



Annual report 2023-24

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/

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Mastodon: **@WritersGuildGB@union.place**

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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 2023 to 31 March 2024.

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 launched a policy position statement on writers and AI following the results of a survey which revealed that 65% believed the increased use of AI will reduce their income from writing, and 61% were worried that AI could replace jobs in their craft area. We also issued advice to authors whose books had been used without permission to develop AI systems, and we ran a special event for our members on AI.

We surveyed writers in non-broadcast audio, theatre, and on ageism, to inform our lobbying and campaigning work. We also ran a TV fees census.

We supported the TUC's campaign to protect the right to strike, in the run up to – and after – the introduction of the Strikes (Minimum Service Levels) Act.

We launched a campaign to Save BBC Doctors, following the announcement that the continuing drama was to close after 23 years.

We have continued to speak out about the shake-up to arts funding in England at a national level, and also the impact of local authority cuts, particularly in relation to our playwright members and the future of new writing itself.

We responded to the Draft Media Bill, welcoming an enhanced role for Ofcom to make SVOD providers more accountable for their UK content, and ensuring our public service broadcasters' online services are more easily discoverable. But we raised concerns about the implications for audience accessibility and around regulation to challenge misinformation and harmful content.

At TUC Congress 2023, WGGB President Sandi Toksvig OBE moved our motion Streaming and Fair Pay for Writers, which was carried by delegates.

We held a Global Day of Solidarity rally in London's Leicester Square, in support of members of our sister union the WGA who were on strike from May to September last year.

We are finalising a WGGB 'manifesto' as we approach a General Election – to make the case to all political parties of the importance of writers to the UK economy and creative ecology.

As a member of the Creators' Rights Alliance, WGGB continues to advocate for UK writers on fair pay and terms, including intellectual property rights.

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

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.

DIGITAL RIGHTS

Writers Digital Payments, set up by WGGB and the Personal Managers' Association in 2012, has now paid out over £12 million to writers for use of their work on BBC iPlayer and ITVX.

WGGB, Netflix UK and PMA signed a new deal on remuneration which will apply to UK writers on Netflix scripted live-action commissioned series.

We renegotiated our Script Agreement for Television and Online with the BBC.

A ground-breaking set of principles to govern the digital broadcasts of stage plays by the Royal Court, Royal Shakespeare Company and National Theatre have now been incorporated into our TNC agreement.

EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY

We continued to run online events for under-represented writers, including new networks on challenging sexism, ageism and class privilege.

We have completed our survey on writers and ageism and will be publishing the results this year.

We issued a statement on the conflict in the Middle East and passed the motion *Palestine Israel* at our AGM.

We celebrated Disability History Month, LGBT+ History Month and Black History Month with special online events. We also ran an event on accessibility in videogames writing.

Following the publication of a 'deep dive' report into writers, directors and producer directors from Creative Diversity Network, we called for an urgent reset and an independent inquiry to address systemic issues of racism, sexism, ableism and all forms of discrimination that exist within the creative industries.

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 fourth virtual AGM, and member-only training workshops on a range of subjects including 'build your brand as a writer', 'copyright for writers' and a member tax surgery.

NATIONS AND REGIONS

Our branches in Scotland and Wales continued to make headway with their lobbying and other work on a range of issues and our Northern Ireland branch was instated last year.

NEGOTIATIONS

We negotiated a 6% rise on minimum fees for playwrights working under our TNC Agreement (covering the Royal Court, National Theatre and Royal Shakespeare Company).

We negotiated a 10% rise on minimum fees under our UK Theatre Agreement - 6% backdated to 1 May 2023 and 4% from 1 May 2024.

We negotiated a 5% rise on minimum fees for ITV writers.

We negotiated a 4% rise on minimum fees for audio writers at the BBC.

We renegotiated our BBC Script Agreement for Television and Online, including a 10% uplift on minimum fees.

We negotiated a new agreement with Netflix UK, establishing minimum fees and other rights for episodic TV writers.

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

We are engaging with the Independent Theatre Council on renegotiating our theatre agreement.

NEW PLAY COMMISSION SCHEME

We announced Carmen Marcus as the winner of the Faber New Play Award – for *And The Earth Opened Up Under Her*. The award was part of our New Play Commission Scheme (NPCS), a response to the decline in new commissions as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic.

This year saw some of the plays from our New Play Commission Scheme open at theatres and on tour.

RECRUITMENT

We ran a ‘refer a friend’ competition to boost recruitment during #HeartUnions Week.

Our membership has now passed the 3,200 mark, up 6% on last year.

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.

Our annual Writers' Guild Awards saw a pause this year and we are currently in the process of reviewing them.

General Secretary's report

I think it is fair to say without exaggeration that last year marked one of the busiest years for WGGB, with three themes emerging – solidarity, negotiating wins and sustained campaigning and lobbying.

May saw members of our sister union the Writers Guild of America West and East go on strike – industrial action that was to last nearly five months and end in September with an historic deal. Our members were quick to show their solidarity, refusing to take work in the jurisdiction of the WGA and taking to the streets for a Global Day of Solidarity in June. Thank you to all those of you who came to our protest in Leicester Square in the sweltering heat of summer – there was over 200 of you in total with many more supporting on social media and some fantastic coverage in the press.

You were out and about on other marches too – showing solidarity with members of public service unions in the UK whose right to strike was under threat from the Government's Strikes (Minimum Service Levels) Bill, which made it on to the statute books in the summer. We continue to support the TUC's campaign against this pernicious piece of legislation – watch this space for more activity.

It was a busy year on the negotiating front, too. We agreed rises on minimum fees of 6% for playwrights working under our TNC Agreement, 4% (and 6% backdated) under our UK Theatre Agreement; a 5% increase for ITV writers; 4% for BBC audio writers and 10% for BBC TV writers, alongside a

renegotiation of our Script Agreement for Television and Online. Alongside the Personal Managers' Association we also agreed a landmark deal with Netflix UK, setting out minimum fees, residuals, pension rights and allowances for episodic TV writers – the first of its kind for WGGB and an SVOD company in the UK. And on the pay front, Writers Digital Payments – set up by WGGB and the Personal Managers' Association in 2012 – passed the £12 million mark in payments to writers this year, for use of their work on BBC iPlayer and ITVX. We are working on renegotiating our Pact TV and film agreements, our TAC TV agreement and our ITC theatre agreement.

Campaigning and lobbying have continued apace with lots to occupy us as we approach a General Election. While by no means a new development, 2023 seemed to be the year in which AI burst into the public consciousness and dominated the media. We launched a policy position statement on writers and AI, following the results of a survey of members which revealed that 65% of writers believed the increased use of AI will reduce their income from writing, and 61% were worried that AI could replace jobs in their craft area/s. We continue to watch and respond swiftly to developments in this rapidly changing area.

