retaken our place on the Midlands TUC Culture and Leisure Industries Committee (CLIC) and look forward to working with the other entertainment unions to progress our aims.

We have run several events, including one with former WGGB President David Edgar promoting the highly successful New Play Commission Scheme. David also chaired a Zoom event with Erica Whyman (then Acting Artistic Director, RSC), Sean Foley (Artistic Director, Birmingham Repertory Theatre) and Corey Campbell (Creative Director, Belgrade Theatre Coventry) looking at the work they do and the wider state of regional theatre. It was a little dispiriting to hear about the ongoing impact of Covid on audiences, as well as dwindling funding, but the openness and honesty of the panel was much appreciated. The opportunities for theatre commissions in the region are increasingly thin on the ground and this is something the branch would like to draw attention to in the coming year. On a more upbeat note, we held a very enjoyable New Year 'not-working' social, attended by a small but delightful group of local members. A fun evening was had by all!

Thanks as always go to WGGB Deputy Co-Chair William Gallagher who produces our monthly e-newsletter, as well as WGGB Assistant Organiser Joe Abel and the rest of the West Mids committee. We are always looking for new people to join our ranks, especially anyone from further

afield. It's important to remember that our region doesn't just consist of the West Midlands conurbation, but stretches from Oxford to Oswestry, and from Gloucester all the way up to Stoke-on-Trent. If you think you could help us reach more of our region, or have ideas for events, please do get in touch. You can contact us by email:

westmids@writersguild.org.uk or find us on Twitter
[@WMWritersGuild](https://twitter.com/WMWritersGuild)

Tim Stimpson
Chair

YORKSHIRE

It's been a great pleasure to represent the WGGB in Yorkshire for another year, and to get to know some of you via your queries and problems – I hope we've done a good job in getting you the help and advice that you've needed!

It's been an important year in reminding us all just how important unions are, as we can in every industry and public service right now. Here in Yorkshire, we were part of the fight against the hugely unpopular Channel 4 privatisation proposals, working with our sister unions in the creative industries, and with the Metro Mayor, Tracy Brabin's office. It's a credit to everyone that our voices were heard so loud and so clearly, and that these proposals have now been canned. They would have done untold damage to the channel's presence in our region, and the ecosystem that is flourishing around it.

I know times are hard for so many, and that opportunities can be hard to come by. If we can help in any way, or offer any advice, I'm always delighted to hear from you. Email me on yorkshire@writersguild.org.uk. Here's a good year ahead to all our Yorkshire members.

David Allison
Chair

Obituaries

WGGB has sadly lost some long-standing members in 2022-23, 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/).

Ray Jenkins (1953-2023)

Fay Weldon (1931-2023)

Ian Curteis (1935-2021)

Raymond Allen (1940-2022)

Kay Mellor (1951-2022)

Eric Chappell (1933-2022)

Stephen Churchett (1947-2022)

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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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