**POLICY DEVELOPMENT PAPER**

 **Equality between Women and Men**

Equality between women and men remains the keystone to all equalities. Equality between human beings depends on equality between women and men. The more this is resisted the more harm it does to the interests of both women and minority groups, because minorities are often women too.

Jean Rogers

1. **Introduction**

EQUITY, in line with most trade unions, has more women than men in membership. Our women members are looking to the union to lead the way in tackling discrimination wherever it occurs and to make progress in achieving equality between women and men.

Many issues remain. Older women are frustrated and disappointed that little progress has been made since 2010 in addressing obstacles to their work opportunities. Younger women are suffering ever more pressures on their mental health and wellbeing. All women are victims of the gender pay gap.

This paper is an opportunity for Council to debate its Gender Equality Policy and a number of relevant questions affecting women’s careers in Live and Recorded Media, Games, Variety and Circus and so often the waste of female talent.

In seeking to achieve true representation of all women and their interests, my purpose is not to define ‘women’ but to determine how EQUITY can address the power imbalance that continues to exist between women and men.

My intention is to encourage debate on pressing questions, seek clarity on the answers and identify a clear list of priorities and actions that can be taken in order to bring about real change.

Without agreement on a clear plan of action, no meaningful progress can be made.

To help us in our deliberations, I have endeavoured to underline some important recurring themes and underpinned many of the questions by quoting a useful reference source, the Council of Europe’s Gender Equality Strategy 2018-2023:

<https://rm.coe.int/prems-093618-gbr-gender-equality-strategy-2023-web-a5/16808b47e1> )

The Council of Europe’s strategy identifies six objectives: Prevent and combat gender stereotypes and sexism; Prevent and combat violence against women; Ensure equal access of women to justice; Achieve balanced participation of women & men in political & public decision-making; Protect the rights of migrant, refugee and asylum-seeking women and girls; Achieve gender mainstreaming in all policies and measures. It is also a good reference source for EQUITY because Intersectionality is addressed as a transversal issue across the priority objectives of their Strategy:-

*“Intersectional discrimination on the grounds of ethnicity, age, disability, sexual orientation or gender identity, among others, disproportionately marginalises particular groups of women. Therefore, intersectionality is addressed as a transversal issue across the priority objectives of the new Strategy. Furthermore, discrimination on the ground of sex has a structural and horizontal character that pervades all cultures and communities, at all levels.* ***Gender inequalities also “add up” during the course of a life, so that certain* *disadvantages experienced in younger years accumulate throughout the life cycle and can cause subsequent difficulties later in life****. A life cycle approach to gender equality policies is therefore necessary to capture this reality.” (COE)*

1. **Gender Equality and EQUITY: The Questions**

Of the many questions that come to mind, and Council may well have more, I have chosen these which I consider to be the most pressing:-

A. What is Equity’s current Gender Equality Policy?

B. What has been achieved since a policy was established and what remains?

C. What role, if any, does funding play in achieving gender equality?

D. What are the problems, old and new, to achieve gender parity in 2021.

E. What role do men play in helping EQUITY achieve its gender equality objectives?

F. Is it just a question of equal numbers or should we dig deeper?

**QUESTION A**

**What is EQUITY’s Gender Equality Policy?**

FIA REPORT ON AGE SEX AND PERFORMER EMPLOYMENT IN EUROPE

<http://www.fia-actors.com/uploads/ENGLISH.pdf>

In 2006 as Equity’s female V I joined the FIA President Agnete Haaland (Norway), Rynagh O’Grady (Irish Equity), Ira Ratej (Slovenia) and Anna Carlson (Sweden) to set up a EuroFIA Gender Equality Steering Group. Funded by the EU it produced the 2009 Research Report and in 2010 a Handbook.

Our original policy is based on this report which confirmed sexism and ageism as the two biggest factors in the inequality of women and men’s employment opportunities and although the follow-up 2009 Equity Petition, plus the Stage Newspaper’s support of the Gender Equality Campaign called for 50/50 Representation of Actresses in Film and Television, many petition contributors highlighted the same problem for female workers more or less across the whole of our industry.

FIA GENDER EQUALITY HANDBOOK OF GOOD PRACTICES

<http://www.fia-actors.com/uploads/Engendering_EN.pdf>

In 2010 Council ratified this handbook which identifies many of the present Council of Europe’s Strategy Objectives, whilst crucially incorporating a checklist to enable artistic directors, heads of departments, union reps and equality advisers to track equality processes in their organisations. It focused on:-

1. Promoting Equality between women and men’s employment.
2. Combatting gender stereotyping and sexism in the audiovisual and media services.
3. Challenging gender representation on stage and screen.
4. Lobbying for gender equality in public funding of the arts.
5. Investing in training and mentoring for female empowerment.
6. Training of managements in gender sensitivity.
7. Mainstreaming gender into policies and measures in ALL union and employment organisations’ activities.

