



Minutes for AAPTLE Meeting #20
Wednesday 4th November 2020 12pm on Zoom
Chaired by Production Managers Forum

Present:

ALD: Johanna Town, David Ayton, Zoe Spur

ASAM:

ASD: Dominic Bilkey, Zoe Milton

CITA: Catherine Kodicek, Nikki Edmonds, Claire Hartley

FMTW: Peter McKintosh, Leo Wan, Anna Fleischle

FTF:

MDA: Ayse Tashkiran, Asha J-G

PMA: Mark Price

PMF: David Evans (including ABTT, SIPA), Mandy Ivory-Castile, Suzy Somerville, Louise Gregory (Guest), Terry Lee Dixon (Guest)

SBTD: Rosie Whiting, Emma Tompkins, Nicky Shaw, Cat Silver

Scene/Change: Max Jones, Anna Fleischle

SDUK:

SMA: Arran Pallan (FTF), Andy Rowley

Stage Sight: Tamykha, Bruno Poet

Video Code: Ian Galloway, Gilly T

Freddie Crossley

WELCOMES & APOLOGIES

Apologies: No Apologies

Welcome: PMF welcomed everyone to the meeting and a representative from each association introduced their association to our guests Helen Ryan (Assistant National Secretary of Arts & Entertainment Division) & Paul Evans (Assistant National Secretary of London Production Division) from BECTU, to the meeting.

AAPTLE thanked Helen and Paul for joining us today.

QUESTIONS

The pre-submitted questions were put to Helen Ryan & Paul Evans. Their responses are summarised below, where possible.

BECTU INTRODUCTION

1, Some members of AAPTLE will not be familiar with BECTU and who it represents as a union. Could you please give a brief introduction to the scope of BECTU's work, and your role within it?

- Helen explained, she invited Paul to join us to offer his experience regarding how things work in his area of BECTU (TV) to help the conversation in Arts & Entertainment.
- BECTU is a sector of prospect, which has just over 45,500 members in the sector

- **Sector is Split into six divisions**
 1. **BT & Digital division,**
 2. **BBC division,**
 3. **Independent Broadcasting division,**

Two predominantly Freelance Divisions which are

4. London Production division,

5. Regional Production division

(who have a combined membership of just under 20,000 members)

6. Arts & Entertainment division

(which has 8,600 members with just under 3,300 listed as freelancers working in theatre and live events)

- **Arts & Entertainment division covers members working in Theatres, Cinemas, Arts, Leisure and Live Events.**
- **A&E have negotiated agreements which mean many people have terms and conditions which are enforceable, we regularly renegotiate these T&C's.**
- **The vast majority of people who benefit from these T&C's are non-members. We cannot discriminate so when we negotiate an agreement it must apply to union members as well as non-union members.**
- **Non-members often do not benefit as much as members because they don't know what is in the agreements or they don't know where to go to ask for advice to maximise the benefits of the agreements, and in fact they can't ask for advice from BECTU because they are not members.**
- **Helen noted that these agreements would be a lot stronger and a lot better if we had more people in the union and therefore more members in the workplace.**
- **Helen is the Assistant National Secretary of Arts & Entertainment division (A&E), Helen leads a time of officials across the UK some of whom will work across all the divisions we have talked about. Along with leading on National negotiations I have industrial case load, (which means I look after a range of employers and oversee their negotiations for them.**
- **Paul is Assistant National Secretary for London Production Division (LPD), which covers people who are freelance working in Feature films, TV dramas, factual, entertainment, documentaries, outside broadcast and commercials. Essentially production being Camera, Lights, Sound, but also post-production and production management.**
- **Paul expressed his view that in every part of the Union the branches shape the Union.**
- **We branches that are divided into craft. We have Camera branch, sound branch, lighting and electricians branch and so on.**
- **We organise in branches and in sectors. Sub divisional committees that negotiate**
- **We organise along those ways and we also organise in sectors. We have sub divisional committees that negotiate our TV drama agreement. Our major motion picture agreements our supporting artists agreement our construction agreements etc. We negotiate with the Commercials Association**
- **I represent members within the LPD, we host the activity of the branches. My job is to make sure that those branches are active, busy and assertive**

FREELANCERS

2, 70% of the UK's theatre workforce is freelance, and more self-aware than ever. How does BECTU currently support them?

