

WGGB Manifesto: Putting writers at the heart of the story

www.writersguild.org.uk

The Writers' Guild of Great Britain (WGGB) is a trade union representing over 3,000 professional writers in TV, film, theatre, audio, books, comedy, poetry, animation and videogames. Our members also include emerging and aspiring writers. It negotiates national agreements on pay and conditions with key industry bodies, including BBC, ITV and Pact, the Royal Court, UK Theatre, National Theatre and the Royal Shakespeare Company.

Summary

The creative industries continue to play a significant role in the UK economy, generating over £124.6 billion a year and employing over 2.3 million people.

Writers are at its heart – creating the stories, characters and worlds that everything depends upon and yet, despite the wealth generated by the industries, writers are often underpaid and unprotected and their vital contribution to the sector overlooked.

Currently, whole sections of our industry are struggling to survive – theatres are closing or ceasing to develop new work, the number of UK independent films has been steadily reducing and our public service broadcasters are commissioning fewer original works.

More support is needed to ensure that the UK can continue to produce content that reflects the vibrancy and diversity of modern Britain.

To nurture, support, protect and develop the UK's writing community, we need: fair pay, fair treatment, a sustainable sector and a copyright system robust enough to face the challenges posed by recent developments in Artificial Intelligence (AI).

Fair pay

Writing is a highly skilled occupation that requires dedication and training. For it to be a viable occupation, open and available to those of all backgrounds, the following are required:

- Greater restrictions on free work/low pay across the creative industries, including internships and schemes, with penalties for those who continue to under pay.
- An end to ‘in-perpetuity buy-out’ clauses and other exploitative practices, through legislation that requires fair remuneration for creators (including royalties and residuals).
- Greater parity of earnings for those writing children’s and animated content.
- Tax and benefit reform to ensure the system is fit for purpose for a freelance workforce whose earnings fluctuate and who are often paid in lump sums.
- Action to deter late payment of freelance writers.

Fair treatment

The creative industries continue to lag behind other industries when it comes to the treatment of its (largely freelance) workforce. Writers are particularly vulnerable when working in an industry that relies heavily on personal connections and informal networks and where raising concerns can result in a loss of future work. To ensure that writers are treated fairly and receive adequate protection, we believe the following are required:

- Increased accountability and transparency measures for funding bodies, focusing on the distribution of public money to freelance creators.
- Introduction of accountability measures for venues and production companies that engage freelance writers – especially those that receive public funds.
- Greater scrutiny of the working practices of all venues and companies that engage freelance creators.
- Improved commissioning processes – including greater transparency around decision making.
- Mandatory equalities monitoring and reporting on freelancers engaged in the creative industries.

- Improved protections for freelance workers against discrimination, bullying and harassment.
- The introduction of 'access riders' across the industry.
- Independent inquiries into racism, sexism and other forms of discrimination in the creative industries.
- The introduction of a Freelance Commissioner for creatives.

A sustainable sector

We need immediate action to ensure that UK writers are able to access and sustain careers in the creative industries and that the industries themselves are able to survive in the context of a global market and climate emergency. Steps that help towards this include:

- Increased and improved routes to direct funding for freelance writers.
- Increased, ringfenced funds for the Public Lending Right (PLR) fund, and an expansion of the qualifying libraries to include private, community and educational libraries.
- Increased financial support for the creative industries as a whole, but with improved accountability regimes to ensure that the benefit reaches writers and other creators.
- A strengthened 'cultural test', that recognises the importance of UK-based writers and storytellers when making work that qualifies for tax relief and other benefits.
- Measures to ensure that UK talent, resources and intellectual property are protected in an increasingly global industry.
- Increased funding for creative education and skills training programmes, including measures to ensure that accessible routes to the industry are available to all.
- Education reform to ensure that all young people have access to arts education.
- Support for the industry to transition towards more climate friendly practice.

Copyright and AI

Recent developments in AI pose a significant threat to writers' work and earnings. To protect writers, the next Government and the Intellectual Property Office should work to:

- Maintain and strengthen existing copyright protections.
- Establish a new regulatory body to monitor and regulate AI expansion.
- Ensure that AI licensing agreements are always required for the use of work by AI and that the granting of such licences is at the discretion of the rights holder.
- Require AI developers to maintain clear and accessible logs of the information used to train their tools and allow writers to check if their work has been used.
- Ensure that where AI has been used to generate content or make decisions, it is clearly labelled.
- Ensure a right to human review is in place wherever AI decision-making is used.

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WGGB is a trade union registered at 134 Tooley Street, London SE1 2TU

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