In the autumn, we found out that BBC *Doctors* was to close after 23 years – bad news for writers and audiences and the West Midlands region which hosted production of the show (read about the sterling work our West Midlands branch has been doing challenging local arts cuts on page 36, and our TV Chair's report on page 22). To help support members directly affected by the closure, we successfully negotiated

compensation and development programmes with the BBC. Coming so soon after the closure of *Holby* we are concerned about the future of soaps in the UK and we are raising these concerns directly with the broadcasters.

It has been another tough year for the theatre sector and our playwright members – still recovering from the prolonged lockdowns of the pandemic which affected venues and new work so dramatically, and adjusting to a seismic change in audience behaviour afterwards. Shifts in arts funding at a national level have heaped on additional challenges, and in more recent months cuts to local authority arts budgets have compounded this further. It is a worrying time, but it is vital that we protect writers and new work. Our New Play Commission Scheme (NPCS) has been one response, and we were delighted to announce the Faber New Play Award winner in 2023 as part of the scheme (page 25) and see some of the NPCS plays start to make it to the stage! We will continue to press the Government about the importance of new playwriting, as part of our ongoing lobbying work.

On that note, with a General Election on the horizon, we've been working hard to put together a manifesto so that all political parties understand the vital contribution our writer members make to the UK economy and the health of the creative industries. Keeping on top of twists and turns at Westminster is an important part of our job – we continue to respond to Government consultations and legislation such as the Media Bill, to ensure writers' concerns are front and centre in the eyes of our policy-makers. And our national branches in Wales and Scotland are working hard in this area too (you can read their reports on pages 28 to 30, and those

of our craft and regional committees from pages 13 onwards – a big thank you to all of our elected reps and officers for their tireless work).

TUC Congress last autumn saw WGGB President Sandi Toksvig OBE introduce a successful motion on Streaming and Fair Pay for Writers (find out more in her report on page 9). There have been plenty of other events throughout the year too, including our online AGM in November 2023, which saw the motion *Palestine Israel* passed. We have run over 20 online events for writers, further training workshops for our members and developed our member networks for under-represented writers, which lets them meet and discuss issues relevant to them and their writing career in a safe space.

Our dedicated and passionate Equality and Diversity committee has been busy once again this year, including responding to a report from Creative Diversity Network in November, which highlighted the serious lack of progress being made by broadcasters to engage diverse creatives. You can find out more about this and their other work in their report on page 13.

And all this activity is paying off in the form of a growing and active membership which has passed the 3,200 mark. Plus, a sizable number of craft, regional and national representatives who I am looking forward to continuing to work with in 2024.

I wanted to say thank you to you all for the part you have played in this. Whether you have signed a petition, responded to one of our many surveys, come to an event, taken up a WGGB placard and joined a march, or suggested

that another writer join WGGB as part of our #HeartUnions Week competition. You are your union, we are the union, and if you'd like to get even more involved via one of our committees, please contact your Craft, National or Regional Rep via our website.

It is always a pleasure to connect with our members, particularly at our AGM in the autumn, so I hope to see you there this year!

Ellie Peers
General Secretary

Chair's report

I would like to begin my first annual report as Chair by paying tribute to my predecessor, Lisa Holdsworth, who served two consecutive terms of two years from 2019 until 2023, at which time she was required to step down by WGGB rules.

Lisa is an exceptional writer, union activist and human being. She steered the WGGB through challenging times – for example, the Covid-19 pandemic, the Government's ongoing war on our public broadcasters and the WGA strike. She chaired the union with dignity, calm, endless patience and a never-failing sense of humour. And she did it all whilst juggling her own stellar career. Thank you, Lisa. Trying to fill your shoes makes me feel like one of Cinderella's ugly sisters, but I'll do my best.

Although some of these challenges have now passed, these are still daunting times for all of us. Writers with established careers are finding their work suddenly drying up, and for new writers, 'breaking in' to the industry seems more of an impossible dream than ever.

Meanwhile, the cost-of-living crisis is biting everyone except the very wealthy. If this situation continues to worsen, we will return to a situation where a writing career is only viable for those with independent means. Stories will only be told by the highly privileged – the very opposite of the 'diversity and inclusion' which employers wish to be seen to champion.

Furthermore, we cannot escape the fact that all of our work is taking place against a background of chaos, conflict and crisis in the wider world. It has never been more important to ensure that we are all able to speak up, safely, about what matters. At our AGM in November 2023, we passed a resolution supporting writers working in Palestine, Israel and the diasporas, declaring that “we believe in the pursuit of cultural resistance to the ongoing violence as a means of freedom of expression”. We have also been supporting the TUC’s ‘protect the right to strike’ campaign.

At a time like this, our greatest asset is our solidarity. At over 3,200 members, our union has never been stronger. We need you – every one of you. Simply by being a member, you are playing your part in helping our negotiators to win better deals for writers.

We have had some significant wins, big and small, over the past year (and you can read about them in our Craft, National and Regional reps’ reports on pages 13-37), but I’d like to highlight one particular success; after many years of negotiation, we have finally made a deal on remuneration for TV writers with Netflix UK. This is a landmark moment in our relationship with streaming services; and represents the first agreement of its kind for writers in the UK.

Sadly, television writers have been badly hit by the closure of *Holby City* and *Doctors*. Despite our campaigns and negotiations, ultimately we were unable to prevent this. We did win a small pay increase for the last 75 episodes of *Doctors*, and the BBC has committed to developing opportunities for the core writers. We are very aware of the

devastating effect that these closures have had on many of our members, and we will continue to pressure the BBC to replace these shows and provide more chances for new and mid-career writers to develop their work.

Our survey of film writers revealed increasing discontent with the way that screenwriters are credited and treated and our Film Committee is looking at ways to address this.

Six years on from our Equality Writes campaign, the latest figures from Creative Diversity Network revealed a lack of progress in hiring more diverse writers in general – and for women and writers over 50, the situation is getting worse, not better.

In theatre, we are increasingly concerned about the climate of risk-aversion around new work. However, we're delighted that some plays commissioned under the WGGB New Play Commission Scheme, spearheaded by former WGGB President David Edgar, are now up and running in theatres around the UK.

The landscape is changing for audio drama. There is a huge public appetite for scripted audio drama and comedy, but BBC Radio is making much less drama under our traditional agreements. We will strive to reach agreements with other companies to increase writers' pay.

The Books Committee is very active, supporting writers of traditionally published work and self-published writers, whilst protecting writers from predatory publishing models. Our 'Is it a Steal?' campaign is one way we have been tackling

the need to reform the hybrid publishing sector and promote good practice.

For videogames writers, we have hosted in-person networking events and panel discussions as well as an online one focusing on accessibility.

As video conferencing becomes more widespread, we've been able to offer much more to our members in terms of live events. 'Write On', our regular series of online events, covers all craft areas and a wide range of topics. Most of the discussions are available on our website or our YouTube channel. If there is a subject that you think we need to cover, please get in touch and suggest it!

