

Cynulliad Cenedlaethol Cymru / National Assembly for Wales
Pwyllgor Diwylliant, y Gymraeg a Chyfathrebu / The Culture, Welsh Language and Communications Committee
Cynyrchiadau Ffilm a Theledu Mawr yng Nghymru / Film and Major TV Production in Wales
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Ymateb gan Equity / Evidence from Equity

Equity Wales Consultation – Film and Major Television Production in Wales

Equity welcomes the inquiry launched by the committee into film and major television production in Wales, in particular with regards to greater clarity on the Welsh Government's policy aims for funding productions and for greater transparency as to the benefits to our members living in Wales.

Equity represents actors, singers, dancers, variety artists, stunt performers and a range of other creative professionals. Our 42,000 members work across all areas of the live arts and in film, television, the music and video games industries and radio. We also have almost 5,000 Student and Graduate members who are looking to enter the industry in the next few years. Almost 1,600 Equity members live in Wales, of whom around a third we believe to be Welsh Speakers.

Equity must note its disappointment that once again the voice of the workforce and on-screen talent was not deemed a representative stakeholder when the committee held its informal roundtable event to inform its inquiry. Our members have a direct interest in the creative industries in Wales and across the UK and our members feel that Equity should have stakeholder status in partnership with all interested parties.

Transparency and Accountability

When the BBC announced the start of filming on the new production of 'Requiem' in Newport the press release contained a quote from the Economy Secretary Ken Skates:

Our growing success in the TV and film production industry is helping to promote Wales globally and highlight the talent and skills base that we have here. Attracting productions of this calibre to Wales is a sector priority and brings direct and indirect benefits to the economy, to local communities and to the film and TV sector. <http://www.bbc.co.uk/mediacentre/latestnews/2017/requiem>

Equity is fully supportive of this kind of investment in the creative industries, an industry which in 2016 was worth £92bn to the economy of the UK (<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/creativeindustries-record-contribution-to-uk-economy>) and is one of the fastest growing sectors in Wales. (<http://gov.wales/topics/businessandeconomy/our-priority-sectors/creative-industries/?lang=en>)

But this support has to guarantee a benefit to the talent within Wales and not just act as a location for productions to 'lift and shift' from other locations in the rest of the UK. When announcing the Welsh Government support to the Channel 4 Drama 'Kiri' the Culture Minister was quoted as saying: *During 2018 we will work hard to build on this successful record and continue to build Wales' reputation as a premium filming location with much to offer.* It is not enough, in our opinion, for Wales to simply be a filming location – if there is truly to be a thriving film and television industry in Wales then it has to be more than providing a backdrop for productions made by companies from outside Wales. They must also make commitments to a substantive base in Wales, the development of skills and talent alongside a proportion of production spend, which must include front of camera talent.

This investment strategy also seems at odds with the Welsh Government's programme for Government 'Taking Wales Forward' which sets out the ambition for the future of work in Wales including the development of skills and careers for

life enhancing work. It is also, in our opinion, at odds with some aspects of the Well being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015.

If we look at the three specific examples of the investment in 'Requiem', 'Kiri' and also Bad Wolf as a production company and look at the on screen talent in the productions, alongside the opportunities made available to our members living in Wales during the casting process, it does not, we believe, fit the commitment to '*highlight the talent and skills base that we have here*'.

For 'Requiem' we have undertaken some initial research into the core cast, i.e. those characters that appeared in more than 4 episodes of the 6 part series. This shows that over 75% percent of the actors are based outside of Wales. When we look anecdotally at the opportunities offered through Wales based agents to Wales based actors we find that there were limited casting opportunities offered, with minimal success, and when they did have to attend casting sessions with the producers and casting director they had to travel to London to audition. Some were auditioned in Cardiff and some were asked to submit 'Self taped' auditions for consideration but again there was minimal if any, success in the process. When we undertake the same exercise on 'Kiri' and characters appearing in more than 2 episodes of the 4 part series 100% of them are based outside of Wales. Equity is told anecdotally by Wales based agents that almost none of their Wales based clients were invited to casting by the Casting Director. The percentage and opportunities were the same for Bad Wolf's production of 'A Discovery of Witches'.

Equity has long argued about the practice of not casting productions in the area in which the production is being filmed and these arguments date back to the lack of casting facilities at the Roath Lock studios where Doctor Who and Casualty are both regularly cast at BBC Elstree rather than in the location of filming. It shows an unwillingness to explore the talent in the production base, and the financial commitment required by actors to travel, often at short notice and at peak times, provides an economic barrier that does not always enable people *to fulfil their potential no matter their background or circumstances (including their socio economic background and circumstances)*. (Well being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015).

