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Senedd Cymru | Welsh Parliament

Pwyllgor Diwylliant, Cyfathrebu, y Gymraeg, Chwaraeon, a Chysylltiadau

Rhyngwladol | Culture, Communications, Welsh Language, Sport, and International Relations Committee

Effaith costau cynyddol / Impact of increasing costs

Ymateb gan Equity / Response from Equity

**Culture, Communications, Welsh Language, Sport, and International Relations Committee  
Equity Submission - Short inquiry into the impact of increasing costs on organisations within its remit**

This submission has been prepared by Equity, the leading trade union for performers and creative practitioners in the entertainment industry. We represent over 47,000 actors and creative workers across the UK including 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 in circus tents. In Wales Equity represents almost 1,700 creative workers across the sector.

**Introduction**

Equity welcomes the opportunity afforded by the committee to respond to the impact of the Cost of Living crisis which affects both our members, and the workplaces they rely on for their livelihoods.

Whilst our submission does respond to the entire series of questions in the call for evidence, we have opted to take a holistic approach in submitting our response. In broad terms this allows Equity to outline the precarity of the work our members undertake which frames the experience of getting work, staying in work, benefitting from work and ending this experience.

**Response**

In our most recent published survey of members across the UK in June 2022 we reported how performers and creative workers were struggling to survive due to the cost-of-living crisis – with the majority expected to struggle to meet essential costs and many considering leaving the profession. Whilst we have not followed up this survey at the time of response to this inquiry, we know that the essential costs have only continued to rise and we have seen the number of members in crisis increase dramatically through our growing casework load.

One member told us: *"I don't eat and my health has declined. I've even turned the gas off to my own home at stopcock as I can't afford it. I sold my TV as I can't afford a TV license. I don't live, I exist."*

- 60% of respondents anticipated difficulty in meeting essential costs (e.g. housing, rent, food, childcare, utility bills) due to the cost-of-living crisis.
- 47% have already experienced difficulties in meeting essential costs during the period 2021-22.
- 33% have seen their level of personal debt increase in the last year.
- 41% feel negative about their prospects for work in the entertainment industry over the next 12 months (24% feel positive).
- 19% anticipate having to leave the entertainment industry due to the cost-of-living crisis (36% do not anticipate this, 46% are not sure).

The survey, conducted between May and June 2022, further found:

- 70% of members are currently or will shortly need to work more hours and days just to cope with essential living costs.

- 89% think the cost-of-living crisis will force those on low incomes and artists from working class backgrounds out of the industry.
- 72% think the cost-of-living crisis will put added pressure on young artists, new entrants and graduates.
- 65% think the cost-of-living crisis will make things worse for marginalised groups, including women, Black, and deaf and disabled artists.

Alongside these findings, analysis of UK Government data shows that Black people and young people have already left the profession in droves following the devastating impact of Covid-19. If the precarious nature of work has only worsened there is little chance of this talent drain being reversed. Comparing DCMS workforce estimates for January 2019 to December 2019 and October 2020 to September 2021, Equity found that:

- The number of young people (aged 16-24) working in music, performing and visual arts has fallen by 19% (compared with a 14% increase for people aged 55-64).
- The number of Black / African / Caribbean / Black British people working in music, performing and visual arts has fallen by 39% (compared with 9% fall of White people).

The 'Broadcasters facing diverse talent drain' report from Ofcom <https://www.ofcom.org.uk/news-centre/2021/broadcasters-facing-diverse-talent-drain> published in September 2022 also shows that female employees were more likely to leave TV and radio industries and the proportion of TV employees who are disabled projected to fall over the next five years.

Equity is demanding that the UK Government does more to shield its members and the creative workforce from the debilitating impacts of the cost-of-living crisis. It supports the TUC call for the National Minimum Wage to be increased to £15 an hour and has long argued for a Basic Income Guarantee similar to that being trialled in Ireland. <https://www.gov.ie/en/press-release/27aed-irelands-basic-income-for-the-arts-pilot-scheme-launched-by-government/#> We have been encouraged by the Welsh Government's interest in this method and the ongoing trial in the care sector as an important step forward and useful to the ongoing discussions around this kind of scheme. We support the comments and case made by the Future Generations Commissioner at the start of the pandemic for a Basic Income Pilot for creatives in particular. <https://www.futuregenerations.wales/news/future-generations-commissioner-calls-for-a-universal-basic-income-pilot-for-creatives/>

Equity and other trade unions are calling on the UK Government to remove the minimum income floor from Universal Credit. Our members tell us that this significantly disadvantages the fluctuating nature of their income, and the precarious nature of their employment. In September 2022 the TUC published a policy proposal around a replacement for Universal Credit which seeks to address the failure of the system introduced in 2013 which was designed to reduce the number of people in work who were living in poverty. <https://www.tuc.org.uk/research-analysis/reports/replacement-universal-credit>

Equity are also calling on employers, producers and engagers in the performing arts and entertainment industry to urgently address the harmful impacts of the crisis by improving pay and conditions in order to protect the sustainability and diversity of the workforce. We can use the principle championed in Wales of Social Partnership where funders, including Creative Wales and Arts Council Wales, in collaboration with the employers and trades unions can help address the impact by entering into meaningful collective bargaining and helping to remove the concerning elements of in-work poverty we are seeing in some companies in receipt of public funding.

The UK Government need to deliver on their promise to preserve and strengthen the UK legislative platform following our exit from the EU. We would welcome the UK Government delivering on their proposed employment bill, something we call for alongside other unions in the aftermath of P&O. <https://www.tuc.org.uk/news/tuc-unions-demand-business-secretary-names-date-employment-bill-wake-po-scandal>

For Social Partnership to be a success it is also essential that the UK retains within its framework of international human rights obligations its status of ratification and adoption of the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) (and its protocols). Similarly, it is critical importance that the UK does not seek to diminish fundamental human rights currently assigned in the Human Rights Act (1998). Human rights are the essential underpinning obligations that inform employment and trade union rights and are inalienable in a modern, functioning democracy. The ECHR provides the right of recognition for unions and provides workers and unions with the fundamental right to bargain collectively to achieve better terms and conditions and to achieve a real rise in our member's earnings to combat the effects of the UK Governments inaction on rising energy and other basic living costs.

### **Conclusion**

We are now in a crisis of income.

We call on the UK Government to

- use the power of government to help with surging costs,
- to bring forward an immediate increase to the minimum wage,
- to boost universal credit now, instead of waiting until April, and scrap the Minimum Income Floor.

We call on the Welsh Government to

- Continue to use what levers it has through the Economic and Cultural contracts with those in receipt of public monies in Wales, in conjunction with Creative Wales and ACW, to require that they engage in meaningful and realistic conversations and negotiations to improve pay and conditions, where they can, in order to protect the sustainability and diversity of the workforce which is so critical to the supply chain within the creative sector;
- Lobby the UK government for fundamental changes to Universal Credit and the benefits system and for the protection of the legal framework which enshrines workers' rights and the rights of the trade union movement which, through Social Partnership, could make a real difference to the lives of our members living and working in Wales.