Although our various craft areas face different challenges, they do share some similarities. And there is one looming threat that concerns us all – artificial intelligence. Whilst we're aware that some writers will wish to use AI as a tool in their own work, we think it's important that everyone is aware of the risks and that writers' rights are protected. We are lobbying the Government for protections and have a detailed policy position on AI which you can view in the Campaigns section of our website. If you suspect that your work has been used to train AI, please contact the WGGB for advice: email casework@writersguild.org.uk

In conclusion – we are living in interesting times, our industries are changing fast, and there is a lot of work to do. And if you would like to do more – by getting more active in your union – please consider joining one of our Regional, National or Craft committees.

I am deeply honoured to serve you as Chair, and I look forward to working with you all.

Emma Reeves
Chair

President's report

Leicester Square in the heart of London used to be common land and I like to think we members of WGGB kept it that way last summer on the bright day when we gathered for common purpose. Myself and about 200 of my fellow writers stopped our often-solitary work and congregated to make our voices heard at the Screenwriters Everywhere WGGB protest.

Fittingly, we gathered under the statue of William Shakespeare to show our solidarity with members of our sister union in the United States who were then in the midst of a months-long strike. I'm sorry that it was necessary but I do like a protest by professional pen pushers. As well as being delightful company, writers come up with the best placard slogans, and are pretty good at a chant too. I'm sure you know that the strike ended in the autumn with a good deal for the Writers Guild of America. Your solidarity counted and collective action works – thank you to all who came and melted with me on that blisteringly hot summer's day. And to everyone who stood with the WGA for the duration of the strike, whether that was by refusing to take work in the jurisdiction of our sister union or sending your support via social media. Every action, however big or small, counts.

On to the cooler climes of Liverpool in the autumn, and to the TUC's annual Congress where I had the privilege of moving a WGGB motion Streaming and Fair Pay for Writers, which was passed. I have never attended the Congress before and was proud to speak for our workforce. I think there were quite a few in the room who hadn't even thought

we might have and need a collective voice. The motion recognised the global success of streaming giants and called for an end to the practice of ‘buy-out’ agreements requiring writers to sign away intellectual property rights and thus denying them their rightful financial share in the future success of their work. Many writers rely on royalty payments to keep afloat, and the increased use of non-collectively bargained buy-out agreements risks writing becoming a profession for only those who can afford it. Congress recognised the valuable contribution writers make to the UK economy and cultural and creative sector, called for an end of buy-out agreements and also agreed to support WGGB’s collective bargaining efforts.

And on that note, this past year has seen a ramping up of collective bargaining from our brilliant WGGB General Secretary Ellie Peers, her divine Deputy Lesley Gannon (the descriptions are my own) and individual negotiating teams made up of volunteer working writers just like you, whose tireless work on committees underpins the success of your union. You can find out about all negotiating wins this year – including rises on minimum fees, the renegotiating of existing agreements and the negotiation of new ones – in Ellie’s report on page 5.

It’s heartening to see WGGB’s membership grow each year, and this last year is no exception. Engagement and activism of our membership is flourishing too. I’m not surprised. It is a fabulous organisation of which I am so proud.

Just by being a member you are making your union stronger. There are now over 3,200 of us – be assured, you are in good

company and we stand together. I find when I am seated alone at my desk that is so comforting to know. Onward!

Sandi Toksvig OBE
President

Treasurer's report

I'm happy to report that the WGGB is still here and solvent, despite a difficult year which included the cost-of-living crisis and the WGA's writers' strike. The Finance Committee and staff are careful as ever with members' money, making sure that all expenditures are used for the members' benefit.

The General Fund, the amount 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 2023 WGGB financial year of £727,824.

Our membership has grown by almost 6% and now stands at over 3,200. In a tumultuous year, more people want the protection of their union than ever.

To service the increased membership, we've made some changes in staffing. John Sailing has been promoted to Senior Organiser and Sarah Woodley, our Communications Manager, has had her hours increased. We've also welcomed Donya Jeyabalasingham as our new Policy and Campaigns Assistant. In an election year, it's important to keep abreast of what's happening in the arts. The Writers' Guild now has more staff than ever and we're lucky to have them all.

I'm proud to announce that this is the eighth consecutive year that the WGGB has not put up its subscriptions. Not a lot of organisations can say that.

The WGGB has continued to have our AGM, committee meetings and events on Zoom whenever possible, which is far more inclusive. It also saves on members' travelling expenses, which is used to support union work.

The Writers' Guild has comfortable financial reserves, which we carefully monitor to ensure that we can cover staff pay and running costs for the next five years. The reserves are earning interest in the bank.

There is also a Welfare Fund, for members who need help in difficult times. Please remember that the Fund is always there for members who suffer urgent financial difficulties. You can check for details on our website:

www.writersguild.org.uk/member-benefits/welfare-fund

All of the above is made possible thanks to the hard work of the Finance Committee who now, because of Zoom meetings, have to provide their own tea and biscuits. I want to thank Lisa Holdsworth, William Gallagher, Emma Reeves, John Wilsher, Richard Pinner, Rupert Creed and Antony Pickthall for their good humour and excellent judgement.

The WGGB wins and the WGA strike victory this year have been made possible by writers standing together and making our voices heard. Our greatest asset is our members. Please recruit more writers to join us and make us even stronger.

Gail Renard

WGGB Treasurer

Equality and Diversity Committee report

The Equality and Diversity Committee has been focussed on advocacy and strengthening our communication with our membership.

Building on the work done last year in creating WGGB Member Network groups, we have expanded the number of groups and planned a full calendar of events to regularly bring writers from underrepresented groups together to discuss the issues most important to them. You can view the full schedule for the year and register ahead for any of the meetings via the WGGB website:

www.writersguild.org.uk/wggb-member-networks/

This year, we conducted a piece of research into members' experiences and thoughts around ageism in the industry. The response from which will feed into the union's ongoing discussions and we will keep a ready eye on the issues raised and how age affects both mature and younger writers.

We have increased the frequency of our presence at the TUC equalities conferences to share experiences, information and learn from our fellow union counterparts.

Our commitment to championing representation continues – from engaging and commenting on industry training schemes, last year's Creative Diversity Network Project Diamond research results and the Writers' Guild's call for an inquiry into discrimination in the creative industries.

Members of our LGBT+ Network also led marchers at Pride London again – for the second year in a row. It has become a popular date in the calendar for our members and we look forward to more in future.

Sumerah Srivastav and Miranda Walker
Co-Chairs

Craft committee reports

AUDIO

The Audio Committee met five times this year and continued the practice of dividing meetings equally between BBC and non-broadcast discussions. We remain committed to growing membership among, and support for, non-broadcast audio drama writers working in a currently unregulated sector. At the same time, we seek to ensure that cuts and changes to BBC radio drama production do not erode rates of pay for writers already working in broadcast or reduce opportunities for new writers to work in audio. Overall, we seek to champion the craft of audio writing and improve its accessibility and sustainability as a career.