Equity would argue that if a production is to be filmed here that it should bring opportunities to the talent and skills base that choose to live within Wales, especially when productions are receiving Welsh Government funding or loans. We must be clear, however, that we are not being parochial and looking for all productions that are made in Wales to feature only actors that reside here – that is impractical and also at odds with us being a UK-wide Trade Union. What we are saying is that companies should be required under the terms of the investment from Welsh Government to not only spend a proportion of their production budget here but also to fully investigate through working with Wales based Casting Directors and Line Producers/Assistant Directors the talent that resides here. We are told that most productions employ a London based Casting Director who will have limited knowledge of what is available and will often not hold castings locally to explore this fully. We are therefore looking for a condition of investment to be that Local talent is given an opportunity to audition and for that audition to be held in the area of the production base.

It is Equity policy, through our Manifesto for Casting, to give all talented performers a chance to excel, regardless of their age, gender, ethnicity, sexuality or socioeconomic background. It also underscores that actors should not be forced to move to London to pursue their careers, or give up their ambitions when they assume caring responsibilities. The campaign aims to widen the net and open up opportunities for all parties: performers, casting directors, agents and audiences. Our General Secretary Christine Payne is quoted: *Our industries will only thrive by attracting and retaining professional talent regardless of background or circumstances, to meet the ever growing demands for audio and audio-visual content on stage, on screen, online and on demand. This manifesto will be used by the union to seek that changes that will ensure the continued success of our creative industries.*

<https://www.equity.org.uk/documents/manifesto-for-casting/>

Productions have to provide a commitment to develop local talent, as the BBC do with the BBC Writers Room, and we have to look at what else is on offer to the other talents required for a sustainable film and television industry. One of the obstacles faced over recent years has been the Ofcom definition of nations and regions content. Currently the UK Parliament requires Ofcom to determine that a suitable proportion of programmes made by licensees should be made outside the M25 ('out of London'). In order to count towards the regional production quota, productions must meet two out of the following three criteria:

- 1) The production company must have a substantive business and production based in the UK outside the M25;
- 2) At least 70% of the production budget (excluding the cost of on-screen talent, archive material, sports rights, competition prize-money and copyright costs) must be spent in the UK outside the M25; and
- 3) At least 50% of the production talent (i.e. not on-screen talent) by cost must have their usual place of employment in the UK outside the M25.

The purpose of requiring relevant productions to comply with two out of the three criteria, we are told, is to provide ‘flexibility for producers to use some London-based resources, without thwarting the policy objectives of the statute, which is to buttress and strengthen regional production in the UK’. Ofcom has decided to exclude on-screen talent from the criteria, the purpose of this approach being ‘to ensure that the quotas remain focused on regionally-based production expertise rather than more mobile on-screen talent and, importantly, to avoid the quotas being skewed by the significant cost of on-screen talent in some productions (including, but not limited to, drama productions).’ What this approach fails to address is that there is on-screen regionally-based production expertise housed in the regions and nations who choose to live and work there. We are encouraged, however, that Ofcom have recently put a call out for evidence into a review of Regional

TV Production and they will be looking specifically at these criteria. https://www.ofcom.org.uk/__data/assets/pdf_file/0013/112315/call-evidence-regional-productionreview.pdf

Our final point would be that regardless of the Ofcom definitions and guidelines the inclusion of Welsh Government funding should mean that the requirements are higher and absolute. Broadcasters, in particular, have already made that commitment to greater production in the Regions and Nations and if they are also receiving funding to be here it should also look to increase the representation of the nation on screen.

The Welsh Government’s priority is therefore to provide the support and guidance to ensure that no talent is unfulfilled and no marketable creative idea is wasted.
Creative Industries Sector Panel Chair, Ron Jones.

<http://gov.wales/topics/businessandconomy/our-priority-sectors/creative-industries/?lang=en>

Provision for Equality and Diversity

In May 2016 Diverse Cymru were commissioned by the Welsh Government to do a body of research on Equality and Diversity in Film and Television in Wales. Equity were involved alongside other Stakeholders in this subject and the final report 'Rewriting the Script' included a number of recommendations to the Welsh Government as a first stage to making a real difference across the entire sector. <https://www.diverseecymru.org.uk/rewriting-the-script/> There should be transparency, and a commitment from every company invested in that they will seek to increase this diversity by following guidance put in place based on these recommendations. This is, as we've already mentioned, part of the Well being of Future Generations Act and therefore already Welsh Government policy.

Eradicating Bullying and Harassment

Following on from the revelations of sexual harassment and bullying within industry and institutions we have to recognise the toxic culture that allows this to thrive. Equity has published its 'Agenda for Change' to demand a safe working environment where our members will not have to endure or observe bullying or harassment and where perpetrators understand there is nowhere to hide.

<https://www.equity.org.uk/documents/agenda-for-change-report/>

Equity would like to see the Welsh Government attach a condition to the funding of Film and Television productions that there is a firm commitment to recognise their duty of care with regards to preventing bullying and harassment in the workplace, and ensuring they provide policies upon receipt of funding which show their dignity at work policies to guarantee the creation of a safe working space.

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