

IFRCS03 Simon Curtis, Wales and South West England Official, Equity

Senedd Cymru | Welsh Parliament

Pwyllgor Diwylliant, Cyfathrebu, y Gymraeg, Chwaraeon, a Chysylltiadau Rhyngwladol | Culture, Communications, Welsh Language, Sport, and International Relations Committee

Effaith Gostyngiadau Cyllid ar Ddiwylliant a Chwaraeon | Impact of Funding Reductions for Culture and Sport

Ymateb gan: Simon Curtis, Swyddogol Cymru a De Orllewin Lloegr, Equity |
Evidence from: Simon Curtis, Wales and South West England Official, Equity

This submission has been prepared by Equity, the leading trade union and representative stakeholder for performers and creative practitioners in the entertainment industry. We represent over 50,000 performers and creative practitioners across the UK including actors, directors, designers, choreographers, dancers, singers, entertainers, comedians, stage management and audio artists. Our members work on stage, on TV sets, on the catwalk, in film studios, in recording studios, in night clubs, in pubs, in community settings and circus tents.

In Wales Equity represents almost 1,750 creative workers across the sector, and through its democratic structure provides the industry body for the creative worker and its collective voice.

1. What impacts has reduced funding had on your organisation and sector so far?

The impact on Equity members living and seeking work in Wales cannot be underestimated. We have seen proposals made to cut our members contracts at Welsh national Opera in the chorus, which is measurable alongside venue closures and general reduction in spending by producers and venues which provides a loss of opportunity for members which is a little more difficult to quantify. What we do know for our members is that as a predominantly freelance workforce they already grapple with the perception that their career path is impractical and unsustainable, leading to many leaving the industry.

Where we can quantify the impact, with the combined reduction in funding of 25% to WNO inflicted by both the English and Welsh arts councils, the statistics

are bleak. WNO Management current proposals, at the time of submission, include a cut of at least 15% in basic salary, and a reduction from full-time 52 week contracts to 45 weeks. Our members tell us that:

- 76% of them would suffer a high or significant impact on their personal finances
- 72% may leave WNO employment because of the proposals
- 56% of them would consider leaving the sector, with 32% of them maybe considering the same

2. To what extent will these impact be irreversible?

The sector has been under pressure for some time to produce more with less, but there was always going to be a tipping point and whilst many will argue that this is somewhat in the rearview mirror, we can certainly reflect on the number of venues, companies and members either temporarily or permanently removing themselves from the industry.

For our members, this talent drain is irreversible. Once you lose the skills and experience, they cannot easily be replaced. If the Welsh Government are to protect the sector there needs to be an urgent intervention. With the rise in costs, and the shrinking of funding allocated, we will lose more companies and more expertise going forward in our opinion. Whilst much is made of the success of the screen, the other parts of the sector are vital as part of the eco-system. You cannot have one without the other.

3. What interventions would you like to see from the Welsh Government, beyond increasing funding?

As you will be aware the Creative Industries contribute over 5% to Welsh GDP. Exhibiting accelerated growth post-pandemic, faster than the overall Welsh economy. Despite this headline success, financial challenges pervade the sector, particularly in arts and music. Investment does not reflect the key contribution it makes to the economy, or its importance in the core principles of the new Welsh curriculum.

A major piece of research done by Equity in the recent General Election campaign showed that arts funding in Wales has fallen 30% in real terms since 2017. [UK arts councils cut funding 16% in real terms since 2017 | Equity](#)

You can use Arts Funding Tracker to break these figures down by constituency. [Arts Funding | Constituency Tracker Tool | Equity](#)

The Welsh Government Culture Strategy, currently also in consultation, therefore, presents the perfect opportunity to tackle these issues. However, the current draft lacks ambition and offer of investment. Rather, it chooses to maintain a broad narrative, aspiring only to ensure these sectors are “great places to work and volunteer”.

Given the current climate this strategy, we believe, is not fit for purpose, especially considering the language tying employment and volunteering against the backdrop of budget cuts imposed on and by ACW.

Acknowledging that the Culture Sector has by no means been singled out in the budgetary cuts, the current cuts to funding will however be felt by our members and organisations across Wales, and by all who benefit from their work.

It is important, therefore, for Welsh Government strategy to continue focus on skills alongside new provisions on fair pay and working conditions on union agreement to protect the professionalism of our members and the especially continue to explore a basic income for the arts, as recommended by the committee in previous inquiries.

We have already urged Welsh Government, as part of our response to the consultation, to create a transformative Culture Strategy providing tangible financial support to struggling sectors and meaningful narrative for developing and sustaining the workforce.

Equity has a central UK policy of “Performing Arts for All”, which is our manifesto for a thriving performing arts and entertainment industry. I attach to this submission the full report for your information, but list below a summary of our recommendations by way of a reference point.

1. Set out a roadmap to increase public funding for the performing arts and entertainment to the European average of 0.5% of GDP over two parliamentary terms
 2. A living wage in the arts and entertainment
 3. Regionalise arts and entertainment funding
 4. Democratise arts decision-making
 5. Regulate artificial intelligence to protect and reward human creativity
 6. Build a diverse, inclusive and representative art and entertainment industry
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7. Expand public film and television
8. Invest in arts education and skills

We fully acknowledge that these changes will need bold and frank discussions with Westminster as much of what needs fixing is not currently devolved, but it is the only way – we believe – for there to be a Creative Industries in Wales in which our members and Wales as a cultural nation can be proud.

Wales needs a cultural strategy which focuses on proper long-term investment and objectives, and on the right to fair pay and working conditions on union collective agreements for both experienced, skills artists and emerging young talent, if the sector is to survive.

4. To what extent do the impacts you describe fall differently on the people with protected characteristics and people of a lower socio-economic status?

We only have to look back at the impact of the pandemic, and the shuttering of the industry, to see the areas of membership which felt the full impact of their loss of livelihood overnight.

We hear from our members that there are parts of the sector which have yet to recover to the pre-pandemic levels, so against that backdrop there is clearly further damage being done now because of cuts. Working class representation in the creative industries is already at its lowest level in decades because of the systematic underfunding and undervaluing of arts education.

Whilst the Channel 4 research in May 2024 concentrated on film and TV, this is in our experience illustrative of the whole creative industries. [Working class creatives in film and TV at lowest level in decade – Channel 4 News](#)

Equity would be more than willing to give further oral evidence to expand on any of the above should the opportunity arise during your consultation.
