



About the WGGB

Formed in 1959 The Writers' Guild of Great Britain (now called the WGGB) is an affiliated trade union that represents professional writers in the UK. We organise in the following sectors, film, television, animation, theatre, radio, books and videogames and have national agreements covering television, radio, film and theatre. We have 2,526 members including 1321 film and TV screenwriters.

WGGB has a typical union structure, led by a General Secretary and elected Officers and Executive Council representing our organising sectors and UK regions.

We work collectively with trade unions and writer's organisations both here and abroad and are affiliated to Trade Union Congress (TUC), Federation of Entertainment Unions (FEU) Performers' Alliance, British Copyright Council, European Writers' Council, Federation of Screenwriters in Europe, Filmmakers' Alliance, International Affiliation of Writers Guilds, Union Network International, and World Intellectual Property Organisation.

Bernie Corbett – ex-General Secretary

Bernie stood down after 16 plus years at the helm of the WGGB, during his time as General Secretary he has built the WGGB into a strong organising union. He is still working with us as Finance & Business Manager for a few more months before retiring, unfortunately he will not be at the conferences in Paris.

Brexit and the Creative Industries

It is a mess, the Department for Exiting the EU has practically no resources at the moment, and is depending on existing ministries, in our case Department of Culture, Media & Sport (DCMS), to work out what the UK's negotiating position should be in respect of their part of the economy. DCMS has formally asked a number of bodies, including the British Film Institute (BFI) and the Creative Industry Council to provide detailed input on the issues to be dealt with. WGGB alongside our sister unions in the Federation of Entertainment Unions are identifying areas that the DCMS needs to retain and feeding this back via the BFI, CIC, etc.

Some of the areas that FEU unions have identified are below:

European funding of the film industry and creative sector – the UK needs to retain access to Creative Europe, which has funded the development of many UK independent films. It is estimated that the Creative Europe programme has boosted UK cultural exports by spending £39m promoting British films to the rest of Europe. Overall the Creative Europe programme is worth £1.07bn (2014-2020). In 2015 the culture sub programme supported 54 UK projects and the MEDIA programme supported 53 co-productions. Switzerland lost all access to funding schemes in 2014 after imposing restrictions on EU citizen mobility and while Norway pays into and can access schemes, they have no say in their development.

If it is not possible to retain access to the above then the UK should explore the possibility of re-joining Eurimages as an alternative source of international funding for independent film.

If access to EU funding for UK creative industries becomes less available, we want money equal to our EU contributions to Creative Europe to be ring fenced by the UK government for UK public funders in the creative industry, e.g. ACE, BFI, these funds should be ring

fenced for the type of projects previously funded by CE in the UK and could have a specific cultural or diversity/equality remit.

US Foreign Direct Investment in film - about £1.2bn is invested by US operators in UK film and high-end TV production each year. While this is probably secure in the short-term, given the long lead time on projects, and the current attractiveness of the low pound, investors could be deterred by no longer having easy access to the EU market and freedom of movement once the UK Brexits.

Freedom of movement for workers - essential in the increasingly internationalised labour market that services the entertainment sector. London has become a global creative hub thanks to the high number of EU and non-EU workers who bring specialised skills with them. Any move to exclude them could hamper the sector, with high-end graphics being one area for concern. Separately, many co-production agreements specify levels of mixed crewing, where UK workers may no longer qualify as EU workers, and the current Film, High-TV production and Animation Tax Relief, which we want to keep, is dependent on a Cultural Test approved by the EU.

There is uncertainty about which bits of the estimated 20,000 to 60,000 of EU law might be rescinded/amended by a future UK government once free to do so. There's a wide range of provisions that could change, including health and safety, and the few employment rights enjoyed by atypical workers, almost all of which is derived from the EU. We could also be without the quotas for EU content (which in our case usually means English language programming produced in the UK) which are in TV Without Frontiers, and the Audiovisual and Media Services Directive.

Currently we are identifying the challenges of Brexit within the entertainment industry, and the arrangements we'd like to see in a new relationship with Europe.

BBC Charter Renewal

BBC charter renewal, the draft charter and framework was published in September 2016, so we are all expecting the charter to be renewed from January 2017. In order to retain the licence fee for the duration of the charter the BBC made some questionable concessions. The most damaging relates to free licenses for the over 75's, these are currently paid for by the government but from 2020/1 it will be the BBC's, responsibility this could result in a funding gap of over £650 million. However, if the Digital Economy Bill is passed then the BBC would have the power withdraw the free licence concession.

BBC

BBC Studios are up and running and are now a member of the WGGB/PMA/BBC TV forum, which is a negotiating body setting out the terms screenwriters are contracted on at the BBC. The abolition of the in-house guarantee, means that all BBC programmes will potentially be put out to tender. The first tenders went out on 20 September 2016 and they included the long running series *Holby City*, we have been assured that writers will retain BBC terms and conditions as agreed in the BBC Forum.

We are continuing talks with the BBC about introducing a pan-industry agreement across television, this is still in the early stages and other broadcasters are not yet involved in negotiations.

ITV

WGGB has won increases on minimum fees and pension contributions, we are continuing negotiations with ITV to finalise policy to protect freelance writers from bullying and harassment and to agree lump sum payments for digital use paid via Writers Digital Payments.

Pact – television

Negotiations to update the television agreement continue with Pact, the trade body for independent cinema and television producers in the UK. We won a 75% increase in minimum fees so that now the minimum fees paid to write a one-hour drama go up from £7,500 to over £13,000, effective from 1st October 2016. This is significant as the current agreement has not been revised for 13 years.

Pact – film

WGGB are in discussions with Pact about updating our film agreement. Negotiations should begin this year. We are looking at various ideas from the development of a new writer's contract template to separate agreements covering low-budget, co-productions etc. The details of the new WGGB/Pact Film agreement(s) are still in the embryonic stage but this time next year we hope to have fully formed new agreement.

Equality & diversity

Finally, the long awaited Project Diamond started in August 2016, the project includes equality monitoring of freelancers working in television, this is the first industry wide monitoring in television in the UK.

WGGB is continuing to highlight the underrepresentation of women screenwriters in television and film. Putting pressure on broadcasters, producers and funding organisations to address the gender imbalance. Initial research shows that as little as 8% of peak time television drama from June 2015 to June 2016 was written by women, the figures increase to 32% if soaps are included. The situation is no better in comedy, for example the BBC's new entrants scheme Comedy Feeds only commissioned 15% women comedy writers since 2012, with 2016 having no women writers, directors or producers on the scheme. In film over a ten-year period only 14% of UK films were written by women. WGGB is planning to undertake more detailed analysis across TV and film, and campaign for 50/50 male/female screenwriters in TV and film.

There are continual negotiations within theatre and we have achieved increases in minimum fees across the board, and with the renewed Executive Council we are investigating organising opportunities within the book and videogame sectors.

Ellie Peers
WGGB Acting General Secretary