Answered by Helen Ryan:

- **We offer advice and representation to individuals who are members, on an individual basis. So that includes advice on contracts, monies owed, other work-related issues. Including bullying, harassment and discrimination.**
- **We offer a whole wide range of employment and freelance related issues.**
- **We also have an excellent research department.**
- **In fact, one of our members in the research department, is the guru on freelancers and tax issues. In fact, even the HMRC speak to him for advice about freelance issues and he specialises in tax and freelance advice.**
- **He has done a series of work over the roll out of IR35, running workshops for other members. He is the go-to person that we use across the whole of prospect, specifically tax advice for freelancers.**
- **We are not indemnified to offer help and advice to non-members. For legal reasons we can't just offer advice to everybody, unfortunately.**

- Within the film and TV industry there is high engagement with our freelance members when we ballot them. Between 80 to 90% of the membership voting. Therefore, I believe we have the potential to do the same with our freelancers in theatre and in live events.
- We do have to be able to engage with them but as I say they must be members to for us to be able to do that.
- However, I will say this, the definition of freelance is extremely wide and quite often includes different people. It depends on who you talk to so sometimes it will include people who have what we call short PAYE contracts. In other words, you are moving from producer to producer to producer, so you never get longevity in your employment. You don't get continuity of service and they are sort of PAYE freelancers. I think, it is clear that people who are on short term PAYE contracts do see themselves as freelancers.
- PAYE Freelancers is a group who do actually benefit from some of our collective arrangements and they don't realise that. Because they're not members they don't realise that they can rely on those agreements and actually improve sometimes some of the contracts that they're actually employed upon.
- I'll give you good examples there last year we started our Buy Out Campaign with costume and wardrobe, in the commercial West End. We started looking at the Buy Out contracts that people were on. What we actually found was in some instances there were thousands of pounds out. They were being underpaid and we actually challenged the producers on behalf of our members and we actually got back dated money even though those contracts had been signed and had been worked under.
- We were quite successful with that and we worked until the pandemic came along. We were about to launch our Buy Out campaign, to try and get it across to people that you see yourself as a freelancer you call yourself a freelancer. We don't mind but just be aware that you could actually rely on these agreements, which might get you better rates of pay.
- Throughout the Pandemic BECTU has lobbied Government because there are thousands of people in our industry have fallen through the cracks and have been left with no financial support. We are continuing to do that lobbying. Details can be found on our website to view details of our campaigns.

3, How does BECTU directly connect with its freelance theatre workforce members.

Answered by Helen Ryan:

- I think Paul will agree with me, communicating with freelancers is credibly hard. We do direct email communications but unfortunately, they go unread. Because people are very busy, and they don't want to read yet another email. Also, we have found that freelancers are actually self-organised, they are often in private online communities for example Facebook and WhatsApp groups etc.
- I was quite intrigued to talk to Paul about how do we tap into that mode and be able to convert that round into being able to organising into theatres and what he said was that in film TV they have mobilised the reps very effectively by using slack. I haven't used slack before but apparently that's quite popular over in film and TV. The strategy there has been to create content that members want to share with the wider group, with those freelance communities that they're actually already in. That means that the reach affected in film and TV is a lot wider than our actual membership, so our reputation is quite a lot bigger than the base of our membership. We are very keen to look at trying to replicate this over in theatres and in live events.
- Paul has reiterated to me that this method must be led by the members. Trade Union Officials are not best placed to fashion those messages.

4. What proportion of BECTU committees are theatre freelancers?

Answered by Helen Ryan:

- Well this was quite a challenge. To try and get these stats. I managed to get them, I was I was not going to be defeated, but I've only actually got them from my A&E division. The following stats do not apply to the whole union.
- We have 15.24% of reps who are listed on our system as freelancers within A&E. This number reduces slightly when we just look at theatres, to 12.7%.
- What we have learned is that the world of a freelance rep is different to that of the more conventional workplace rep. Where workplace reps would represent people in grievances, disciplinaries and workplace issues. We have started evolving the scope and the concept of reps

for the freelance community. These freelance reps now become the go to person in their community and they are the advocate for that community.

- We noticed the more active members also helped drive our negotiations. They become the people that listen to what colleagues are saying and feed that info into us. They also help with our communications and again that's what we're trying to replicate.
- Now going into arts and entertainment we will be looking at rolling out different types of training for those reps. To give them those skills in the new year. We haven't got around to it yet, it was due to kick in later this year, but unfortunately the pandemic delayed our plans and we've now pushed it into the new year.