Regarding BBC radio drama, 2023-24 marked the centenary of the first BBC radio plays. Our committee has been an active participant in the BBC Audio Forum and this year we were pleased to have in-person meetings with BBC radio comedy, drama and speech commissioners to share the concerns of our members directly. We were pleased too that some of these were reflected in the new BBC commissioning guidelines released for the latest Radio 4 offers round. We remain committed to the idea that relative rates of pay and production budgets for BBC audio drama should keep pace with rate rises in other sectors – the latest WGGB-negotiated rise on minimum fees for audio drama writers commissioned by the BBC was 4% (effective 1 April 2023) and the union is already working on the next round of negotiations. We also seek improvements to the way audio drama is platformed

on BBC Sounds and residuals for writers from Sounds and Audible.

Regarding non-broadcast audio, this year we launched a ground-breaking survey for writers of non-broadcast scripted audio drama to gather information on their working conditions, opportunities and rates of pay. Following an excellent response to the survey, we look forward to working with the results. This information will allow writers' experience of the sector and their priorities to inform WGGB Audio Committee's non-broadcast strategy in the coming months. Members of our committee attended the London Podcast Festival to share information on the WGGB and meet writers. We are keen to encourage the WGGB principle that 'Free is not an option' while supporting the drive and ambition of self-producing writers and the importance of the non-broadcast audio sector as an entry point for new and diverse scriptwriters. We plan to produce rate cards and best-practice guidelines for writers in this area.

Co-Chair Nicola Baldwin attended the BBC Stories in the Air conference at Contains Strong Language in Leeds. Co-Chair Lucy Gough hosted BBC Radio 4 drama and fiction commissioning editor Alison Hindell at the National Library of Wales for an event delivered in partnership with Aberystwyth University. *Danger 1924/2024: Commemorating the (Welsh) Origins of BBC Radio Drama* was a live staged reading of *Danger*, the first play broadcast on BBC radio, by students from Aberystwyth University, and a celebration of the history and power of audio drama. WGGB was a proud supporter of this event.

We were also delighted to present the Tinniswood audio drama award once again this year, and to announce Shôn Dale-Jones as the winner for *Cracking*.

We look forward to further events with new and young audio writers and working with Soho Poly Theatre on a hybrid event to celebrate 10 years of the UK International Audio Drama Festival. We are grateful for the enthusiasm and expertise of all our committee members, plus the tireless support of Eleanor Dawson and WGGB staff.

Nicola Baldwin and Lucy Gough
Co-Chairs

BOOKS

It's been a good year for the publishing industry, with Statistica reporting in December 2023 a rise in revenue from sales of books, journals and rights in 2022 compared to the previous year.

There was £3.8 billion from sales of physical books, journals and rights, £3.1 billion from digital books, journals and rights, and £164 million from audiobook downloads – all in advance of the previous year.

Indeed, revenue from audiobook sales has more than doubled since 2018. Sales of digital books may overtake physical books this year, for all that physical books remain popular. E-books are especially popular with those aged under 25.

Yet despite the rise in revenue, the number of books sold is slightly down over the same period, with 209.1 million sales in 2022 compared to 212 million in 2021. That suggests growth in revenue is due, at least in part, to books being more expensive.

Some concerns have been expressed that the growing cost of books will have an adverse impact on sales in the year(s) to come.

That, of course, doesn't help in our work to address ongoing challenges affecting writers, such as a relative lack of diversity in the industry, relative low levels of pay and the threat presented by AI. These are all areas in which the Books Committee has been involved over the past year.

ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

Members of the Books Committee have been very engaged on the potential opportunities and threats presented by AI, discussed in and outside of committee meetings. Several members discovered that their books had been ‘scraped’ by machine-learning systems without their knowledge and sought advice on how to respond.

Prompted by these discussions, I initiated discussions with other craft representatives and the Executive Council, feeding into wider union activity on this contentious subject. WGGB has now issued a policy position statement on AI and joint guidance with the Society of Authors ‘My book has been used to train

AI – what can I do?’ Both of these can be found on the WGGB website and members who are concerned about their individual work can contact casework@writersguild.org.uk

ISRAEL/PALESTINE

Several members raised concerns about the impact on book writers of the ongoing situation in Palestine, in line with the Guild’s wider discussions on this subject and the motion moved at our AGM.

These discussions have included various cases being cited where, in the US and Europe, some authors who have taken a particular stance have had books withdrawn from sale or from library shelves. We’re not aware of examples of this

happening in the UK but continue to monitor events. We also sought assurances from the Chair of the Writers' Guild on working with writers' organisations outside the UK that are best able to lead on the cases cited.

PLR AND THE BRITISH LIBRARY

The British Library was subjected to a sizeable cyber attack in October with wide-reaching impacts on its digital systems, including the PLR system that pays royalties to writers when their books are loaned out by libraries. As a member of the PLR advisory board, I attended briefings and in-person meetings, and helped to disseminate information to members.

Thanks to some incredible work by British Library staff, PLR statements have been issued and payments are on course to be made over the coming weeks. The remaining issue is that the registration system is still inaccessible, but the hope is to have this up and running again by June, so that new books can be added to the system in time for next year's payments.

I also attended a PLR meeting in Leeds in 2023 and will attend a meeting in Norwich later this year.

IN THE REGIONS

We continue to meet online over Zoom, with members from around the country. We're also engaged in a number of online events more generally.

Last year, former Books Chair Corinne Sweet hosted 'Burnout and beyond: anxiety and the freelance writer', which the

Writers' Guild has since posted on YouTube – you can access the channel here:

www.youtube.com/c/writersGuildgb

As part of the Manchester-based Macfest, I also interviewed author Fatima Manji (see the Macfest YouTube channel) and will host another Macfest event later this 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're looking at ways to be more proactive in our work, and are keen to invite new members to join us.

Simon Guerrier
Chair

COMEDY

In March 2024, the Comedy Committee attended the Big Comedy Conference in London, hosted by the British Comedy Guide.

Committee members hosted a stall throughout the day and met with writers, producers and commissioners from across the UK comedy sector.

Later in the year, WGGB will also be attending the Edinburgh Festival Fringe to meet comedy writers and hear their concerns.

Getting out and about at events like these helps raise the profile of comedy writers and the WGGB and is an important recruitment opportunity.

Nathaniel Tapley
Chair

FILM

2023 was, first and foremost, the year of the WGA strike. Lasting 148 days, stretching from the start of May until the end of September, this long-anticipated display of labour solidarity from our sister guilds in the USA led to hardship and uncertainty across the industry. But the strike held, the unions prevailed, and their commitment and unity delivered much-needed gains.

The Film Committee supported office staff as they faced a mountain of enquiries from WGGB members. The list of situations that needed clarifying seemed endless and our thanks go to Ellie, Lesley, John, Eleanor, Joe and the rest of the WGGB team, as well as their opposite numbers in WGA, for providing clear, time-sensitive advice that kept everyone on the right side of the line.

The gains secured by WGA will benefit screenwriters across the world. Of specific interest to feature film screenwriters are better and speedier payments for rewrites, improved residuals if writing for streamers, and some early definitions around the use of AI. The industry is still coming to terms with the aftermath of the strike, clearing the production backlog even as economic headwinds bite. But the status of screenwriters has been strongly reasserted, and we will all benefit in the long run.

