

## **Bill Armstrong (Scottish Chair, Writers' Guild of Great Britain)**

The WGGB represents professional, emerging and aspiring writers across a range of craft areas, videogames, television, film, theatre, books, comedy, poetry and animation. We negotiate better pay and working conditions with key UK industry bodies and lobby and campaign on behalf of writers on a wide variety of issues.

I chaired the union's television committee, negotiated with the BBC, ITV and PACT and developed the Free Is NOT an Option campaign before taking over the Scottish chair. We now have an active Scottish committee representing writers from across the country and from all craft areas. You will be hearing from our theatre and South of Scotland co-ordinator, Jules Horne, in a moment. It's critical that WGGB Scotland works closely with the SSP, playwright's studio and the Federation of Scottish theatres to get writers' voices heard and to influence decision makers at a time of existential crisis for our theatres and playwrights.

The WGGB guidelines for playwrights during Covid will provide us all with a useful tool in that work. They are on the union website at [writersguild.org.uk](http://writersguild.org.uk) and there is a great deal more detail to these guidelines and recommendations than I have time to mention here but the main points are;

- no writer should be asked to return upfront fees
- productions of new plays should be postponed rather than cancelled
- Theatres should pay acceptance fees promptly, even if the production is delayed
- Writers should not waive payment for the right to stream previously recorded shows
- Fees for work commissioned for digital platforms should be pro-rata with existing WGGB agreements

Even if the theatres you work for were not involved in the development of these guidelines, drawing attention to them can often be far more effective than you would imagine. Many, if not most, employers will recognise them as a fair and reasonable framework that will enable the richness of our theatre to survive this crisis intact. We found that a similar thing happened with the Free is NOT an Option campaign. Those guidelines on what is, and isn't, acceptable to ask a writer to do for free – also at [writersguild.org.uk](http://writersguild.org.uk) may soon be more important than ever. Even when theatres re-open, budgets will be tighter than ever. Without strong, collective action writers' fees will be reduced and the work they are expected to do for free, will increase. The diversity of voices on the cultural landscape will be reduced and society fragmented when we most need to pull together and feel a part of something greater than ourselves. The Covid and Free is NOT an Option guidelines provide sound principles and detailed recommendations which can help us articulate our collective campaign to get writers voices heard in the critical months and years to come.