5. BECTU is currently exploring a 'New Deal' for Freelancers'. What is that, and how does BECTU hope to deliver it?

Answered by Paul Evans:

- We were in the bizarre situation back in March where we went from being a Union that had a relatively small group of fairly active reps in branches, to branches like the Camera Branch which suddenly seemed to be in permanent session. Zoom was a real innovation. Zoom was something that we had not really used before with most of our members preferring in person meetings. Due to the pandemic we had a lot of members and a lot of branches coming together.
 - Our LPD members were very angry about a number of things, that we as a union have always tried to stoke them up a little bit about. As you can imagine when you're dealing with freelancers who are very busy. We have a bunch of campaigns that are absolutely central to the members, which is our rates and the terms of conditions issues.
 - Then there are issues that are second order to members, that we find very hard to get their attention about, very hard. All those issues came to the fore all of a sudden, the whole freelance deal just how bad the freelance deal is for people. It became really apparent when we were doing all the campaigning for PAYE and freelancers and campaigning to make the government move on the self-employed income support scheme.
 - I think that as a union we can take the credit for getting the government to put the second qualification date back on the PAYE freelancers. This came out of the energy that our members put into discussions. As a result, we got loads more people furloughed by getting that second date. That date in late March added to the late in the 28th of February of the qualifying dates.
 - Our members were really annoyed about the freelance deal they were really upset about their lack of employment rights. With the lack of you know the lack of job security, the whole employment rights package.
 - People became aware, they started articulating all their old frustrations.
 - Which were about not being able to have well managed pensions.
 - That they were finding it harder to get mortgages
 - They were finding it hard to apply for loans
 - They were finding it hard to even get rental properties.
 - So, we established working groups on 6 areas, and it sort of morphed into 7 but the 6 areas we did a working group on were.
1. Tax: and Employment Rights Pensions: Where we came up with an articulation of what our members views were, what they think was wrong and what they'd like to see changed.
 2. Income Protection: We talked about the issue of income protection and how can we how can we stop the sort of lumpy earnings of many freelancers have. Whether they work a couple of months and have a couple of months where they're not doing much. Then they have other months when they crazy busy. What can we do about that? Also ensuring protections, so that people can't just on the spot be given a week's notice. Which happens a lot of feature films and TV dramas. Now if something is not working out, then off you go down the road, here's a week's notice. We want to do anything we can to make employers have to jump through more hoops before they can do that. So, they must be more careful about their hiring decisions. Because you know when the freelancer loses work, they can't just pick up the phone and get another job. It's the often people working teams. if someone is let go with a week's notice, there team is still working. They may not get any work for three or four months, so we wanted to look at income protection.
 3. Welfare: we also wanted to look at welfare the fact that you know if you are an employee you have a HR Department, there are people you can go to, to talk to about mental health issues, about bullying. You can escalate disputes. if the employer has a dispute with you at least must be managed fairly and buy a book. Our members wanted us to work on something that could ensure that freelancers have something approaching that. That we at least have industry norms where freelancers are given the same communications that employees get when they start work.

