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'Creating Safe Spaces': and Equity's Agenda for Change

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CAMEo Cuts

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'Creating Safe Spaces': and Equity's Agenda for Change

Maureen Beattie, President of Equity

In this CAMEo Cut we consider the recent Agenda for Change report produced by Equity, the UK entertainment union. Following a wave of allegations of sexual abuse, harassment and misconduct in the entertainment industry, the Agenda for Change report focuses on ways of tackling a spectrum of bad behaviour that includes not just sexual misconduct, but also bullying and harassment more generally. Here we outline some key points from the Agenda for Change and then present extracts from a public lecture entitled 'Creating Safe Spaces' given by Maureen Beattie for CAMEo in September 2018.



About the author

Maureen Beattie is the President of Equity. She graduated from what is now The Royal Conservatoire of Scotland in 1974 and she has been working as an actor and director ever since. She joined the Council of Equity, the entertainment workers union, in 2014 and in 2017 led the union's working party on sexual harassment which produced the *Agenda for Change* and the *Creating Safe Spaces* campaign. In 2018 she became Equity's second ever female President. She likes to think the times they are a-changin'.

'Creating Safe Spaces': and Equity's Agenda for Change

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Introduction: A Time for Change

Equity is the trade union that represents performers and other artists working in the UK live and recorded entertainment industries, including film, television, radio, theatre, opera, dance, modelling, circus and variety entertainment. In 2017, in response to a raft of high-profile allegations of sexual harassment and abuse, and in the wake of widespread revelations engendered by the #metoo movement, Equity undertook a consultation and survey of its members and established a working group to investigate the issue of sexual harassment in the entertainment workplace. The outcome of that process has been the *Agenda for Change* report [1] published in 2018. *Agenda for Change* focuses on the procedures and protocols that the entertainment industries should be adopting in order to ensure that sexual harassment does not occur in the workplace and that there is also zero tolerance of other inappropriate attitudes and behaviours such as bullying, intimidation and discrimination. The longer term aim of the report is to help change ingrained attitudes and behaviours in an industry where many forms of abuse have gone unchallenged and unchecked for far too long. The report places the onus on the entertainment industries to create a culture where vulnerable workers – and indeed all workers – can be free of intimidation, harassment and harm.



Equity is running a high-profile awareness-raising campaign in its members' workplaces, encouraging employers to define and uphold their own robust codes of professional conduct and providing additional staff resources and a special helpline to encourage people to come forward with their own reports of harassment and abuse. It is also developing its own particular guidelines for agents, casting directors, engagers and employers. Some of the recommendations of the *Agenda for Change* include ensuring that dignity and respect at work polices be attached to contracts; making sure that non-disclosure agreements (NDAs) are not being used to mask inappropriate behaviours; and identifying a named on-site contact who is trained to deal with complaints in a professional and sensitive manner. Equity is also lobbying for legislative changes, including increasing the time-limit for lodging a claim of sexual harassment from three to six months.

The *Agenda for Change* also focuses on educators and training providers, encouraging them to help students prepare for their future careers by ensuring that courses provide an appropriate understanding of personal space and boundaries, consent, and ways of behaving acceptably at work as well as dealing with unacceptable behaviour.

In September 2018, Maureen Beattie, the new President of Equity, presented the *Agenda for Change* during her speech to the TUC Congress. In her address she focussed on the *affirmation* that Equity is encouraging all of its members to have read aloud at the commencement of each new job or engagement:

‘Congress, I would like to begin by reading the affirmation which Equity is encouraging members to read aloud at the beginning of every new venture:

Every single one of us working on this project is entitled to work in a safe space: a space free of fear, a space free of bullying and harassment of any kind. We will work together honouring our differences and celebrating the gifts we each bring to the table. We will treat one another with politeness and respect at all times and, if we are subjected to or witness bullying or harassment, we will speak out knowing that our voices will be heard and we will be taken seriously. Together we can create a safe space’.