GENDER MAINSTREAMING

However, despite 5 years of intense media attention, the Women’s Committee’s 2011 ARC Motion uncomfortably challenged the union to agree it “has lost the focus Gender Equality needs to confront and challenge often unconscious norms and notions of gender stereotyping within the industry and Equity.” Representatives were invited to look at and implement Chapter 7 Gender Mainstreaming in the FIA Handbook of Good Practises, ratified by Council in 2010.

***Gender Mainstreaming is not an end in itself but an approach and means to achieve the goal of gender equality ensuring that gender perspectives and attention to the goal of gender equality are central to all activities*** *(FIA Handbook)*

“Gender mainstreaming leads to better informed policy-making, better allocation of resources and better governance.” (COE)

**QUESTION B**

**What has EQUITY achieved so far?**

A timeline of some relevant dates and actions is provided in the Appendix.

The involvement of Equity with Gender Equality arose from demands in the late 1990’s, primarily from older actresses, to look at portrayal of women, and the lack of career progression experienced in contrast to their male contemporaries, who also enjoyed better pay.

The FIA Steering Group uncovered a myriad of reasons through its original research, many of which continue to be tackled today, but the invisibilty of older women, the lack of work opportunities through under representation of real women’s stories and the struggle of younger women to balance childcare with a career continue to be the primary obstacles.

CAREER

The manipulation of career prospects through stereotyping which affect women’s finances and pensions, creating an invisibility, and the added anxiety and mental health issues around body image for both young women and older females have been investigated inSara Reimer’s 2019 Making an Appearance Report.

March 2021, Equity Council has decided to link with a campaign premoting casting opportunities for older actresses“Acting Your Age”.

**QUESTION C**

**What role does FUNDING play in achieving gender equality?**

ARTS COUNCIL ENGLAND (ACE)

The Women’s Committee’s 2011 ARC motion called for focus on ACE and its lack of enthusiasm or resolve for gender equality monitoring. The Women’s committee said “A meaningful dialogue with ACE regarding the new 2011 General Equality Duty is vital now, asking for input into any proposals, before they are published, to ensure gender does not get lost within the 7 strands.”

Free advice from a Gender Equality lawyer in 2013 produced the start of challenging correspondence with ACE Chief Exec. Alan Davey on the Gender Equality Duty but when a follow-up letter had to be paid for the matter was disappointingly dropped.

It is difficult to conclude anything positive has happened in the interim when fast forwarding to February 2020 and the Sphinx Theatre Company event on their depressing Research on ACE Funding to women**, “What Share of the Cake?”** Frustration was expressed that women are subsumed into the ACE’s Diversity list; that ACE’s 2020 Ten Year Strategy admits “Generally, in the creative industries there are lower employment levels for women than men” and ACE still has no specific data on performer employment, continuing to include female front of house and office staff in its gender data.

**QUESTION D**

**What are the obstacles, old and new, to achieving gender parity now?**

Both women and men are victims of stereotypes restricting their full capabilities(CEO)

STEREOTYPING

*Gender stereotypes both result from and are the cause of deeply engrained attitudes, values, norms and prejudices. They are used to justify and maintain the historical power relations of men over women, as well as sexist attitudes which are holding back the advancement of gender equality. Gender stereotypes and patriarchy negatively affect men and boys too. Stereotypes about men and boys also result from, and are the cause of, deeply engrained attitudes, values, norms and prejudices. Hegemonic masculinities are a contributing factor to maintaining and reinforcing gender stereotypes. (COE Gender Equality Strategy)*

In study after study it becomes ever clearer that the underlying problem in our industry of sexism and the stereotyping of women, young and old, is part of a power play in which our female members are **victims just by being women whilst also being the protagonists through their work in the media.**

Women invariably play women. The Women’s C ommittee has no doubt that women have been used primarily to decorate the stage and screen. Exceptions exist but invariably men are given opportunity to represent humanity and women to represent ‘women’, preferably young and nubile and not ‘past their sell-by date’ (2009 Equity Petition).’

Another stereotyping problem affecting work opportunities are the supporting and minor roles so often written as male - judges, doctors, surgeons, plumbers, dentists, experts, newspaper reporters etc.