4. **Race, Equality and Disability:** We also had one working group on equality and diversity. To look at issues like race, equality and disability. About gender equality, gender equality is a really big thing in feature films and in TV dramas. The people who joined the industry when they left University or College it tends to be almost 50 / 50 gender split. However, by the time people are into their 40's a lot of women have dropped out of the industry. That's partly because of the assault course of un family friendly long hours working. This is a very delicate issue, it's something we had to have long conversations about, but we came up with a broad position on it.
5. **Management:** We also wanted to be critical of the quality of management in freelance areas we think that to some extent the fact that people are prepared to work as freelancers means that management almost think they don't have a responsibility to manage well. In our experience employers could do an awful lot more to manage scheduling better. So, people weren't having to work such long hours and you know we talked about the quality of productivity and the quality of work people do in long hours working and how it's not actually doing the industry any good
6. **Terms and Conditions:** Which is where we looked at what we are going to when we bounce back at the end of this. Our members are a lot more cohesive now than they were back in March. An awful lot more people are now conscious of the union. They've spent cumulatively probably weeks in union meetings from March until June time. We want to revisit our current agreements we are going to challenge the abuse of what we call "prep and wrap". Which is one of the big issues in feature films and TV dramas. Where people are asked to do work at the starting at the end of the day, for no money or what's perceived as no money.
We also wanted to make sure that we had good terms and conditions on Covid related terms, when we return. We were in a position to be able to rope in all the agents who represent people at the higher end of our industry, and we've come up with a joint position. That we are taking to the employers. to say look if your production is cancelled for three weeks because of the pandemic you should be paying people. You should be retaining people on full time pay. Now I've no doubt the employees will take a different view on that, but we are pressing it and we are highlighting examples of where employees are agreeing with us. It's our strategy as a union generally to catch employees being good, rather than to normalise bad behaviour by shouting about it. We've managed to get quite a lot of employers. Warner's have now agreed to paying people for 100% of their salary if there if they must lose work because of Corona virus related issues. So, all of those came into the new deal for freelancers.
7. **Environmental & Sustainability:** Then the very last bit was something that sprung out to the management working group. A lot of members very concerned about environmental issues, about sustainability. About you know transport, about single use plastics. A range of other sustainability issues and we established a working group on that.
 - As well another result we created new structures we've now got clear instructions to our union comms departments and our research teams on what to campaign for. They know exactly what our members want, we've never consulted our members as much as we did in March, April, May and June.
 - I think it was you know from the point of view of being able to really understand what our members thought. That was it, so that's what the new deal for freelancers is. It's a single, it's a strong set of well communicated values. That we as a union now know to campaign for. We are also seeking alliances wherever we can, we know that the new deal for freelancing TV and feature film. We know that there's so many crossover issues with people outside of that area, and freelancers in every other sector. We believe that now bectu's production people are much more articulate interlocutors with people who want to join us and campaign on all those issues.

6. Does BECTU have enough staff allocated to directly support and represent the specific needs of all theatre freelance disciplines?

Answered by Helen Ryan:

- The way that I look at how we deal with staffing is that it depends on numbers and where resources are.
- My division is growing, it is one of the ones that is growing. That is recognised by prospect.
- Do I have enough officials to do what I want to do? No, I do not, and I think any trade union official who is also the manager would say exactly the same.
- We have a huge "To Do List" of what we want to achieve.
- We see so much unfairness, so much more that we could change. But we can't do it because we're obviously restricted by the amount of money, we get in.
- How many staff we must support directly? Do I want to add anymore on that? Yeah,
- I think the thing we must get across all the time here, is that we are a union and the union is about enabling people to do things for each other.

- I can't stress this too strongly,
- We are not a service that does things for people directly.
- What we do is we have a lot of members in a particular area. We allocate a number of our officials, to host and facilitate that activity and they pick up personal cases.

Answered by Paul Evans:

- London Production Division is three times as big as A&E. we've got ten times as many Film and TV freelancers in the union as we have from Theatre and Live Events and in Theatre in particular.
- We can only allocate the resource those members commensurate with the number of members we have.
- I can't take resource away from those 20,000 members who are in the LPD union to help a large group of people in Theatre.
- Wanting the union now. That doesn't mean that we don't want to help, and we'll do anything we can. We will do skills transfer; we will help where we can.
- But what I'm saying to you here really is, if we can have a plan to grow membership rapidly in Theatre and freelance then we can allocate resources to make that happen.
- We can allocate resources to make it more sustainable. We would absolutely love to get Theatre freelancers to be the size of their film and TV counterparts.
- I think that to some extent Theatre freelancers have advantages that film and TV freelancers don't have. In some cases, I think there are areas where you find it easier to be captive, more so than film and TV. So, I think it's possible, but we can only do that if there's a commitment to join and grow the union.

7, Does BECTU recognize the precarity, limited rights and protections of freelance practitioners working in the current UK theatre employment structures? And what additional support can be offered this 'disposable' workforce in order for them to invest in and sustain union activity without fear of being 'blacklisted', in contrast to permanently employed members of staff?

