



60 years: 1959-2019

About the WGGB

Celebrating our 60th year, the Writers' Guild of Great Britain (WGGB) is a TUC 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 2,404 members including 1357 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. Currently we have seven members of staff, Ellie Peers (General Secretary), Lesley Gannon (Assistant General Secretary), Kate Glasspool (Union Organiser), John Sailing (Union Organiser), Sarah Woodley (Communications Manager), Nadine Edwards (Organising Assistant) and Rose Cooney (Administrator Membership). We had a change of leadership at this year's Annual General Meeting, we thanked Gail Renard and Olivia Hetreed for all their hard work over the past years and welcomed Lisa Holdsworth (Chair) and Sandi Toksvig (President) onto the Executive Council.

We work collectively with trade unions and writer's organisations both here and abroad, including (but not limited to) the Trade Union Congress (TUC), International Affiliation of Writers' Guilds, Federation of Entertainment Unions (FEU), Performers' Alliance, British Copyright Council, British Screen Advisory Council, Federation of Screenwriters in Europe (FSE), Creators Alliance and World Intellectual Property Organisation.

Below is an update on some of the key negotiations and activities undertaken by the WGGB over the last year.

Brexit and the Creative Industries

Over the past couple of years, we have concentrated our efforts on lobbying government ministers to ensure that they understand the importance of the creative industries and the impact that Brexit could have on it. However, with increased political turmoil in the UK, lobbying is no longer a viable option as no minister and civil servant stays in post longer than a few months. We are now on our third Secretary of State for Digital Culture, Media and Sport since July 2018 and expect a further change by the end of the year.

With the political landscape changing daily we find ourselves facing one of the largest upheavals certainly in my lifetime (52 years). To understand the impact on our industry of a no deal Brexit, we have to consider at least 25 pieces of government guidance, for your sanity I'm not going to detail all of it here.

Potential impact of a no-deal Brexit;

- Freedom of movement – restrictions and red tape will detrimentally affect touring shows, literary festivals, location shooting, etc.
- Mobility of workforce – potentially we will have skill shortages, and worst hit will be areas such as videogames and special effects. Some companies have relocated, and some are no longer looking to hire UK workers.
- There will be a loss of funding, which the UK Government have not pledged to replace, and film will be worst hit.
- British copyright law has always been robust and in the main will remain after no deal, but UK writers will not benefit from the new provisions such as the ‘transparency triangle clauses’ in the Copyright Directive without primary legislation first being passed.
- Impact of an uncertainty – it could lead to currency devaluation with hyperinflation (or not). We don’t know what impact this will have on the UK economy moving forward, whether people will still be able to afford to continue to purchase videogames, or go to the theatre or cinema, or buy SVOD services, etc.

Of course, a sizable chunk of the UK population on both the left and right of the political divide champion Brexit and say that we can make the UK better if we leave. Research into the impact of Brexit on the creative industry does not back up this claim. For our industry to continue to thrive we either need to remain or leave with a deal on par with the rejected transition deal.

BBC & BBC Studios

The BBC has extended its catch-up service on iPlayer from 30 days to 1 year. We had no objections to this if writers continued to be properly paid for this use via Writers Digital Payments. Since the public consultation the BBC has proposed significant changes to the way in which writers are paid for iPlayer use. Negotiations are continuing.

ITV & BBC have agreed to set up a new SVOD service for the UK called Britbox, similar to the US version. It will commission as well as acquire content, but terms still need to be agreed with the unions and producers.

BBC - radio

Our radio agreements have been redrafted and published, and a pay claim has now been submitted.

We settled a dispute with BBC over their expectation that writers would write storylines for free on a radio soap. The BBC stated this work was just preparation, so unpaid. WGGB members refused to continue to ‘produce storylines for free’. After 6 months of arguing we won, the jobs are now recognised as separate pieces of work, paid for separately and storylines now have a fee.

ITV

We are in the process of updating the agreement, with proposals on extract fees. We had achieved significant increases for soap writers, the next big negotiation will be on Britbox. We are due to meet soon.

Pact

Television

Negotiations to create a new tripartite television agreement continue with Pact, the trade body for independent cinema and television producers in the UK. After 2.5 years of negotiation, we do seem to finally be getting somewhere with SVOD negotiations. There is general agreement on a midpoint in fees on which we hope to build upon, to improve the current industry contracts for SVOD in the UK. With new players coming into the market in the UK there is a renewed sense of urgency to get a deal done.

Film

Revised terms for the contracting of film screenwriters on non-studio productions, have been submitted. We look forward to restarting negotiations.