Shortly after her appearance at the TUC, Maureen came to Leicester to provide the keynote public lecture at our second CAMEo Conference ‘Care in the Media and Cultural Industries’. Over 120 people attended the Curve Theatre to hear Maureen discuss the *Agenda for Change* and expand on the theme of ‘Creating Safe Spaces’ at work. In this CAMEo Cut we present an edited extract from

Maureen’s talk. *Prof. Mark Banks CAMEo Director, November 2018*

Extract from Public Lecture, 13 September 2018

‘Creating Safe Spaces’

Maureen Beattie (President of Equity)

@ ‘Care in the Media and Cultural Industries’,
CAMEo Conference, Curve Theatre, Leicester,
12-14 September 2018

I’d like to start by saying thank you very much to Professor Helen Wood, who’s in here somewhere. Hello Helen! She was the person who asked me first of all to come here. I was really pleased to do that. And to say thank you to CAMEo as well, because obviously we are stronger together. Well, I’m president of a union, I must believe that. [We are] stronger together and the more chances we get to go out there and tell people what we are up to and ask them to join the fight against harassment, sexual harassment, bullying in our business, the better (...).

I’ll give a bit of an idea of what we’ve been up to. And before I do, to really begin, I would like to read you our affirmation. This is an affirmation of how we are going to behave in this room. We wrote it to go along with our *Agenda for Change* that came out of the sexual harassment working group: ‘Everyone in this [lecture] is entitled to work in a safe space: a space free of fear, a space free of bullying and harassment of any kind. We will work together honouring our differences and celebrating the gifts we each bring to the table. We will treat one another with politeness and respect at all times and, if we are subjected to or witness bullying and harassment, we will speak out knowing that our voices will be heard and we will be taken seriously. Together we can create a safe space.’

So, it started [with] Harvey Weinstein and his allegedly despicable behaviour. Then the allegedly despicable behaviour of Kevin Spacey. But really it was the Harvey Weinstein thing that started it all off and, you know, we had to do something, we had to do it fast. As you all know, if you are member of any large-ish organisation - we have 45,000 members it's a bit like driving an oil tanker and it takes 14 days to do a U-turn - we wanted to be swift, and so we put together the sexual harassment working group. We met four times between October and February – October last year and February [2018]. And we met - what felt like and I'm very glad to say this - everybody in our industry. We met people who represented all of our different members and we met people from all the different engagers, funders, casting directors as well to find out what was going on. We also asked our members. We asked them two questions. One was 'would you please tell us your stories' and number two was 'please give us your top three ideas' [to] change this endemic poison in our industry. We asked specifically for people to tell us their stories with a view to say: 'this happened to me' [and] 'if that had been in place it wouldn't have happened'.



[Sexual harassment has been] going on forever, as you probably know, and I know that it's endemic in many other industries as well. But the difference really is, as those of you who are involved in the entertainment industry know, if you're a surgeon, you don't go; 'Why, hello I'm a surgeon, are you surgeon too? My name is Maureen. Shall we get into bed and pretend to have sex with one other in front of thousands of people'. It doesn't really happen. I'm not saying surgeons don't have sex with one another but it's a different kind of vibe. It's that, it's the fact that there are people in my business, our business, where we are required to remove a layer. If you want to be good at your job, typically if you are a performer of any kind, of course there stage managers, directors, designers, and choreographers, of course it affects them too. Specifically, if you are a performer you have to open yourself up, you have to open yourself up to be sensitive to other people's emotional needs that they are giving you to perform. And then to give it back to them. And it makes us vulnerable on that level. Also, it's a business where what you look like matters a lot. Because there is awful lot of talk of about: 'Well you know you're just not, you're just not loose enough. You need to relax. Take your top off. Go on. What's wrong with you? You're such ah- never mind'. And you heard all of the stories with Harvey Weinstein. It was so many stories of people going: 'He asked me to do that and I thought is that what everybody does?' You know these men and women who have been abused by these people, they are not [necessarily] coming from a place where they understand the world and they don't expect the world to behave that way. They are very, very vulnerable.

My first personal experience, really bad experience I would say. It was at drama school

and there was a chap at drama school, who was one of the lead guys. He was very very important. And he said to me, towards the end of my third year. He said: 'You know, you did very good work, you've really improved a lot Maureen. You know we are very pleased [but your] work lacks depth'. I thought: 'Gosh, I spend three years and my work lacks depth'. I believed. Of course I believed him! I was horrified. He said: 'I wonder if it might be because you're a virgin'. So of course what he was hoping I would do is go: 'I have a terrible problem can you help with that?' In fact, what I did was say: 'Oh God, thank you very very much, I'll go away and do something about it'. And off I went.

