

Cynulliad Cenedlaethol Cymru / National Assembly for Wales
Pwyllgor Diwylliant, y Gymraeg a Chyfathrebu / The Culture, Welsh Language and
Communications Committee
Cynyrchiadau Ffilm a Theledu Mawr yng Nghymru / Film and Major TV Production
in Wales
CWLC(5) FILMTV32

I am writing to you to give you a view/account of the experiences of a “self-employed” background actor.

First and foremost, there is hardly any information regarding acting – not from school (as they’ve dropped it altogether in certain comprehensives), and especially not from the industry or government. Everything I’ve come to know has been from learning the hard way and experiencing it.

I state “self-employed”, as, we are expected to file/present ourselves as a business – yet, we receive no aid from industry/government, and as a background actor you are most likely never going to breach the £11.2k bracket.

It’s all upfront costs, with no guarantee of national minimum wage – in fact, after costings and travel are deducted, many productions work out as below minimum wage/ costing you to fulfil the work.

It’s almost a double standard of – they expect the best, but want you to pay for being a part of it.

The acting industry lacks such regulation in the UK that, in part, that’s why so many companies are coming to film here (as it’s cheaper to film here than in the US – because of the unions and legislative backing of their government). The knock on effects are that, for a background actor, we are basically on zero hour contracts, but with added scrutiny and acceptable prejudice (due to the nature of the work). You are contacted for availability, and the day before filming, you are contacted with travel details – of which the work could be in Cardiff/Bristol/London with a call time of 5/6am.

Film companies basically treat SA’s like dirt, where I’ve only found exception on few sets. We’re expected to fulfil all these criteria, pay upfront – and expect not to get paid for 10–12 weeks (which is industry standard).

A further problem, is the monopoly of certain agencies, and how they have sole access/control to certain companies, and how they use their power.

For example: I had to wait 17 weeks for payment. I followed the protocol of waiting 10 weeks before asking about payment. I was given 3 payment dates, of which 2 were not stuck too and the 3rd was delayed but eventually arrived – however – because I asked about where my money was, I was let go from the agency.

As I'm not in a union (Can't afford it), there is no support and as a result I've lost 80% of my work (in tv and film) because of the monopoly of said agent (██████████).
██████████).

The very thing that bodes in the film industries favour is the fact that the work is magical, and people will always be fascinated about how it's made – and they actively take advantage of those people, by not paying them a minimum wage (yet alone a living wage), not paying them for performing certain things on/off camera (i.e. If you're not aware of what a "walk-on" is or a "stand-in", or that you were one – you won't be reminded by the company or paid for it).

For myself, this is my only line of work next to music due to the nature of my illness that sporadically affects me (where this kind of sporadic work, works for me as I can't maintain a conventional 9–5), however – from being powerless in the hands of agencies who slap you with the hand that (seems) to feed you, from an industry that has banked off of zero hour contracts, that suckers many to pay fees to agents who've done no work and don't work for you, having a standard of waiting 12 weeks for payment... these are things that prevent me from being able to reinvest in my art/skills, as I struggle to get by, literally hoping that jobs come through in order to afford the car I bought in order to get to these jobs.

I feel that as an actor, it's a minefield trying to understand tax – or where we lay in between the taxman and our pay, I fear that being self-employed – it's not affecting my stamp but will eventually effect my state pension, I feel powerless when asking about where the money I've earned for fear of losing another agent, I feel anxious when asking the AD at the end of the day whether or not the action I did on camera constitutes extra payment (when I know it does) for fear of not getting rebooked, and I fear that I can't sustain this any longer and have no idea as to how else to make money as a creative. All I want to do is entertain and educate,

but the systems that are in place to help don't, and to be frank – I don't know how the industry will change or what change could be brought in for the better.

Ideally, some form of differentiation between part-time “do it for the fun” extras, and full time “this is my day job” background actors, because the former affect the latter largely as many in the industry have second jobs where acting facilitates “pocket money” for them, where in reality – it's the only accessible (essentially non skilled) work available in these areas.