



SWG AGM REPORT TO MEMBERS – NOVEMBER 2018

Events

Our events calendar has been significantly curtailed this year by a combination of factors, including personnel changes, rebranding of the group, a new focus on campaigning and lobbying, and the considerable disruptions of the big move to Bedford Row, currently scheduled for the week beginning 18th March.

However, we're delighted to say that Book to Screen, this evening's event, is a sell-out and that we already discussing how to build on tonight's talk to develop a series of practical workshops offering some start up training in adaptation, pitch and treatment writing... so please keep an eye on the website!

In collaboration with the estates team, we're also presenting a special festive event on 10th December at Wilton's Music Hall. Our secretary Theo will be hosting *Box of Delights* scriptwriter Piers Torday, the production's artistic director Justin Audibert and award winning playwright Patricia Cumper, for an in-conversation discussing the challenges and rewards of adapting an original work for stage.

Relaunch of the group

Having finally decided on our new name - after extended discussions about making sure we are inclusive of all writers and creators working with scripted content - we're now awaiting the move to the new premises to plan our formal launch event, as well as setting out in more detail our targets for activities, campaigning and lobbying for the year to come (of which more later).

BBC radio negotiations

Radio Forum negotiations have been dominated for much of the year by the BBC's insistence on tying agreement of the annual increment to negotiations

over podcast fees, terms and conditions. Our secretary Theo has negotiated hard on this and the result is the following: we've secured a 2% increase to the minimum rates payable to writers of radio drama effective from August 2018. We have also agreed a further uplift of 2% effective from 1st November 2018. The new public service fee has been increased from 12.5% to 15% calculated on a single transmission fee. On podcasts we have finalised an agreement whereby commissioned scripts will be remunerated on a fixed fee basis in accordance with agreed slot length categories, in return for a five year licence term (as well as further remuneration for commercial exploitation in line with the RDA) with all terms subject to regular review.

We're also pleased to announce that the PACT Code of Practice for the engagement of authors as expert consultants or contributors to TV and radio programmes has finally been updated and agreed, after a lot of work on the part of our chief exec Nicola and other staff members. Our initial hope was to have aspects of fair dealing enshrined within the PACT code and to have BBC Studios sign up to it, but unfortunately we were unsuccessful on both counts, so instead we will be drafting a guidance note with the aim of publishing this on our website early in the New year.

Audio Awards

This year's Imison Award entries numbered a healthy 18, and the judges are about to settle down to read the agreed longlist of X. We've noted that female writers are in a distinct minority this year, [and judges have already commented on what seems to be a fall in overall standard and range of entries.] *will only add if relevant - our group certainly feels so!* Keep an eye on the website for further updates!

Communications and outreach

Website

We're hoping to see the Management Committee agree some further investment in the website as a whole, and specifically for our group pages, but Theo has worked hard all year to keep the pages right up to date and to add fresh, wider-ranging content, both in news and in features.

Feature highlights included three fascinating interviews with David Morley, Hannah Silva and Catherine Johnson - all timed to coincide with the launch or

broadcast of their work. The Q and A with Hitchhiker's Guide producer David was so well-received that it's been expanded into a full panel session at the Society's AGM in Manchester at the end of the month.

In terms of outreach I can report that we are forming new contacts with the development agencies and Theo did a talk earlier in the year at Writing West Midlands, and will be talking on behalf of the group and SoA at next year's Writing West Midlands and Writing East Midlands over the next couple of months. We're also working on being a much more regular presence at MA graduate fairs, and Theo attended his first in Manchester last week. Finally, our chief exec, Nicola will be in New York next week to meet with publishing and authors' bodies, but she's also hoping to make first contact with WGA East, with a view to opening a regular channel of communication for the first time with our American equivalent.

Activities, campaigning and lobbying

This year we've been focusing somewhat more than previously on issues affecting screenwriters. The headlines have been dominated by diversity, pay inequality, and bullying and harassment issues, and we've been doing some research, meeting with other organisations and developing strategies to address these issues on behalf of members.

We've also spent several months chasing the BBC over the issue of pension entitlement for freelance TV writers. Earlier in the year we wrote to the BBC to share our concerns, raised by one of our committee members, that whilst freelance TV writers are eligible to receive a pension contribution from the BBC for work commissioned under the terms of their script agreement, this is conditional on the writer joining the WGGB's pension scheme and – since the WGGB only offer such a scheme to members – signing up for membership of the WGGB if they were not already members. It's worth noting that until a few years ago non-WGGB members had the choice of requesting the contribution be paid into a scheme offered by the BBC (now closed) and that other organisations operating under comparable collective arrangements have made their schemes open to non-members (e.g Equity and MU). Our concerns were shared by the AAA and PMA who put their names to the letter. The latest update from the BBC is that they are liaising with their external pension supplier, we hope with a view to making such a scheme available once again. Again, keep an eye on the website for news of the outcome.

Bullying and harassment and the #metoo campaign have dominated as issues in almost all media and we've been keeping members informed of developments in our area of the industry through blogging and news items throughout the year. Following the publication of a shocking report from WGGB about treatment of writers on BBC continuing drama series (which reflects an industry wide problem) we met with a delegate from a new, industry wide group of organisations (including BAFTA, BFI, BECTU, EQUITY, WGGB and Directors UK) who are looking to address the issue and help hold the industry to account, and we've been invited to join the group and help to monitor, review and further develop their recently published *Principles and guidelines*.

Theo, myself and our public affairs manager, Tim Gallagher, have also joined a lobbying group which includes ALCS, WGGB and Directors UK, to raise awareness about threats to AV writers' rights post-Brexit, and I'm delighted to say that we've already written a pithy letter to the new Culture minister, and Theo and Tim will be among the hosts at a drop-in session for MPs on the subject at the House of Commons next Wednesday.

We're also working with the Future Film team at the BFI, contributing to a panel on the legalities of being a filmmaker, and we'll be involved in their festival, planned for early next year.

Finally, the committee met with Sarah Crown from ACE a couple of months ago to discuss their new Developing Your Creative Practice fund, which is, for the first time, open to scriptwriting projects, and is already paying dividends for scriptwriters. We were also pleased to be able to contribute to discussions around their strategic plan for 2020-2030.

People

We're sad to be saying goodbye to committee members Isla Gray, Catherine Johnson and Hilary Robinson. Both have been great to work with, and have contributed brilliantly to everything we're trying to do. A big thankyou to both. We've also added an additional member of staff to our number: events manager, Sophia Jackson, took over her main role in early summer, but she's also recently been appointed co-secretary of SWG and is already turning out to be a great asset to our collective. Thank you Sophia. Last but not least, we'd like to record a special thank you to Theo Jones, our secretary, who has

worked incredibly hard this year to turn the committee's ideas, asks and aspirations into reality. Theo's creativity, enthusiasm and dedication has already begun to transform the feel, freshness and spread of our group pages, and he's largely responsible for the website features and much of the outreach described earlier. So well done and very many thanks, Theo! We may not yet have reached the 750 SWG members that Theo set as our goal, but we're delighted to announce that our group now numbers 559 - a healthy increase over the year of about 10 percent!

End.