NEROPA is a gender and diversity tool, investigated and promoted by Equity to try and change this practice, presented at a BFI Symposium in January 2018**.** It would be good to have an update on this.

SEXUAL HARASSMENT AND SAFE SPACES

 Behind the scenes, positions of authority are mostly held by men - lighting directors, artistic directors, sound engineers, company managers, financiers, etc. This often creates a male environment where sexist attitudes can flourish. The Harvey Weinstein horrors come to mind where the huge discrepancies between roles for women and men in film, and very few older women present to chaperone, created an unbalanced, unhealthy working environment, a concern that has worried women for a number of years.

OPPORTUNITIES AND PIPA

*The importance of addressing persistent gender gaps in employment, pay, poverty, pensions and unbalanced share of household and care responsibilities between women and men is recognised as a key factor towards women’s economic independence. Women’s economic independence and empowerment are prerequisites for gender equality and for equitable and sustainable societies. Economic empowerment increases women’s access to economic resources and opportunities including jobs.COE Gender Equality Strategy*

“Women’s under-representation in public and political life undermines the functioning of democratic institutions and processes.”(COE)

The Council of Europe’s new Strategy also addresses the implications of equality between women and men as regards dignity and rights, in public, private and family life. The social significance of maternity and paternity leave and the role of both parents in the upbringing of children and as carers of adult dependents has to be taken into consideration to ensure that both women’s and men’s human rights are fully and equally respected.

VIOLENCE

The attitudes expressed towards women, particularly through social media, which are manifested in sexual harassment and stalking mainly of younger women, and the bullying and demoralising of the very young and of older women, is all part of the cultural power play. This makes the empowerment and confidence building of women harder to achieve. It is our role as trade unionists to fight this in the workplace, in the union and in portrayal. Female activists are particularly vulnerable to this kind of intimidation.

EMPOWERMENT

This is essential if women are to assert their right to true equality.

The current Women’s Committee Chair Kelly Burke has been working hard on empowering women including dialogue with Drama Schools and providing an Equality Toolkit for our female members.

The Vice Chair Abiola Ogunbiyi is preparing an exciting Empowerment Evening via Zoom on 29th April looking at ways to give women more confidence to assert their rights.  <https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/empower-night-with-the-equity-womens-committee-tickets-151788715133>

**QUESTION E**

**What role for EQUITY men as gender equals?**

“The involvement of men and boys is critical to the achievement of gender equality”(COE)

Can men help overcome recurring, and some new, obstacles to progress? These obstacles can be attitudes or circumstances. Here are some examples:

* Meetings on gender equality overwhelmingly attract women participants.
* Women’s rights are not seen as ‘Human’ rights.
* Gender equality is seen as the responsibility of women to press for change.
* Resistance to change.
* Whataboutism.
* Divide and conquer tactics are used to force women’s concerns into competition with those of other equality groups.
* Gender fatigue creates a conservative backlash.
* Fear that progress will give women the upper hand and men will suffer.
* The rise of Masculinism.

MEN

Does the term ‘Gender Equality’ mean the same thing to women and men?

The Council of Europe says:-

*The role of men, in both the public and private spheres, is critical to make progress towards real gender equality. Men’s and boys’ participation and responsibility as actors of change for gender equality are very important. Male gender stereotypes need to be overcome in order to free men and boys from the pressures of stereotyped expectations they face. The inclusion of men is needed both as active partners in the promotion of the human rights of women, as well as beneficiaries of gender equality policies.*

**QUESTION F**

**Is it just a question of equal numbers or should we dig deeper?**

Monitoring often appears to show that gender balance is improving on the face of it but would a figure 46% female 54% male necessarily mean all is well or a 50% female 50% male mean equality is achieved in casting and in commissioning? Is it not our duty to dig deeper and see what that figure really means? Figures can be manipulated as we well know.

There are so many factors in the imbalance of work opportunities for women not just on stage and screen, but in Variety too and ‘behind the scenes’ roles. 50/50 will mean nothing if those women are in mostly subordinate, cheaply paid roles, primarily there to decorate. True gender balance has to also mean women as directors, writers and commissioners.

 **3.Conclusions**

The issue of Gender Equality for Equity members is vast and complex but the call from our General Secretary to look to developing a strategy is most encouraging.