But at the time I buried it deep, I buried it deep down inside. I didn't tell my parents. I didn't tell Equity about it. I didn't speak to my fellow students. I mean it was, you know, I was deeply ashamed. I was guilty that I had not lost my virginity because it meant that I wasn't as good an actress. I mean, aw! So that was one example, and the other thing that made me feel very strongly to get this sexual harassment working group off the ground was an experience on the other side. I worked with a young stage manager. She was not long out of drama school, and training. She was a delight. Anyway, I went into the wings one night [and she was] ashen in the face. And I said: 'Are you alright?' She said: 'Well one of the actors just handed me this'. She gave me this bit of paper. Now I'm not going to tell you what it said. It was sexual, really sexual. I didn't know what to do and I didn't confront him, I [didn't] tell anyone else because I was having to go on working with this guy for the next three months or whatever it was. And I'm ashamed of that to this day. I'm absolutely ashamed of myself, I said to her, 'Well, now that you've told me, I'll keep an

eye out'. Seriously? Now of course I would just be absolutely convinced I would do something about it (...).

So [Equity] got together and asked members for all these ideas (...) we got over 200 ideas from members. A lot of them repeated. We got all of these ideas and started to distil them down as an Agenda. I have to say that, although harassment happens to men and women alike, whatever your sexual identity or however you define yourself, the vast majority of cases we heard were where women were being abused in some fashion by men. That's just true, but it doesn't mean it's the only thing that happens. So that was something we knew we had to address. So, we spoke to engagers, casting directors, agents, educators (...). We looked into our own conduct too. How are we behaving towards our members? How are we behaving towards the staff at Equity? (...) We met ERA 50:50, we spoke to Directors UK, Stage Directors UK, Stage Management Association, Women in Film and TV, Raising Films, the Federation of Drama Schools, One Dance UK [and many more].



We also reviewed the work of other organisations. We looked at existing policy on dignity and respect at work covering bullying and harassment in various other organisations. For instance, the BFI and all the other theatrical organisations I've just mentioned. We talked to other unions around the world about what their practices were, to see if we could borrow anything from them and they have done the same with us.

Out of all these endeavours came two main things I would say. The *Agenda for Change*. It's an oncoming thing. The *Creating Safe Spaces* campaign (the affirmation that I read earlier) goes in there. The new harassment helpline came out of the *Agenda for Change* too (...).

If people want to (...) get retribution in the form of a payment for the abuse they have suffered, if they want to take a company to court that's wonderful. But there comes a point when you have to say who you are and you have to name names, and that's really hard to do. And we never push anyone. There is an absolutely fantastic young woman, who suffered the most appalling abuse in a touring company. And she said 'No, I'm going to out these people'. So she came to Equity and we took them to court. We won. You know you don't get your dignity back, but she got £10,000, which was very nice. This is what she said: 'One of the men talked about my vagina, my breasts. They asked me for a threesome, asked to have sex on a daily basis. They took a picture of me when I was asleep and drew an ejaculating penis on it and put it on social media.' This is all evidence, this is all serious stuff. 'If it wasn't for the union I wouldn't have been able to take them to court. I wouldn't have been able to afford the solicitors fee and I got a lot of emotional support'. Fantastic, what courage! (...) What a debt of gratitude we owe people like that.

Very important, we realised that we [cannot be] bystanders. The affirmation says if we are subjected to or witness bullying or harassment, then stand up and say, 'I saw this'. Say to somebody, speak to somebody: 'This cannot go on'. If more of us do it, the less likely it is these people are given the warm, cuddly atmosphere in which to behave really badly. We need to all pitch in. We have got a few other tools. We have got a casting question card, which is questions that a casting director or any director or anybody in this room is not allowed to ask you; your protected characteristics. Your age, your gender assignment, your pregnancy or not, your marital status, all of those things. We are currently signing off on a leaflet on bullying and harassment with the protected characteristics, but also saying to people: 'Here is some guidelines as to what you should do'. And one of the really important things about that is *do not go on social media*. We've had several situations with Equity, where somebody has brought us a case and they have gone on social media. These [accused] people, a lot are very powerful and they are very rich. And they have money and lawyers and what happens is you're taken to court, for libel, for slander, for defamation of character. Not only do you not get the retribution you so richly deserve, you don't get to flag up your [harassment] (...) So, we are constantly saying to our members, please don't make it very easy [for them] - of course in the moment you're in pain, you're angry and you want to get out there and tell - [but] safeguard yourself at all times, that's number one. There will be occasions that you do not feel comfortable or able to challenge your mistreatment or that of others. Contact Equity at the earliest opportunity. You may be able to raise a workplace concern. We are very keen, we are doing it more and more; putting

somebody in place in each organisation - somebody who is a member of Equity - and who takes in the role of being (...) a bridge person between the company and Equity.