Answered by Paul Evans:

- I think that broadly I've answered the question. Considering the examples that I talked about with the new deal for freelancers.
- I'd like to deal with this issue of blacklisting though. Because it is something that comes up time and time again.
- It is a genuine concern.
- Our members don't have to disclose their membership to anyone. It can be kept to yourself.
- If you are a union rep you can do it discreetly. A lot of our union reps are very active without the employers knowing about it. So that's one thing we do stress to our members. Often the fear of blacklisting is very real to some extent but I think if you conduct yourself well as a union rep you don't have that fear and we don't have that concern.
- I think you know there are ways of being effective I mean as a union our approach to film and TV is generally not to do this sort of calling out of bad employment practises. Having a hostile relationship with the employers is often counterproductive
- What we do is we try and catch employers being good. If you start picking up an employer who is doing something very bad and make a big noise about it and to some extent all of the other employers see that as a norm and they start to behave badly as well.
- So what we try to do is we try to make being a BECTU rep, being something that's being seen as a positive contribution to industry. Also the thing that I say to every freelancer and I'm always advising freelancers, is that employers don't want to employ people who just say yes to everything. They want people who can push back, can do it articulately, can talk and make sure that they you know the crew and that their colleagues concerns are being heard. I think part of our training for reps and part of the stuff we do mentoring and supporting reps is to help them find ways to articulate their concerns the concerns of their colleagues to employers in the way that doesn't put them in danger. Where I can't see a way of doing it then they can escalate it to us and we do it
- But the blacklisting issue is one that comes up time and time again and I think that it's one of those issues that I would urge people to push back on. I think sometimes it looms a bit too large in people's minds.

BRANCH STRUCTURE

8. For those not familiar with BECTU could you please outline briefly its Branch structure.

Answered by Helen Ryan:

- Explaining branch structures is quite complex because it varies by division.
- Each divisions branch structure are devised and agreed by our members. Not by the officials. So it's the members who decide how they want to organise. That is always endorsed by what we call our sector executive committee, who are elected members. So it is complicated because members themselves decide how they actually want to organise branches.
- As an overview in A & E
- We think that branches have a number of functions.
- Firstly, recognised areas. That offer a process for consulting members on their terms and conditions, pay offers etc.
- Secondly, we sometimes use the branches for industrial action ballots if necessary, if that's the position we're in.
- Where we have agreements with large venues eg: English National Opera and the National Theatre's. We have branches within these venues that are specific and people who are in that branch relevance with what their discipline is there in there because their commonality is their collective agreement.
- We also have a commercial West End branch which is a combination of loads of employers but the commonality there is the SOLT BECTU agreement.
- Then out in the regions for example where we have quite a number of small organisations, small venues things like that freelancers a bit like RPD they are in regional branches.
- So that is a brief overview of the branches in the artisan entertainment division.

AAPTLE Member Response and Impromptu Question:

Could I just pick up on that? I think perhaps the original question has missed the point. In the film industry they're able to organise by craft. I think a lot of Theatre freelancers in the UK would like to do the same.

Would you speak to how we could organise if the members are allowed to organise the branches? If members are the people that choose how branches get put together. Is it possible for costume workers as an example to create a costume craft branch in A & E?

Answered by Helen Ryan:

- I think this comes back to what are the functions of the branch?
- I think there is a difference between a branch and a function of that industrial grouping, is it for networking for example?
- Let me use the example of the Theatre Touring Branch that's a new branch that we launched recently.
- They came to us, they didn't have a home, they were like little nomads all over the place. They talked to us and said. This is what we want to do, we want to have this branch but we also want to have disciplines within the branch and we also want to be able to talk to people within those disciplines outside of branch. What can we do?
- So what we've done, we've created a Theatre Touring Branch that covers all disciplines across the whole of the United Kingdom. Within that we've got discipline structures like groupings. We haven't called these committees, because they didn't want to be called committees. They are arranged by discipline.
- Also we launched last night in a webinar, the Theatre's Touring Network and what people can do irrelevant what branch it could be an LPD there can be an IBD that can be BBC as they want but people can opt into that network it doesn't interfere with what branch they are in. That gives them the network structure but they can communicate with each other and build that community
- So that is effectively the best of those worlds because we're not interfering with the industrial structure. That if we did didn't organise in some areas around the industrial structure. People would quite rightly say we're not consulted, on our terms and conditions, how dare you agree that on our behalf. I didn't have a voice or artefact. It would retain that ability there, but it also gives the freedom and the flexibility to build and further move out these networking groups that we are really trying to encourage our members to take up and move on.
- The problem we've got is our membership databases is clunky. It is outdated. We have got a new computer system that is going to be brought in an over the next six to nine months. Give it another

three months to settle down again. We're hoping that will also help our members to opt into networks and not feel trapped in branches because we are quite conscious of that. We can get around it with our current system it just has to be a membership lead.