The Film Committee took these gains into our ongoing – but, I am happy to report, newly re-energised – negotiations with Pact. At the time of writing, we are making progress on

renegotiating a Minimum Terms Agreement for feature film writing and updating the Screenwriting Credits Agreement. We hope to share the fruits of these negotiations with the world in 2024, and will update our *Writing film: a good practice guide* booklet once this is done.

We continue to engage with BFI, BFI Network and regional screen agencies through regular meetings. In April 2023, we held a Zoom with the BFI Filmmaking Fund that was open to all members, and have continued those conversations behind closed doors since.

WGGB sponsored the Emerging Writers' Spotlight event at the 2023 BFI London Film Festival, delivering helpful exposure for the Writers' Guild's work at a key industry forum. This event was immediately followed by a film members' networking event in Leicester Square. More of these to follow.

We are always exploring avenues for campaign work, and have consulted with the membership on a number of surveys across the past 12 months. We will support the union's wider work on ageism and will continue to engage with BFI to stay on top of their diversity monitoring data.

I have attended a couple of gatherings of the British Screen Forum (BSF), a key lobbying group for the screen sector. BSF and WGGB, alongside a number of other groups, made detailed submissions to the Culture, Media and Sport Committee hearing into British film and high-end television. It is impossible to deny the widespread frustration – despair is not too strong a word – felt by members at the state of the

British independent film industry. An industry set up solely to service US studio productions, not enough support for domestic projects, a director-skewed creative model, a broken distribution model, audiences staying at home. We can only hope that this Government – or whoever replaces it following the General Election – will start to take this issue seriously, and provide the sector the financial support it so urgently needs.

Thanks as ever to my wonderful Film Committee, who have supported me across multiple meetings through the year, and who remain positive, defiant and united in our love for our craft. It remains my great privilege to work with you all and I look forward to making my last year in post a productive one.

Tom Williams
Chair

TELEVISION

2023/24 has been a challenging year with important successes – thanks to WGGB General Secretary Ellie Peers and Deputy General Secretary Lesley Gannon’s determination we now have a new agreement with Netflix, a 10% rise on minimum fees for writers working under our BBC Script Agreement for Television and Online (SATO), and important new provisions under SATO, including increased residuals. We’ve also had a 5% rise in minimum fees for ITV writers this past year.

The cancellation of *Doctors* was a major blow to its regular writers, some of whom have given more than 20 years to the show, and to the many writers for whom it was a first TV job. Thanks to our excellent pressure group and WGGB officials we now have offers on the table from the BBC for core writers in terms of pay on 75 episodes and writer development. We understand these are uncertain times for all TV drama production units, but it is important that storytellers are treated well and given the respect they deserve (we also lost *Holby City* only two years ago). The reduction in episodes for *Casualty* and *Hollyoaks* is also a concern and we will continue to monitor future developments.

Pressure of business means that Darren Jones is acting in a deputy chair capacity (an informal rather than elected posted – though important nonetheless). Darren has given years of service to the committee, and he also leads our new animation writers’ group. Animation is a significant part of the industry, but a precarious one, and basic fees can differ

wildly from one production to the next. The new group hopes to improve that situation going forward and recently had a presence at the British Animation Awards at the BFI in London, where we distributed an animation flyer on our work to attendees.

Our TV fees census has now closed and we will be following up with a Zoom event about writers' rooms in May. Our new project for this year, the creation of a TV Writers' Survival Kit, then follows.

This business varies greatly according to where writers are in their careers. The make-up of the TV Committee itself is changing to better represent our membership in terms of ethnicity and age. Warmest thanks to everyone who has served on the Committee this year, to all the WGGB staff who give a disproportionate amount of their work time to TV and especially to Eleanor Dawson for connecting everyone and everything.

Sukey Venables-Fisher
Chair

THEATRE

It's been a challenging 12 months for theatre and a sobering start to 2024. The combined effect of year-on-year, real-term cuts to companies over the last 14 years and the lengthening shadow of Covid has been starkly reflected in a lack of enterprise and a risk averse culture in our industry. So, these issues continue to be the Theatre Committee's (TC's) main challenges to date.

On the negotiations front, David Edgar continues to work tirelessly in heading up this work, alongside Rupert Creed, Nick Dear and Barney Norris.

Since our last report, we have agreed a two-year pay deal with UK Theatre (totalling a 10% increase on minimums) and are in ongoing negotiations regarding the digital delivery of work.

We also agreed a 6% raise in minimum fees for 2023-24 with the TNC (National Theatre, Royal Shakespeare Company and Royal Court) and are in negotiations about 2024-25. We are also in what we hope to be the final stages of negotiations about revised rates and terms for NTLive and NT at Home.

Our negotiations are also looking at a range of measures to improve the commissioning process for writers and addressing what many writers feel are the inadequate and uncaring procedures currently in place across the industry. As a prelude to this work, we established a working party of playwrights including David Eldridge, Tamsin Oglesby and Roy

Williams, who have been active in campaigning on these issues.

We are also about to start working with ITC on a long overdue review of our rates and agreement.

We continue to flag up the concerns of our theatre writing members with Arts Council England (ACE) following ACE's 2022 funding review of NPOs (National Portfolio Organisations). We felt new writing had not been a priority. Oldham Coliseum's closure and the withdrawal of funding for Hampstead Theatre, The Gate, Stockroom and the Donmar has been followed by further grim news of large scale local authority cuts to arts and culture. Notably, Birmingham and Nottingham have hit the headlines, with severe threats to the Rep and the Playhouse, but the same attrition is being experienced throughout the country.

At the beginning of this year we released our 'Playwrights and theatres survey', which looked to understand how playwrights experienced the commissioning process amidst reports of 'ghosting' and poor communication from theatres. We are now analysing this data, which will inform our ongoing discussions with our negotiating partners. Any playwrights who are concerned about mistreatment are encouraged to contact the WGGB casework team: casework@writersguild.org.uk

We believe we have been making progress, and having some impact, through our regular meetings with Arts Council England in flagging up the plight of new writing across the country. And we promoted a well-attended online event with

them in July, in which they outlined the grant and career opportunities on offer, and attempted to ‘demystify’ the processes involved in their schemes.

On a wholly positive front, the New Play Commission Scheme (NPCS) continues to fulfil all our expectations. Already three plays have been produced and well-reviewed: Matt Woodhead’s *Woodhill* for Lung, Jessica Hagan’s *Brenda’s Got a Baby* at the New Diorama, and Peak Stuff by Billie Collins with ThickSkin Theatre. And all but one of the 18 shows are now contracted, and most have a timeline in place to production. A couple of companies have seen a change in artistic director, which has led to delays, but all in all NPCS has gone ahead smoothly and efficiently, thanks to the tireless work of all involved.

