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## **Culture unions in call for new TV studios, fairer spending, more devolution and a better deal for workers**

Unions representing workers in the cultural sector have today (Friday, 21 April) written an open letter to candidates in the West Midlands mayoral election calling on the candidates to commit to securing a new TV and film studio for the region, greater devolution of arts spending to the region and a fairer deal for cultural workers.

The letter points out that whilst the region is the home of Shakespeare and other fantastic cultural assets the region is disadvantaged when it comes to per head of population arts funding with only £4.58 versus London's £69.

To maximise the region's cultural potential a cultural manifesto has been published urging the incoming Mayor to address 6 key areas:

- A Midlands film and television studio facility.
- Trade union recognition and implementation of negotiated agreements as a condition of public funding.
- An integrated local government policy framework to support live venues, festivals and street performers (including infrastructure, public transport, regulatory framework etc).
- An increase in public spending on the arts in the Midlands until per capita regional arts spending is on a par with London.
- Secure, properly paid, professional employment for cultural workers and arts educators.
- Local control of all arts spending in the region (including Arts Council England).

In the letter, the culture unions state "We know what needs to be done to support our cultural industries so we urge the Mayor to push for devolution of arts funding - it's time Whitehall trusted the West Midlands. By working together we can build a cultural devolution that offers fairness for its workers, grows our economy, and benefits all citizens in the West Midlands."

## ENDS

### NOTES TO EDITORS:

- 1) The **open letter** can be viewed here:  
<https://www.tuc.org.uk/sites/default/files/CM%2021.4.17.pdf>
- 2) **Photos** can be downloaded for media use here:  
<https://www.flickr.com/photos/126225385@N03/sets/72157679685729303>
- 3) **Cultural manifesto** can be accessed here:  
[https://www.tuc.org.uk/sites/default/files/8255\\_cultural%20manifesto%20V1\\_0.pdf](https://www.tuc.org.uk/sites/default/files/8255_cultural%20manifesto%20V1_0.pdf)

- 4) Text of open letter:

Dear Candidate

A thriving cultural infrastructure is as vital for the social and economic prosperity of a town, city or region as the physical infrastructure of roads, bridges, power and telecommunications.

The West Midlands is famous as the home of Shakespeare, the RSC, Birmingham Rep, CBSO, Birmingham Royal Ballet, Birmingham & Solihull Jazz Festival, as well as our fantastic museums and art galleries.

However, the region is disadvantaged when it comes to per head of population arts funding as we see only £4.58 versus London's £69. The loss of both the BBC and ITV television production centres in the last 20 years has contributed to this inequality by seriously damaging the sustainability of the cultural industries in our region.

The exciting opportunity presented by the Combined Authority and an incoming Mayor offers the chance to put this right.

That is why the Midlands TUC Creative and Leisure Industries Committee has developed our cultural manifesto to promote the values we would like to see adopted by the incoming Mayor:

1. A Midlands film and television studio facility.
2. Trade union recognition and implementation of negotiated agreements as a condition of public funding.
3. An integrated local government policy framework to support live venues, festivals and street performers (including infrastructure, public transport, regulatory framework etc).
4. An increase in public spending on the arts in the Midlands until per capita regional arts spending is on a par with London.
5. Secure, properly paid, professional employment for cultural workers and arts educators.
6. Local control of all arts spending in the region (including Arts Council England).

We know what needs to be done to support our cultural industries so we urge the Mayor to push for devolution of arts funding - it's time Whitehall trusted the West Midlands.

The creative industries have always been notorious for the precarious 'gig economy' that leaves cultural workers with almost no security of employment and minimal rights in the workplace. We believe this needs to change because for our cultural sector to truly flourish it requires properly paid sustainable jobs to attract the best talent to live and work here.

By using Public Sector Procurement processes and applying union rates and recognition we can also help turn the tide on this 'gig economy' by delivering fairness for the workers who produce the fantastic cultural offerings across the West Midlands.

The bold ambition to secure a new studio could transform our future by attracting production to the region and creating many more jobs in start-up companies that would support a studio.

By working together we can build a cultural devolution that offers fairness for its workers, grows our economy, and benefits all citizens in the West Midlands.

Yours sincerely

Mick Corfield, BECTU Section, Prospect  
Ian Bayes, Equity  
Stephen Brown, Musicians' Union  
Chris Jury, Writers' Guild of Great Britain  
Lee Barron, Midlands TUC

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