Answered by Paul Evans:

- Just to reassure you, I can speak for LPD the way that we do things in LPD is our members decide how we structured the division.
- If our members wanted us to divide ourselves into branches based on the 1st letter of members surnames we could do that.
- We can really have any structures that work and it's up to the members to decide those.
- The way we do it in London Production Division is that we have craft branches, so we have camera, sounds, lights etc.
- Then we also have some divisional committees, which do the negotiation with the employers. So in a sense what the branch does is the branch communicate the branch establishes the community of workers so people bunch of people have a common aim what they can do is that they that's where the community activities where people are talking to each other that's really good for consultation.
- When it comes to representation what those branches do is they send representatives to the group of people who negotiate with the employers.
- We are broadly agnostic on whatever structure works for the community side, so the community consultation site and whichever structure works for the engagement with the employers.
- If the structure we have at the moment doesn't work then that's something that members can always engage in a dialogue and we can get it changed.
- I mean I have a reps Handbook that I give to everyone in LPD and if our members wanted to change the structure of LPD that would be entirely their call, not mine.

AAPTLE Member Response and Impromptu Question:

- With the greatest of respect how you are describing the union and everything that you are doing with LPD. All the zooms that you posted and all the work that you've done is exactly what Theatre freelancers are clamouring for.
- It doesn't exist at the moment in the union I'm getting emotional but I want to tell every single person in this room I am a union member I have been for four years. I'm am a freelancer I have been trying with many other people to bring the union into a state where we can work with it.
- I really believe it's the way forward, but I have to say at this moment in time it feels like clawing at a rock face and climbing a mountain in flip flops!
- I understand everything you are saying and it feels like a circular argument. We need as freelance people in this industry either to be able to organise by craft not talking about getting together and networking.
- I'm talking about being able to actively participate in terms and conditions. I realise the membership is low if I can speak completely out of turn in this meeting. The membership is low because freelance people and other people don't see the union working for them in the same way that I think film people do.
- I say this because I want to increase the membership and I want them to actually feel they can join that.
- There is a really strong reason why Freelancers Make Theatre Work came into being and that is because when the pandemic hit yes BECTU film was all over the zooms. I was at many of those zooms. I joined a working party to try and create better terms and conditions before realising that it was a film and TV better terms and conditions conversation.
- It appeared to Theatre freelancers that no one was talking to them, nobody felt like they were being reached out to.
- I understand it's complicated. The branch system as it exists in A & E is absolutely flawed and not fit for purpose for freelance people working in the Theatre and live arts industry.
- The problem is that everything that you've said that sounds brilliant doesn't apply to people who are working in those buildings we had SOLT and massive SOLT variations that came through. Which is egregious in its terms and conditions. It isn't brilliant for anybody working in those industries.
- Freelance people working in the West End weren't eligible to vote in that because they weren't working in those buildings at the exact moment.
- If we want to launch this to be part of the of the solution and they have to join to pass that solution we need a plan.
- In a way we do need the union to tell us okay this is our plans for you re freelance Theatre workers.

- We understand the branch structure gets in the way.
- I'm listening to all of this and it's not getting to the heart of my concern.
- I think the freelancers branch that was created somewhat to try and mitigate against this. I hate to say it hasn't had the same level of support I'd say the touring branches had hasn't had the same infrastructural support being able to reach out to people bring them in.
- I understand you have been up your armpits in redundancies and up your armpits in the coping, so of course you're really, really busy. Everyone's really, really busy.
- I am passionately in favour of the union I want people to join when I hear the two sides talking. I know that it's not there's no connexion there has to be something that freelance people can hold on to and I have been told multiple times that is within my power as a member to change things.
- I have been trying to change things for a long time and I don't seem maybe it's just me not being very good at what I do I don't seem to be able to bring about that change.
- What I would love people to hear today at this meeting is it maybe what is the plan? Is there a plan? Is there a plan for Theatre workers? One that mirrors something that film is doing and I will stop talking now.

Further AAPTLE Member Response:

- It's probably worth noting that in this meeting there are what, 20 different groups of people. Each of them dedicated to a specific craft. A lot of them very new because there was no representation for their craft.
- An awful lot of the issue we have with BECTU is that we look at film and we see that represented really really well. Then we look at Theatre and it's divided into things like touring Theatre. I mean that seems so far away from our experience of how we need to talk about what we do.