The monitoring group for the scheme meets regularly, following the progress of the playwrights and their commissions. In January, we met with over half of the playwrights and it was decided to issue a survey to assess their experience of NPCS and the extent to which they would like to stay in contact. Both at the meeting and in the survey, the playwrights were overwhelmingly positive about the scheme.

As part of NPCS, the Faber New Play Award was awarded to Carmen Marcus’s *And The Earth Opened Up Under Her* – for which she received a prize of £5,000 and an undertaking by Faber to publish it when produced.

On another positive note, we were delighted to celebrate the year’s Olwen Wymark Awards (pioneered and led by former

WGGB Theatre Chair and committee member David James over the last 19 years). This heart-warming lunch event took place at the Garden Museum, London on 1 December – and was, as ever, a very special occasion, with us hosting the 10 awardees nominated for having ‘gone above and beyond the call of duty’ in encouraging new writing. And, for the considerable work in making it such a success, we must give thanks to WGGB staff Kate Glasspool, Sarah Woodley and Eleanor Dawson.

The TC have also been looking to meet up with our regional and national counterparts, and have been working very closely with Tim Stimpson (Chair of West Midlands WGGB branch). Whilst, at December’s TC, we received WGGB Wales Chair Manon Eames and committee member Lisa Parry as our guests, to hear about the issues facing theatre in Wales at the moment. And we’re resolved to keep this dialogue going into the future, with an open invitation for other regions to join us.

We’ve also been keen to introduce new blood onto the TC, encouraging all interested members to meet up with us to discuss the future of our work, hopefully with a view to joining the committee. On that final note, I’d just like to thank all my stalwart colleagues over the last year for their dedication and commitment; they are Amelia Bulmore, Poppy Corbett, David Edgar, Lisa Evans, Debbie McAndrew, Brian McAvera, Alan Spence, Jen Toksvig, Jan Woolf, Nick Wood and Michael Wynne.

**Richard Pinner
Chair**

VIDEOGAMES

This year has been a tough one for the industry. An influx of investors over the last decade has led some companies to a 'short-term results first' mentality. This short-sighted approach has resulted in large layoffs of staff in reaction to small drops in profitability. Almost inevitably these reductions in staff have come amongst those who make the games, not those who have made the decisions at the top. The WGGB has continued to offer advice and support to those going through these difficult times and hopes to be able to offer further guidance when the next rounds of hiring begin.

The Videogames Committee has also seen some change with Victor Ojuel stepping down as Co-Chair at the end of the year. Andrew Walsh has agreed to stay on as the sole Committee Chair. Happily, Victor has remained on the Committee and its members thank him for everything he's done as Co-Chair over the last few years.

In the past year, the Committee has organised and planned 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. Our annual LSBU panel and networking event took place at the end of 2023. We also ran an Accessibility in Videogames Writing online event last October, and a Pre-AdventureX networking event in London in November. Next up will be more networking and a panel event on the role of narrative designers.

Extending our in-person work, the Committee is discussing involvement at industry conferences and a regional event. We have secured further funding from Articy to help support these events.

Amongst our priorities this year have been assessing and commenting on the growing use of AI across our industry and a need to organise writers within companies. A list of potential companies to look at has been drawn up and we are debating the next steps for approaching the videogames narrative staff at various UK locations. We are also hoping to launch a campaign to address the issues with contributors not receiving appropriate crediting within games themselves, and the industry as a whole.

As ever we are open to listen to suggestions from and to give advice to all our videogames members.

Andrew S. Walsh
Chair

National reports

CYMRU / WALES

We have been busy in Wales again, and WGGB Cymru/Wales continues to highlight problems wherever possible and represent our members across the board.

Main issues since last year's report have been Arts Council Wales' Investment Review and an announcement of an independent investigation at S4C into allegations of a "culture of fear" among staff. We are continuing to work alongside the other creative unions in Wales, sharing information, concerns and working together on a number of areas, especially in connection with Welsh Government arts policies and funding. WGGB Wales also contributed, along with our sister unions, to a major report commissioned by Wales TUC on the development and problems/benefits associated with *AI: A snapshot of workers in Wales' understanding and experience of AI*.

Our connection with CULT Cymru (Creative Unions Learning Together) has meant we now once again have a Union Learning Rep for WGGB Wales, William Gwyn, and various successful courses have already been arranged, with several more upcoming for members. Although the Wales Union Learning Fund has suffered a cut, subsequent to cuts in Welsh Government budgets, we have been involved in the discussions regarding tailoring the ongoing WellBeing Facilitators and Mental Health First Aiders schemes run by

CULT, along with all the other ongoing projects, so as to avoid redundancies wherever possible.

We continue to have productive meetings with the new Chief Executive of Arts Council Wales, Dafydd Rhys, although during the recent Investment Review and appeals processes these were necessarily paused. The Investment Review itself in September 2023 resulted in funding changes in which there were winners and losers, most notable among the latter being the complete cut of revenue funding to National Theatre Wales, the English language ‘national’ theatre company, which unsuccessfully appealed against the decision. We have subsequently been in conversation with the company regarding the implications, especially for our members. We are also awaiting news from Arts Council Wales about their promised review of English language new writing in Wales.

Other theatre companies in Wales are slowly beginning to rise out of the chaos of Covid, and there have been several exciting productions, including some new writing which has raised some hope in the writing community, but there is still a sizeable mountain to climb in that respect. Most notably, the appointment of Artistic Director Kate Wasserberg to Theatre Clwyd, which is currently undergoing a massive rebuild, has resulted in even closer ties being forged between the company and freelancers than had already been nurtured, which is to be welcomed. However, there still remains a threat to the already limited opportunities for actually producing ‘new writing’ in Wales – a lack of slots, funding, the apparent collapse of the once busy touring circuit in the country etc. Venues are struggling, and too

many artists are leaving the profession for good. The cut of 10% to Arts Council Wales will not help any of these matters.

In broadcasting too, we have been active. There is mounting pressure on the Welsh Government (especially following recent events at S4C - see above) to create a Communications Authority for Wales, as recommended in the report of the Expert Panel on a Shadow Broadcasting and Communications Authority for Wales (August 2023) to which we reported as part of the Wales creative unions/Federation of Entertainment Unions group. At S4C, the sacking of S4C's Chief Content Officer Llinos Griffin-Williams, followed by the sacking of the Chief Executive Sian Doyle has meant that it has been difficult to continue conversations with the channel regarding some of the issues over which we have concerns – for example, the limited opportunities presented by co-productions for writers based in Wales, the low level of the channel's drama budgets, and the implications for writers of the channel's concentration on developing digital rather than linear content in the future. We also have several examples of non-compliance on some S4C-funded productions about which we are keen to have a discussion.

Non-compliance is also an issue we wish to address in our ongoing re-negotiation of the WGGB contract with TAC, Teledwyr Annibynnol Cymru/Welsh Independent TV Producers, which for various unavoidable reasons has taken longer than it should, although we have reached agreement on the bulk of the negotiations.