BFI Locked Box Scheme – film

Up to a 37.5% share of British Film Institute's recouped income from these BFI funded film productions is put into a locked box, where it is held by the BFI and available to be drawn down for developing and producing future film projects. This money is available to the creative team, with minimum shares of 12.5% each to the writer and director (and more by agreement). The writer and director can individually access this money to fund development of further projects. We have had meetings with Pact and Directors UK where we discussed improving the communication to both writers and directors so that they know that their projects come under the Locked Box scheme.

Theatre

UK Theatre (subsidised theatre)

UK Theatre has just finished consulting its members on a set of proposals we put forward. If agreed the new proposals will introduce a new studio rate, a new rate for commissioned unperformed plays, a new lump sum payment for rehearsals to remove the barriers keeping playwrights away from the rehearsal room. This is all on top of a 4.5% increase in minimum fees.

National Theatre Live

We are currently negotiating an appendix to the minimum terms TNC agreement with the National Theatre to include NT Live (live streaming and encore) and a deal for On Demand in Schools. Earlier this year we negotiated a 2% uplift on minimum fees, so that the minimum for a play is just under £13,000.

Equality & diversity – campaign Equality Writes

Further achievements of the campaign;

- We now have an active Equality and Diversity Committee with newly elected representatives on our Executive Council
- ITV have set up 50/50 Comedy Women Writers, as a direct response to our campaign and have over 400 comedy writers on their database, which means that any producer can now find a female writer.
- There is another project set up to do the same as the 50/50 database, but for Primetime.

We have continued to put pressure on Creative Diversity Network and Ofcom (regulator) about the failing *Project Diamond* and discussions of whether the project will ever be able to share programme level data with trade unions. For inequality to be addressed the television industry must share programme level data. Given the failings of Project Diamond we (alongside other creative unions/organisations) will be putting pressure on the regulatory body (Ofcom) to achieve the publication of programme level data and broadcaster transparency.

Bullying & Harassment

We have set up a Report It feature on our website so that members and non-members can report bad or good practice, discriminatory practice and incidents of bullying and harassment across the creative industry. The idea is to build up a picture of build a comprehensive picture of contemporary practice, which we can then address with engagers/producers.

Climate Emergency

Following a motion at our AGM in June, WGGB released a Climate and Ecological Emergency statement in September (see below) and supported the Climate Crisis strike.

Performers Alliance (Musicians Union, Equity & WGGB) All Party Parliamentary Group

The parliamentary group has launched an inquiry *Breaking the Glass Ceiling: social class and the Creative Industries*; looking at the effect of socio-economic discrimination in the creative industry. There have been three sessions, with one specifically led by the WGGB. The inquiry report is due to be published in December, although this may be delayed if we are in the midst of an election.

The above is a snapshot of the work WGGB has been undertaking over the past year and reinforces the fact that WGGB is a pro-active trade union effecting positive change for writers in the UK.

Ellie Peers
WGGB General Secretary

The Writers' Guild of Great Britain declares a Climate and Ecological Emergency

In recognition of the science of climate change and of the devastating climate-related impacts of human activity on human lives, biodiversity and ecosystems around the world, the WGGB declares a climate and ecological emergency. We pledge to work with and support our members in England, Wales and Scotland in tackling this emergency.

These are our intentions:

1. We will tell the truth

Governments and the media must tell the truth about the climate and ecological emergency and its associated harms. Governments and the media must communicate the urgent need for far-reaching systemic change.

We pledge to:

- Encourage our members to promote discussion and understanding and to respond to the climate and ecological emergency through the work that they do and the productions they're involved with

2. We will take action

Governments must reverse climate-harming policies and enact legally binding policy measures to reduce CO2 emissions to net zero by 2025 and to reduce consumption levels.

We pledge to:

- Recognise and accept the changes that are needed
- Work towards reducing WGGB's emissions to-zero by 2025 by continuously reviewing and developing our environmental policies and practices
- Support members by offering access to solutions-based training
- Promote the use of 'planet placement' to help raise awareness of climate change. See www.planetplacement.co.uk

3. We are committed to justice

The emergency has arisen from deeply systemic injustices. Writing and performance can imagine and forge shifts in the ways people relate to one another and the world, in values and behaviours.

We pledge to:

- Encourage our members to use their privileges, platforms and other resources to amplify the voices of people experiencing climate and environmental injustice and highlight intergenerational harm.
- Acknowledge the social and moral responsibility of writers and creators to reflect the enormity of the climate crisis and the opportunity art gives us to explore, and provide a conduit for the emotional responses it elicits including grief, fear and anger.

Declaration ends. For more information on #CultureDeclaresEmergency, please see the [Culture Declares Emergency](http://culturedeclares.org/) website. <http://culturedeclares.org/>