

John McCann

SSP Statement for Playwrights' Gathering

Hi. I'm John McCann. Linda McLaughlin and I are currently Co-chairs of the Scottish Society of Playwrights.

First of all, I'd like to tell you a little bit about us.

The SSP is a membership organisation representing the interests of professional playwrights in Scotland. We are affiliated with the Scottish Trades Union Congress.

We have a current membership of over 140 playwrights from right across Scotland, all at varying stages of their careers.

The SSP has been representing the interests of Scottish playwrights for nearly fifty years.

Our core tasks include:

- Negotiating the Federation of Scottish Theatre/SSP Commissioning Contract and facilitating its operation.
- Meeting with organisations and companies to foster best practice.
- Answering member queries concerning other theatre contracts and industry practices, most often for members who don't have a literary agent. Together, SSP members benefit from the experience of those who do, and the many decades of working knowledge our members possess. This is an invaluable and a very powerful resource.

At this point I'd like to state that the SSP fully endorses both recent Writers' Guild of Great Britain documents which Bill mentioned earlier: **FREE IS NOT AN OPTION** and **PLAYWRIGHTS AND THEATRES DURING THE CLOSURE: GUIDELINES FOR BEST PRACTICE**.

I'm sure these can be made available to you.

In recent months the SSP has been:

- Working with the National Theatre of Scotland and The Traverse to assist them in the design of contracts some of you may have been offered for online content.
- Linking with Writers' Guild of Great Britain and Equity to identify suitable legal representation for our membership.
- Holding online drop-in meetings to help members stay connected.
- Able to offer a rolling programme of small support-grants to members.

Now I'm going to talk a little about where we thought we were before lockdown...

- A key finding from the 2019 Playwrights' Studio/SSP Playwrights' Survey noted the continued, steady and significant decrease in Scottish playwriting commissions.
- 2019 ended with the publication of **PUTTING ARTISTS IN THE PICTURE: A SUSTAINABLE ARTS FUNDING SYSTEM FOR SCOTLAND**, a report from the Culture, Tourism, Europe and External Affairs Committee at Holyrood. The report recommended that there should be no circumstances in which individual artists should be competing against network organisations for funding from Creative Scotland.
The report also made recommendations for Creative Scotland to change the way it allocates funds by putting artists at the centre of its approach, including incorporating peer review into its application processes; creating a tiered application process to reduce the burden on applicants who are unlikely to progress to later stages of the process; and introducing funding programmes, such as bursaries and stipends, aimed at supporting artists and arts organisations at different stages of their development.
- We were expecting Creative Scotland to announce details of their Future Funding Approach in early 2020 in which I was hoping Creative Scotland would have addressed these recommendations, but lockdown happened as this was due.

This pandemic has exposed the fragile nature of our theatre ecology. I'd like to borrow an analogy from a colleague who spoke on twitter about the theatre sector, we are not all in the same boat. We never have been. It's always the same storm, but we're in very different boats, and now we realise many of us have always only ever been in the water, the boats are capsizing around us, and when we ask for assistance, the people who have yet to help the boats are telling us to be entrepreneurial.

Which brings us to where we think we are now, and one of the chief reasons we are here today. The Scottish Parliament's Culture, Tourism, Europe and External Affairs Committee wants to hear our concerns about the impact of COVID-19 on our life and work. The Committee also want to hear your direct experiences of how you feel the Scottish and UK Governments have responded.

The organisations represented here today will respond in your name, but we would also urge you to respond as individual artists.