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

As always, thanks go to members who have kept us informed of the many issues they are dealing with, and also to the Writers' Guild officers for the continued support they offer members, and myself as Chair, in addressing crucial issues for writers in Wales.

Diolch,

**Manon Eames
Chair/Cadeirydd**

NORTHERN IRELAND

BELFAST MEDIA FESTIVAL

I attended the Belfast Media Festival in November 2023 with WGGB Assistant Organiser Joe Abel. It was an opportunity to announce the presence of WGGB in the region (Northern Ireland is a new committee on the WGGB Executive Council). We also engaged with local members and prospective members.

LOOKING AHEAD

Since taking up the post, I have been engaging one-on-one with members and prospective members on specific issues and plans are underway for a region-wide survey of members and their priorities, as well as the branch's first in-person meet-up.

PJ Hart
Chair

SCOTLAND

Last summer, we were proud to represent the WGGB once again at the Edinburgh Festival Fringe Participants' Fair. We spoke with many members of the writing community and encouraged them to join the union.

This coming summer WGGB is expanding its outreach at Edinburgh festivals, including the Fringe, with a big recruitment drive supported by WGGB staff who will be in attendance. Watch this space for further details!

The Scotland branch continues to be part of the STUC and Federation of Entertainment Unions coalitions in Scotland – it is a valuable way to represent writers' voices and in October last year STUC met with former Culture Minister Christina McKelvie MSP to discuss Fair Work Policies.

We continue to support STUC in their pursuit of the Fair Work Agenda in ongoing discussions with Scottish Government. Recent talks have been looking at what that looks like in practice.

Discussions within STUC have also been taking place around supporting screen bodies in their calls to Ofcom around Channel 4 calls for regional quotas.

We continue our online coffee mornings and evenings. It's a large region and difficult for people to connect in-person so Zoom is an ideal way for us to do this, though at Christmas we were delighted to have an in-person drinks where non-members were welcome too – an ideal opportunity for recruitment.

WGGB Scotland also hosted a Q&A with Creative Scotland about their funding application process, with the aim of supporting and encouraging writers to apply. We had great attendance to this online session and Creative Scotland gave clear guidance on how and when to apply and were very clear that they would be very happy to see more writers make use of their Open Funding scheme. Let's hope members will be able to share news of their funding success soon.

If you'd like to become more involved in your union in Scotland then feel free to drop me a line to scotland@writersguild.org.uk

Suzy Enoch
Chair

EAST ANGLIA

Unfortunately what we've been able to achieve this year in East Anglia has been a little curtailed by my own professional woes. I was a writer on *Doctors* for 13 years, so when the series end was announced so abruptly in the autumn this was rather a blow.

Before that, things looked brighter. In March we held a second showcase of members' work, *Imperfect Storms*, in the studio at Norwich Theatre. As I write, two scripts from these shows have received funding for further development. One of these, *Lovedale* by Fiona Padfield, will have rehearsed readings at the Mercury Theatre and Key Theatre in the autumn. Jenny Ayres' *Camera Shy* has also received funding. And Kitty Morgan's musical *The Highwayman*, which featured in our first showcase, will have performances at OVO and Norwich Playhouse, also in the second half of the year.

We managed two members meetings in Norwich, in March and June, and in May we ran a Writers' Guild table at the National Centre for Writing's Publishing Fair. Alongside this I've been answering queries from members, and promoting WGGB membership at regional events, such as the regular Dragon Hall Socials, also at the NCW. In November I started a new term as WGGB Regional Chair.

By the time you read this we will have staged *Imperfect Storms III* at the Norwich Theatre Royal in April. We will return to the NCW Publishing Fair in May. I've been talking to WGGB Assistant Organiser Joe Abel about other creative and industry events where WGGB could have a presence. This

year I'd also hope to hold more member events in the real world and online. The end of Doctors means I'm no longer 'on call' to the show, and I'm looking forward to being a little freer to develop my own work, to connect with WGGB members and build on some of the relationships we've made with other organisations in the last three years.

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

Stephen Keyworth
Chair

EAST MIDLANDS

As a very recently elected rep I am at the start of my tenure and so have limited activity to report on at the moment.

It's a regional committee of the WGGB that has been empty for many years, and it also shares challenges with our sister West Midlands region who have been doing a sterling job of late, campaigning against 100% cuts to the local authority arts budget and for fairer BBC local investment.

These issues have an impact on East Midlands writers, too, and I am looking forward to developing closer relationships with Tim Stimpson, the West Midlands Chair, and his committee, drawing on their experience and fashioning my own course too.

There are many things that make the East Midlands unique and this is where you come in! If you're a WGGB member in the region (or a non-WGGB member who would like to join) I would love to hear about your experiences and what issues you would like me to focus on. Perhaps there is an event you would like to see us be involved with, or develop ourselves, or perhaps there is a burning issue affecting your writing career that you'd like us to campaign around locally. Or perhaps you'd like to join the committee.

Please drop me a line on eastmids@writersguild.org.uk to help inform my strategy for the region.

Ewen Glass
Chair

LONDON AND SOUTH EAST

The London and South East region is the largest of all the union's regions. As a committee we have continued to focus our efforts on in-person events and tackling ageism in our industry. The WGGB ageism survey has now closed and results will be shared over the next few months.

Last year the WGGB stood in solidarity with members of the Writers Guild of America (WGA) and SAG-AFTRA when they were on strike. It was great to meet so many of you in person at our Screenwriters Everywhere protest in London's Leicester Square in June. It was part of a Global Day of Solidarity and I was filled with so much pride as I stood next to you all, leading the chants! Thank you for coming out in support, be it in person, online or in spirit.

I know many London and South East members have benefited from WGGB online events, training workshops and screenings this past year, and some of you have been in touch with me by email – please keep reaching out to me with your concerns or general queries and I will refer you on to our brilliant caseworker team if necessary.

We're looking forward to holding our next in-person meet-up to build our community – watch out for the member ebulletin or WGGB social media for details.

We are also working on reinvigorating the committee and if you are interested in joining please do not hesitate to contact me and feel free to include the reasons you would like to join or what you'd like to see the committee do.

Email londonse@writersguild.org.uk

Finally, I would like to take the opportunity to thank my committee for their hard work and ongoing support.

Nina Kristofferson
Chair

NORTH EAST

WGGB Assistant Organiser Joe Abel has arranged a webinar for local members about writers' contracts with North East Screen in May and I am looking forward to that.

As a relatively new rep in the region, I am keen to raise our profile locally. One of the ways to do this I think is to become involved in looking at how we can increase opportunities for local writers. Theatre companies do offer 'opportunities', but these mainly consist of competitions, scratch nights, readings etc which is their nod to supporting new writing. This gives the theatre the badge of new writing, an audience, and publicity but for the writer it means little or no remuneration and little or no career progression.

Award-winning writer Dr Louise Powell has recently presented a report titled *First Stage* commissioned by Tees Valley authority on the state of new writing and the livelihood of writers in Tees Valley. I have met with Dr Powell and I will be meeting her again to discuss these issues and how the branch might approach some of these issues in our work.