Further AAPTLE Member Response:

- It's just, it's the same frustration. I didn't hide my frustration as well as my fellow AAPTLE member did but when you are being put into a branch that's a building based branch. In CITA we specifically work for costume workers.
- Why would I invest in being a rep trained in that building and look after that building? When I know that I'm potentially going to leave there in six months time?
- If I can organise by craft and we're putting graduates in, our membership base is going to be epic. I don't see how we can continue on this and just continually be told that we're sort of a second class cousin to the LPD London production division branch.
- It is the one reason every single person on our membership said that they were disengaged with the with the union. Because they would be put into the LPD branch to start with, with all this amazing stuff happening. Then when it wasn't relevant to them and the minute they got moved out of that, absolute silence.
- I'm a touring professional. I've been touring for nearly 20 years. I knew nothing about this webinar yesterday. No communication or whatsoever. I didn't hear it, I don't know whether that's cause I'm on the wrong list of the database isn't working. But right now we need to action. We need to get it sorted out.

Answered by Paul Evans:

- I mean I hear what you're saying. The big function here is the numbers. The reason we've got structures that really work well in LPD and in RPD regional production division. Actually, regional production is catching up because they have relatively small numbers in the regions.
- If you take London, London is so big for TV and film. So as such we've got nearly 14,000 members just in London Production Division.
- We've got 1500 people in the camera department, that means we've got a sustainable branch. You can't have a sustainable craft branch if you only have two or three people in it or 5 or 10 people in it.
- So, as such if we can get a sustainable number of people to make a craft branch then I'm sure we can do it.
- We allocate the same resources to people in London Production as we do to people in A & E per member you get the same amount of same amount of staff resources.
- It's just that because the numbers are larger it is a chicken and egg thing and it's as simple as that if we can get a lot of people in the union then we can have sustainable structures.
- I understand the call for craft branch but like I say if we only have 10 branches that only have 20 people in them the branches will die.

Further AAPTLE Member Response:

- **Aren't you asking us to go to our associations and our members and ask them to have blind faith in a union and join BECTU?**
- **In the hope that maybe one day we'll have enough members for the union to listen?**

Answered by Paul Evans:

- **What the union is best placed to do is help you do things for each other. So it's not blind faith in us as officials.**
- **I'm not asking you to have blind faith in me.**
- **I'm not asking to invest trust in officials.**
- **I'm asking you to invest trust in each other. Because it's about getting a bunch of people together.**
- **I say to the people I don't want any of you to join the union. I want you to form a union.**
- **If you can find ways of sticking together without us hosting it and helping you with it please go ahead and do it.**
- **I wish there was a world where we had the resources to create the kind of support network that would put some investment in and spend two or three years creating a support network in the hope that people will join the union.**
- **I'm happy to sit down and spend and invest time with those people who are members to talk about how could we do it if you want to do craft branches.**
- **I will sit down, I will work with you, I will go through it. We will come up with some creative ideas and see what we can do.**

Further AAPTLE Member Response:

- **If I had to look at my experience up until this point I would say I've engaged in good faith with the union at every level to try and bring about these changes.**
- **When I've been speaking to costume people about the union their predominant experience is negative and overcoming the predominant negative experience takes time and effort to encourage people to join.**
- **When I've been speaking to costume people about the union their predominant experience is negative and overcoming the predominant negative experience takes time and effort to encourage people to join.**
- **I encouraged a lot of people to join the union during the West End negotiations for SOLT. You spend a long time negating previous bad experience promising people that things can be better if we work together, encouraging people to join.**
- **I see that's being offered right now so I'm going to take you up on that and see if I can encourage more people.**

Further AAPTLE Member Response:

- **We already have groups by craft which might be very useful.**
- **We wish we could set rates based on those crafts.**
- **I wonder if given that these groups already exist on this call CITA, ALD, ASD, etc. Is there any way in which a primer document could be produced to explain the processes of setting up craft branches and craft rate cards.**

Answered by Helen Ryan:

- **That sounds like a very interesting idea. I think it's something that we need to explore we need to look at and I think that's a starting point if that's a suggestion let's have a look at it let's see if we can get it to work**
- **Let's sit down and let's have the talk let's have the conversation about it. I am sure LPD will share any of their templates and learning.**

Our thanks to Helen Ryan and Paul Evans for joining us today.

The next meeting is, Tuesday 17th November at 12pm on zoom, Chaired by CITA

We hope to receive written responses from Helen Ryan and Paul Evans on the remaining questions in due course. As ever we just ran out of time.

