

ACTING UP

Breaking the class ceiling in the performing arts

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Gloria De Piero MP and Tracy Brabin MP have been asked by Tom Watson, Labour's Shadow Culture, Media and Sport Secretary, to lead an inquiry into working class access to the performing arts.

The inquiry will look into the underrepresentation of working class men and women in the performing arts, with the first stage of the inquiry looking primarily at film, TV, theatre and visual arts.

The inquiry will investigate access to 'on-screen' and 'on stage' roles as well as access to off-screen and backstage roles, including writers, technicians, producers, directors, designers and more.

Voices from across the industry have raised concerns recently that it is becoming more difficult for working class people to break into and sustain careers in the arts.

Among many issues they point to are poor facilities and a lack of encouragement at school; the difficulty and costs of getting into drama school; the high costs of living in places like London while trying to break into the arts; the low and precarious pay and increasing demands for free work; lack of roles for working class actors and writers.

The inquiry will seek evidence by written, video and oral submission and will hold a number of evidence sessions both inside and outside Parliament. It will report in the summer of 2017.

We want to hear from a wide range of interested parties. If you would like to respond or invite the commissioners to visit a relevant organisation or programme please do so. We welcome submissions of all perspectives from across the industry, and in various forms including video and voice recordings.

The deadline for submissions is the end of March 2017. Please send an email with submissions or any other enquiries to: sarah.coombes@parliament.uk

We're especially interested in responses to the following questions - but please don't feel you have to answer all of these questions, and if there are other points you wish to make which don't fall under these headings then please make them.

Acting Up: Questions

Where do the problems of working class representation in the arts begin?

- Are there enough working class role models on screen and stage?
- Do schools have a more important role to play in tackling the problem early on?
- Do schools encourage students to get involved in drama and take drama GCSEs and A Levels?
- Does youth and local theatre have an important role to play?
- Do drama schools and other arts-related degree programmes assist in breaking down or compounding the problem of working class representation in the arts?
- Once they are trained what are the barriers to working class actors, technicians, producers and others launching a successful career in the arts – are there positions available for them?
- Is the insecurity of the job market a point at which people abandon careers in film and TV?
- Is the prevalence of low paid or unpaid work, particularly in the early stages of a career, an important barrier to people from working class backgrounds sticking in the industry?
- Are the problems similar or different across the country?
- Are theatres, TV, film and radio production companies, broadcasters, casting directors and commissioning bodies doing enough to ensure that working class people have opportunities to gain experience and compete for the jobs and roles they offer?

Is it harder for working class people to break into the arts now than it was in the past?

- How has it become more difficult?
- What's changed to make it more difficult?
- Is it equally difficult across the country?

What positive work is being done to improve working class representation in the arts?

- Which drama schools and other programmes do well in accepting and supporting working class people?
- Are local councils successfully investing in arts facilities and access for disadvantaged young people?
- What initiatives across the country are being run to tackle this problem?
- Does monitoring of and reporting on the diversity of shows on screen and stage have a role to play in increasing representation of working class people and other groups?
- Are national or regional arts institutions, organisations and funding bodies running successful programmes to encourage working class people to aspire to and succeed in careers in the performing arts?

What more could be done – what are the policy solutions?

ENDS