



By email

18 September

## **COMPLAINTS INVOLVING ON-SCREEN TALENT**

I am taking the unusual step of writing to you to express deep concern on behalf of Bectu members at the revelations relating to Russell Brand's behaviour over a long period of time and whilst working with a number of broadcasters and production companies. Sadly, this is not an isolated incident and follows reports about inappropriate behaviour involving other high-profile and powerful on-screen talent at the BBC and ITV.

Whilst we appreciate that these cases are currently under investigation these reports are deeply troubling and are a stark reminder that sexual harassment remains a scourge on the creative sector. Reports that crew members had reported inappropriate workplace conduct many years ago, and yet no action was taken, are all the more concerning.

In a sector where power imbalances are particularly extreme and the environment for junior freelancers can be incredibly precarious, it's critical that victims can have confidence that their complaints will be taken seriously, investigated thoroughly, dealt with swiftly, and perpetrators held to account.

However, what we are seeing time and again is historical complaints and allegations coming to light. It is abundantly clear that your helplines and other measures that broadcasters frequently point to are woefully inadequate in dealing with complaints, particularly those levelled at people in positions of power.

While we welcome the internal investigations into Brand's behaviour launched by the BBC, Channel 4 and Banijay UK, current policies and procedures are clearly not fit for purpose, especially when perpetrators are hugely powerful and their targets are often junior freelancers who may feel that their future employment is vulnerable. We know that many staff are also afraid to raise complaints due to endemic power imbalances, where presenters are seen as 'talent' and all-powerful. Suggestions circulating in some reports, that Brand's behaviour was known about, and that the solution proposed was not to employ women on productions he was involved in, are particularly concerning.

The need for an independent standards authority has never been more apparent. Broadcasters, production companies and studios must put their money where their mouth is and commit to funding and supporting the establishment of the Creative Industries Independent Standards Authority (CIISA). No more prevarication, the need is clear and urgent.

Alongside proper and sustained commitment to CIISA, it is clear that employers need to overhaul internal processes for handling sexual harassment complaints. It is critical that this is undertaken in consultation with unions to ensure that the workforce's concerns are heard and properly addressed.

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How many more incidents must come to light before broadcasters commit to taking real and meaningful action? No-one, however senior or powerful, should be above proper scrutiny. We urge production companies and broadcasters to take a much more proactive, leading role in ensuring the sector is a safe, mentally healthy and respectful place to work for everyone – staff, freelancers and behind the scenes workers.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, reading "Philippa Childs". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Philippa Childs

**Head of Bectu**