BRANCH STRUCTURE continued

9. The UK theatre industry is a nationwide ecology. With 70% of the UK theatre workforce being freelance, who's work patterns are largely of a transient nature, does the Branch system that BECTU operates by function effectively for the majority of the UK theatre workforce?

10. It appears that within BECTU, Film/TV freelancers can organise by discipline but Theatre freelancers can't? Is this correct, and if so, can it be rectified?

11. Has the Division "sorting" process started? Lots of members are reporting to be in the wrong place, so are not receiving the correct or relevant information.

COVID VARIATION AGREEMENTS

12. What are the major variations on the SOLT/BECTU agreements? How hard fought was this? Were the original variations proposed far worse?

13. It seems that BECTU and our members are facing a new and threateningly intransigent management attitude. How can BECTU stand up to these demands and maintain hard-won rights, pay levels and conditions? Is BECTU equipped to defend us from unreasonable demands made under the spurious cover of COVID-19 and defend the rights of backstage crews many of whom have seen little or no pay for over six months and now face a major erosion of their pay and conditions?

14. The MU have taken a much firmer position in the SOLT/BECTU negotiations and we understand Equity have an agreement whereby if any other unions members receive the pre-COVID Sunday rates, so will theirs. Were either of these options open to BECTU to pursue?

15. How many people are BECTU aware of that were made redundant due to COVID? What support was there for them from the union?

DAY RATE CARDS

16. Rates of pay are notoriously poor in the UK Theatre industry, and have been for decades. Often in freelance creative and technical disciplines amounting to less than minimum wage. Taking a lead from our Film/TV counterparts within BECTU, can we move to develop Rate Cards for the UK theatre backstage workforce?

17. How would we navigate the legal restrictions around Price Fixing and Cartel Law which are often held as reasons against? How can one part of the sector have formally established Day Rate Cards but ours can't?

BECTU OR EQUITY?

18. Many freelance creatives and technical disciplines working in UK theatre feel like they exist in a grey area between both Equity (historically for actors) and BECTU (majority TV and Film production roles). Moving forward, is there an arrangement for the backstage UK theatre workforce that could be supported by both Equity and BECTU combined? (Therefore, eliminating the choice UK theatre freelancers have to make between the two unions, and also offering a more bespoke service and support for those theatre freelancers that bridge multiple backstage disciplines).

19. Does BECTU believe that the arrangements which currently exist provide the best support on pay and conditions and recognition for the majority of theatre, backstage and creative workers?

20. Could/should BECTU and Equity be co-signatories on more of these industry agreements?

AAPTLE STATEMENT

21. You will have seen AAPTLE's recently released 'Back to Work' statement. Is this something BECTU will formally be in support of?

22. In situations where controversial employment tactics and unethical practices are being deployed by a UK theatre producer, what is the correct process of calling this out? Are BECTU doing this?
c. How might AAPTLE help support in these situations?

23. If BECTU members are finding their rates of pay or terms and conditions are being diminished by producers post COVID, what are the direct lines of contact within the union to report this in confidence?

DIGITAL BROADCASTING

24. Digital broadcast and distribution rights have become heavily fore fronted during the pandemic and there are now numerous theatre and live event productions being made which will go straight to video streaming. AAPTLE members feel very uncomfortable and vulnerable regarding their protection in terms of copyright, royalties and appropriate pay and working conditions in a new era where streamed 'product' can be made available around the world. There is a need for theatre contracts to include provisions for territorial, residual and/or streaming rights payments to be made to everyone involved in the production.

25. How can we work rapidly together to address this?

26 A great many projects have been made available to stream (some free, some definitely not, a lot requesting donations) during lockdown. It seems that many of these shows were made under standard union theatre agreements, Has BECTU been able to protect the teams who worked on these shows by negotiating payments for streaming and are plans in place to protect the rights of the teams in the case of further digital distribution?

BECTU IN THE FUTURE

27. What is on the horizon for BECTU. What lessons have been learnt from this period?

28. Will BECTU be making attempts to improve its representation of UK theatre backstage and creative teams?

29. What campaigns are BECTU developing to improve inclusivity, pay and working conditions for UK theatre freelancers going forward?

30. Does BECTU feel there is enough data available monitoring UK Theatre industry employment patterns in order to work toward a more inclusive future?

31. How might AAPTLE support moving forward?