If you'd like to get involved in the committee I'd love to hear from you. Please email joe@writersguild.org.uk

David Naphine
Chair

NORTH WEST (MANCHESTER AND LANCASHIRE)

I have recently been elected as Chair of Manchester and Lancashire and my first task will be to establish a committee in the region. I hope to focus on more networking and advocacy for writers. If you'd like to get involved in the committee, then please email me on manchester@writersguild.org.uk

afshan d'souza-lodhi
Chair

NORTH WEST (MERSEYSIDE)

It was an honour to be elected as the Regional Representative for the WGGB in Merseyside in late 2023. I have already started to get to know some of our local members, but there's a long way to go. As we all know, there hasn't been a Merseyside Rep in place for some years, so one of my first priorities is to establish a meet up for local members (and potential members). I moved to the region at the beginning of 2020, just before Covid took hold, and at the time I knew very few writers in the area. My isolation hammered home to me the importance of creating a supportive network for Merseyside writers.

Merseyside is seen as a hothouse of creativity, and good news in recent years has included the opening of the Shakespeare North Playhouse in Prescot and increased film and television production in the local area. However, the closure of the Epstein Theatre, alongside high-level changes at the Everyman and Playhouse, and recent unsettling news about the reduction in output at *Hollyoaks*, with the knock-on effect to local members, are of great concern. And while we all welcome increased filming in the region, it is unclear what benefit this may bring for local members. With this in mind, my next highest priority is establishing links with producers and Liverpool Film Office to promote local writers wherever possible.

I have begun reaching out to local universities to speak to students about the benefits of WGGB membership, and recently took part in a talk at Salford University, alongside Equity and Spotlight.

To contact me please email: merseyNW@writersguild.org.uk

Lisa Gifford
Chair

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)

Life very much got in the way of my Writers' Guild duties in 2023 as my husband was critically ill from February until August, with a house move as the cherry on top of a very mouldy cake.

I hope you will understand that my news from the front is a little sparse.

In March I met with Gloucester-based Tom Berkeley and Ross White, the writers and film-makers behind the Oscar/Bafta-winning short *An Irish Goodbye*. They were screening their film at the Tivoli cinema in Bath, which was sold out. The manager is happy to make the cinema available to the WGGB for any member get-togethers or events we wish to have, which is a great contact.

In April I attended the TUC South West Annual Conference as the Writers' Guild delegate and was elected to the Executive and Women's Committees respectively. I was glad to be there on the WGGB's behalf as I was able to see how we could collaborate in the future and as a result was able to contact the regional offices of Bectu and Equity with the intention of starting a dialogue in the South West. I am our delegate again this year.

In October, WGGB Assistant Organiser Joe Abel and I attended 'The Script's the Thing' in Dorchester. It was the first script/writing event of its kind put on by Dorchester Arts with a good turnout of Wessex-based theatre companies, drama schools and publishers exhibiting. The WGGB stall was well attended as was Joe's talk about the union's role.

In December Joe and I were invited to Bristol Old Vic Theatre School by Head of Drama Writing David Lane where we spent a morning with the MA Drama Writing students explaining the benefits of the WGGB, contracts, professional pitfalls etc. The students were very responsive and we have been invited back on a regular basis.

Lastly, may I say a heartfelt thank you to Joe Abel for all his support this last year.

Sarah Swords
Chair

WEST MIDLANDS

Two massive announcements have defined the year in the West Midlands. The first was the decision to axe *Doctors*. As well as being a blow for members nationwide, it also has dire implications for the region. According to the BBC annual report 2022-23, the BBC spends just 2.7% of its TV network budget in the Midlands, the lowest of any of the nations or regions, and *Doctors* is a large chunk of that. The BBC has promised to reinvest the money but without presenting any concrete plans.

The WGGB has joined with Equity to support a Campaign for Regional Broadcasting Midlands petition demanding that the BBC show not only how the money will be reinvested in a way that supports jobs based in the Midlands (including scripted content) but that investment will be increased so that it is closer to other parts of the UK. The Branch has also made representations to local MPs and the West Midlands Mayor Andy Street to highlight this issue, as well as industry bodies Create Central and Culture Central.

The second announcement was that Birmingham City Council would be cutting 100% of its arts and culture funding in an attempt to fill the enormous blackhole in the budget. The Branch fed into the initial consultation, highlighted the knock-on effect cuts would have on freelancers, and participated in the #CultureMatters campaign, highlighting the importance of arts and culture to the city. With the devastating budget about to be signed off, we took part in two public demos against the cuts, alongside Equity, Bectu and the MU. A day later, Chancellor Jeremy Hunt and Mayor

Andy Street announced £20 million for arts and culture in the region. This will be spent across the whole combined authority (including the Black Country and Coventry) but will also be used to plug the holes left by the cuts. There are still questions to be asked about how and over what timeframe the new money will be spent but this is welcome news, nonetheless.

Meanwhile, we stand in solidarity with those sectors that have not been given a reprieve and the Birmingham residents (including thousands of children) who will suffer as a consequence of losing vital services. We recently became a member of the Birmingham TUC with branch rep Tim Stimpson and committee member Adrian Ravenscroft as delegates. We intend to support our sister unions as they resist the cuts, as well as our members in the East Midlands where arts and culture are facing similar devastation. As part of this effort, the branch has been working with the Theatre Committee to explore new models of supporting playwriting across the whole of the Midlands.

On a more positive note, the Branch has put on several successful events over the past year. In April 2023 our 'Playwrights and Policy' panel discussion looked at the history of practitioner involvement in policymaking and how writers can influence things today in the wake of Arts Council cuts. On the panel were Jane Woddis (practitioner and academic), David Edgar (former WGGB President) and Aisha Khan (writer and director). In September we held 'Mindfulness for Writers' with poet and mindfulness coach Charlie Jordan, and in December we spoke to Deirdre O'Halloran (Head of New Musical Theatre) and Sophia Griffin (Head of New Work)

about the exciting new opportunities at the Birmingham Hippodrome. We also had a Christmas social for members and most recently welcomed Assistant Organiser, Joe Abel, when he spoke at Create Central's Skills Accelerator in Coventry and the StoryTown Conference in Brum.

As ever, thanks to all the members of the West Midlands Branch Committee, especially William Gallagher who writes our monthly newsletter.

The amount we're able to do is only limited by the number of members we have, so if you would like to get involved please drop a line to: westmids@writersguild.org.uk

We're particularly keen to hear from our members in the Shires. You can also follow the branch on Facebook, Instagram, Twitter (sorry, X!) and Threads.

Tim Stimpson
Chair

YORKSHIRE

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 Yorkshire Chair vacancy in the subject field.

Obituaries

WGGB has sadly lost some long-standing members in 2023-24, 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/).

Oliver Emanuel. (1980-2023)

Gareth Miles (1938-2023)

John Stevenson (1937-2023)

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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.

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

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