So, we are on our way, we are all getting together. We are on our way with a worldwide movement to stop this kind of behaviour in its tracks - #metoo, all these wonderful movements. (...) We must not give up when the media spotlight has moved on and it's not famous people anymore and it's just the folk getting on with their business - that is when the bastards are going to crawl out from under their stones and go: 'Ha ha ha! I'm here again and nobody is watching us'. But I'll be watching them and Equity will be watching them.

This is very important. One last thing I would like to say: we have all got to do [something], we can no longer leave it up to usual suspects. We can no longer leave it up to me and the other activists at Equity and the Equity staff who are always stepping up to the plate, who don't mind stepping up to the plate. But we are all [involved], it is our world. This is about us getting our rights back and getting our dignity back, and taking our world back. It absolutely essential: the wolves are at the gates of the city!

Some questions from the floor:

Question: Maureen, how do you think we as members [can] best protect and support those of us that do find themselves in an awkward position when going for casting (...) Often young girl singers for instance have found themselves in a position where they have been colluded into doing things just to get work (...) how can they be safe, to keep that avenue of work open?

Maureen: Gosh big question. Thank you very much. Well, speak to somebody.

Absolutely do not feel guilty, it is absolutely not your fault. It is always, always the fault of the perpetrator. It's not your fault - is it not because you were wearing a low-neck costume for your work. It is nothing to do with that. They have no right, they will try to pretend that you were flirting with them or something like that (...) Speak to somebody at your work if you possibly can because as soon as you say the words out loud: 'I really feel uncomfortable about what he is doing to me or speaking to me'. Then, it immediately diffuses it. Contact Equity. If we know somebody is behaving badly we now can (with this new database) see patterns emerging and if we get information from somebody, or an organisation not treating our members properly, we can do something about it. We can't do something if people don't tell us. So come and tell us and we can do whatever we can. I would also urge all of you to spread the word that we have got each other's back. We have all got to look out for each other, get the *Agenda for Change*, get the affirmation read out. Stick it on the wall. What we are finding very effective is we stick the [affirmation] up on the wall. We stick that up and somebody starts to behave a little [differently]. Not always, I know that they don't always lie down with their tongue sticking out.

Question: Are there are [codes] you think should be compulsory?

Maureen: It's [difficult] to say (...) we are questioning all of the engagers, casting directors and agents – do they have code of conduct? What is it like? Can we have a look at it? Can we suggest how this might be improved? But certainly one of the problems is that so often it is the young and vulnerable, isn't it? We were getting a lot of reports from members going up to casting and the casting

director saying: 'Sorry what actual age are you?' And you think well they are not allowed to ask you. They can ask you if you are doing an alcoholic advert and they can ask you if you're 26, because you have to be 26. (...) You know, questioning you about intimate stuff that's not really their business. I think that's compulsory.

Question: *How do we keep this issue front and centre?*

Maureen: That is a fantastic question. I'm not entirely sure. I've only been President of Equity since July. I've had some time to really think about what I was really interested in doing. My major thing is communication. Communication with our members, but also communication with the outside world. (...) What was happening in the past was [that] the work was done behind the scenes, and Equity is amazing. It's incredible, [but] you never see it. Because that's the nature of the work. I want to go out there with a big bell and run through the street shouting about what Equity is doing. (...) So, I want to get out there. The power of advertising is that the more people know about you, the more they are scared of you. I want these people to be terrified, I want these people to be really scared. If they see me come into the theatre, I want them to go: 'Oh no, that's not good'. Because what is the point otherwise? At the moment, they just dismiss us. Because when that media spotlight goes away, we are still going to be there. (...) I was at the TUC - you get into all kind of exciting places when you become President of Equity! - I was part of the delegation that went to the TUC conference in Manchester. It was just thrilling and we brought a motion about sexual harassment, very much to do with the legality [of lodging claims]. (...) If you have an incident where

you've been harassed, you've got three months [to lodge a claim] at the moment. We want to extend that to at least six, if not more. It takes a longer time sometimes for behaviour like that to percolate through and for you to stop feeling guilty. (...) The wonderful thing was that all of our motions were voted through unanimously. So now we are not just 45,000 people (...) that feeling that we are all in it together, that we are all fighting the same fight is tremendous. I think that's how we are going to go forward.

Endnote

¹ *Agenda for Change* report (2018) <https://www.equity.org.uk/media/1263/agenda-for-change.pdf>



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