The FIA GENDER EQUALITY HANDBOOK

The 2011 ARC agreed with the Women’s Committee’s motion that Equity’s Gender Equality policy had lost its focus. However, measures called for in that motion were never taken forward by Equity’s Organising for Success Policy. We should look at them again and consider doing them:-

1. Chapter 7 calls for Gender Equality Mainstreaming in the union and in industry organisations.
2. The handbook, along with its useful Check is intended to be printed and distributed to the industry.
3. With regard to funding, a more vigorous and challenging attitude is needed to the ACE and its resistance to linking gender equality monitoring to NGO funding.  ACE continues to subsume the gender issue into its list of diversities and not as an issue that horizontally links them. This policy leaves women to fight, often with each other, for ‘a share of the cake’.
4. Mentoring and training will empower women to more influential leadership roles.

Stereotyping, violence towards women, mentoring and the combination of sexism and ageism still need firmer policy and focus.  **A recognition of how we as workers are complicit in the reinforcement of these stereotypes and consequent attitudes through portrayal, writing and direction is essential to look at.**

PARENTING

Some of the work called for in the FIA Handbook was pursued in the FIA Social Dialogue meetings on Life/Work balance and thankfully parenting and other caring issues, childcare facilities, shared parental payments, are recognised by the union as important and continue to be tackled by both women and men through Equity’s collaboration with PIPA and the TUC. This is essential.

The need for parent friendly attitudes, safe spaces and anti-bullying measures are now included in negotiations with employers, along with the need for safe spaces. Next must surely be dialogue on female friendly attitudes towards menstruation and the menopause.

MEN AND WOMEN TOGETHER

Everyone has to be involved, if EQUITY is to succeed in achieving real equality between women and men.

Every two years the Women’s Committee lists its Aims and the involvement of men has been flagged up.  It is clear that in recent time, pressing issues like parenting, racial discrimination, victimisation, disability and mental health, all which directly affect men too, have and do move forward.  But any improvement in Gender Equality remains fragile and slow.

Women need men’s help.  Not to guide and permit, but to listen and support, recognise and understand.  Only together can we make change. Only together can we combat gender fatigue, gender backlash and Masculinism.

The Harvey Weinstein obscene debacle was a wake-up call, as has been the Sarah Everard murder and these two dreadful examples of sexism, are reason enough for EQUITY never again to lose focus on its efforts to achieve gender equality.

The Council of Europe’s gender Equality Strategy foresees an annual review of any changes and progress made. This is an important step. Perhaps Equity could do the same?

**APPENDIX**

**QUESTION B – What has EQUITY’s GE Policy achieved so far?**

**Timeline of dates and achievements** (not exhaustive)

1928 - Universal suffrage achieved.

1930 - Equity formed at May Whitty’s dining room table.

1944 - Beatrix Lehmann - wartime - first female President - one term

1970’s - Birth of feminism/Women’s Lib, Equity forms a women’s Sub-Committee

1990’s - Women’s Committee commission research into female stereotyping

2004 – Women’s Committee seek research on career opportunities for women

2005 – First Female General Secretary elected

2005 – WFTV/EQUITY/BAFTA on older actresses “Searching for Debra Winger”

2006 – EuroFIA Gender Equality Steering Group formed funded by EU

2006 – BFI Report Older Women in Feature Films

2008 - FIA/Equity The Gender Agenda at the Drill Hall

2009 - FIA research on Age Gender and Performer Employment adopted by Council 2009 - FIA research presented to Parliament

2009 - Equity Petition calling for 50/50 representation of actresses in TV and Film.

2009 - The Stage backs the Campaign.

2010 - FIA Equality Handbook of Good Practices ratified by Council

2010 - FIRST Female majority (20) elected to Council (16 men)

2011 – Portrayal Betrayal – Film audiences speak out UK Film Council

2011 – Miriam O’Reilly wins BBC Tribunal on Ageism & victimisation, NOT Sexism

2012 – Equity invited to give evidence to BBC’s SERVING ALL AGES REPORT

2013 – Equity gives evidence to Harriet Harman’s Commission on Older Women.

 FIA Social Dialogue on Life/work balance & gender equality in TV and Film.

2016 - Council supports PIPA

2016 - Council supports ERA 50/50

2018 - NEROPA Symposium at BFI (Jan)

2018 – Equity Report on Sexual Harassment working party and Safe Spaces

2018 – Second Female President

2019 – Making an Appearance report

2020 – Second female Council majority elected

2021 - Equity Council agrees to support Acting your Age Campaign

**Jean Rogers April 2021**

**Equity Councillor, Equity Women’s Committee, Equity Hon. Life member, TUC Women’s Committee, TUC 2017 Women’s Gold Badge Award winner**