

17th August 2022

Dear Liz Truss and Rishi Sunak,

Re. Protecting the United Kingdom's Creative and Cultural Sectors

We are writing to you as candidates for the Conservative Party leadership, and as potential Prime Ministers of our country, when the results of the contest are announced on 5th September.

Ahead of the outcome, with over 117,000 members of our own, ALCS felt it important to communicate some of the pressing issues facing British writers. Hard on the heels of the Covid epidemic, the current cost of living crisis will not only be putting pressure on consumers of our cultural output, but also on the creative workforce that produces the works we love.

The creative sector is one of the UK's great success stories, a driver of economic growth and a strong employment provider across our nations and regions. In 2019, before the pandemic, it grew at four times the rate of the wider economy and contributed over £116 billion, in terms of Gross Value Added (GVA). Writers, whom we represent, are woven into the fabric of our creative arts, contributing across all the genres, from books to theatre, TV, film and, indeed, computer games.

In film, the latest James Bond, *No Time to Die*, earned a total of £640million at the box office, 80% of that overseas, making it the highest earner worldwide in 2021. This would not have been possible without Robert Wade, Neal Purvis and Phoebe Waller-Bridge, the writers.

In publishing, *Shuggie Bain* received domestic and international acclaim, winning the Booker Prize in 2020 and a film adaptation is now being developed by independent producers and the BBC for airing in 2024. This would not have been possible without Douglas Stuart, the writer.

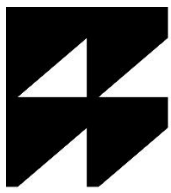
In the performing arts, the Orange Prize-winning *Small Island* was adapted for stage at the National Theatre in 2019 and was so popular that a second run in 2022 was produced. This would not have been possible without Andrea Levy and Helen Edmundson, the author and the playwright.

These are just three recent examples of the creative output that is crucial to our national identity, at home and abroad. The UK is a creative hub that is vital to our economic success and attracts tourism, too, as a result. We want to ensure that this is cultivated further and are, therefore, highlighting here three key requests, which we would ask you to consider endorsing as part of your plans for the future of the UK and its creative sector, as we face the challenges ahead.

Three key pledges

1. Protecting the next generation of our creative and cultural workforce

The pandemic was a huge blow to the creative sector: productions were stopped, new commissions faltered, and writers found it more difficult than ever to make ends meet, with a sharp decline in income. On top of this, much of the largely freelance workforce was unable to access vital government support schemes.



Authors' Licensing and Collecting Society

We ask the candidates, therefore, to create the position of a Freelance Commissioner to ensure that, especially with the looming cost of living crisis, the creative workforce has a dedicated champion to help them from slipping through the cracks again.

2. Broadcasting

Our audio-visual sector is a high-performing and highly profitable part of the UK's cultural output and public service broadcasting forms an integral component of that successful eco-system. It gives local and regional production houses, writers and support workers the opportunity to demonstrate British talent at creating quality TV and film. Regardless of political debates about ownership and financing, it is irrefutable that Channel 4 and the BBC are currently pursuing real commitments to 'levelling-up' across the country and redistributing employment and investment across the UK as a result. It is vitally important that this work continues in the future.

We ask the candidates to agree, therefore, that UK production guarantees be incorporated into any new ownership or licensing agreements to ensure that the vital audio-visual sector can continue to demonstrate the capability of our nations and regions.

3. High Streets

Bookshops form an integral part of local communities, acting as literary and cultural hubs. These largely small businesses have adapted in the pandemic to beyond just the sale of literature to add further social and economic value in their local communities. A recent report by the Booksellers Association found that 77% of all bookshops contributed to a minimum of 20 of the 25 priorities set out for successful high streets, with 96% of them also contributing vitally to the 'liveability' of town centres.

We ask that both candidates commit to a significant reform of the business rates system to help not only with the sustainability of our high streets as a whole in the face of online competition, but to ensure that, - on top of the cost of living crisis - these small local businesses are not crippled by extortionate business rates payments.

Yours sincerely,

Barbara Hayes
Deputy Chief Executive, Authors' Licensing and Collecting Society