HOUSE OF COMMONS

Women and Equalities Committee

Oral evidence: Misogyny in music, HC 317

Wednesday 13 September 2023

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Watch the meeting

Members present: Caroline Nokes (Chair); Elliot Colburn; Jackie Doyle-Price; Kim Johnson; Kate Osborne; Bell Ribeiro-Addy.

Questions 344-390

Witnesses

I: Rebecca Ferguson, singer-songwriter, and Annie Macmanus, DJ, broadcaster and writer.

Written evidence from witnesses:

– [Add names of witnesses and hyperlink to submissions]

Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: Rebecca Ferguson and Annie Macmanus.

Q344 **Chair:** Good morning and welcome to this morning's meeting of the Women and Equalities Committee in our inquiry into misogyny in music. I thank our two witnesses for joining us this morning: Annie Macmanus, DJ and broadcaster, who is here in person; and Rebecca Ferguson, a singer and songwriter, who is joining us virtually. Good morning to both of you.

I understand that you would both like to make an opening statement. Can we start with Annie, please?

Annie Macmanus: I have worked in the music industry for 19 years. I got into the music industry as a DJ for the BBC, which I suppose afforded me a kind of shield of protection because that role comes with an element of power to it, in that you are able to make or break bands. That, coupled with having a very tight and protective female management team for most of my career, has meant that I have not gone through anything traumatic with regards to misogyny. But in preparation for today, I have spoken to a range of women. I wanted to come prepared with some stories and experiences. I have spoken to agents, managers, event producers, photographers, artists, fellow DJs—a real range of women—and tried to collect their experiences and stories, some of which I hope I can give today.

There are common threads that run through everything I have heard from the women I have spoken to. Women—especially young women—in the music industry are consistently underestimated and undermined, and freelance women are consistently put in situations where they are unsafe. A lot of women feel that they are not being heard when it comes to experiences of misogyny.

I am really happy that this is happening. I am really happy to be here and to contribute in any way I can.

Q345 **Chair:** Thank you very much. Rebecca?

Rebecca Ferguson: Hi. Thank you for having me to speak today. I have prepared some words as well. A lot of it I have already placed in my written statement, but I will just read it out.

First, I want to say that I hope that me speaking today brings people who have suffered similarly some form of peace. I did not want to speak today; everybody advised me against it. My husband was concerned for my welfare. He said, "Don't say anything, Rebecca. They'll come for you, and they'll make your life hell." A fellow survivor said the same: "Don't speak. If the Government wanted to change things, they would have done it already."

Sadly, nobody trusts the system—and why would they? Musicians are at the bottom of the pile, more so than any other creative industry. The MU conducted a study, and it turns out that the average musician earns £14,000 a year, yet the music industry is worth billions. We, the talent,

are the product, yet there is nobody ensuring that the human beings generating the wealth are being taken care of, which is naturally leading to exploitation and human rights abuses.

Misogyny in music is the tip of the iceberg of the things that are happening behind the scenes. If you read the unredacted version of my written evidence, you will see how sinister music has become. What is scary is that it will only get worse if the Government doesn't act.

I will give some examples of the result of misogyny in music and some of the things that have happened to me. Bearing in mind that I came to public prominence, as it were, in 2010, and that 17 million people watched me enter the music industry professionally and millions of people voted for me, I strongly believe that if the public knew what was going on they would not have had any dealings, voted, or picked up the phone. They would not have got involved had they known.

On 15 October 2010, I was coerced into a management agreement with Modest Management and told that if I did not sign a contract I would be kicked off the ITV show "The X Factor". The solicitors Lee & Thompson, who drafted the contract, were given to me by the production company Fremantle and the record label Syco. I did not have any independent legal counsel.

My relationships at that time and afterwards were dictated to me by males in very senior positions. Staff were instructed to ruin my personal relationships. Staff were told to ignore calls from my children and to not pass messages on when they tried to call me. Security staff were told to infiltrate and purposely ruin my romantic relationships. Ian Alexander, my head of security, was threatened to be fired from his job if he did not do as requested. Comments were said to me or spoken of me such as: "When you earn as much money as you do, you do as we effing say"; "She's good, isn't she? We just need to break her spirit"; "He only wants you to perform because you're black"; and "When I tell you to do something you do as I effing say."

I witnessed other performers being encouraged to engage in messages of a sexual nature with each other. Members of my team told me that they were threatened or bribed to not work with me when I ended what I deemed to be exploitative and abusive contracts. My PR executive, whose name I will redact for the purpose of this, experienced this, as did my stylist. However, both of them continued to work with me.

Elton John's management team, Rocket Music, were also threatened by senior males in the music industry when they tried to look after me. Colin Barlow, the former head of RCA Records UK, was very concerned for my welfare, and he contacted Nick Gatfield, the former head of Sony UK.

Because I spoke out, my music was blocked internationally. My fans couldn't listen to my music. My videos were blocked and my album was completely blocked internationally, up until I raised this concern to Jason

Iley, the head of Sony Music UK. He instructed a then employee, Simon—I will redact his surname—to investigate.

One of my former day-to-day managers was threatened and blackmailed to give information on me. In exchange, a senior industry mogul said that he would drop a claim against her, which was in the region of £80,000. At 8 am on a Sunday morning in March 2017, the same senior mogul forced his way into my home, sat on my sofa while I was in the shower and proceeded to talk to my child. When I said he needed to leave, he said he was not going to leave, and I said I would call the police. I have crime reference numbers and correspondence to confirm, as I had to instruct a legal team to write to him to tell him to leave me alone. I was frequently receiving contact from him late at night, past 10 pm, despite my legal advisers telling him that he was to have no direct contact with me. This person is so senior in the music industry that he advises the DCMS. I say this because it is so important. There are so many people who didn't want to speak today. There are so many women, but this is what we are coming up against. How do you fight against this level of power?

I discussed my concerns with a criminal barrister and my then legal team, Manleys Solicitors. I once performed a tour for that same industry mogul that grossed over £600,000. The tour was my chance to buy a home next to my mum. I stayed in a caravan with my children for that tour as I wanted to make as much profit as possible. I did not make any profit and I was left to honour the costs personally to my band members. When I flagged this with him and said, "Where's my money?", he withheld all my accounts, all my business letters—everything in relation to my business—so that I was unable to pay tax and unable to meet VAT deadlines. He basically kept everything away from me. He also had his friend running my accounts.

A senior detective with the Metropolitan police, Andrew Grant, contacted me in November 2018 and told me that he had received intelligence and had reason to believe I was unsafe. It was around 9 pm CEST. I was pulling into Gare du Nord train station via the Eurostar. He asked me where I was and I told him I was in Paris. He told me that he would like some officers to greet me off a flight when I returned to the UK. He seemed very concerned about my safety. I was alarmed and very fearful.

I am conscious of time. The rest of what I have to say has been placed in my written evidence. There have been plenty other threats against my life, which I have placed in my written evidence. Alongside that, I am happy to provide crime reference numbers, and I am happy for you to contact people and give them a right of reply in relation to this.

Because the music industry is not regulated, this level of bullying and corruption is being allowed to happen. Because we have a multibillion-pound music industry with absolutely no legislation—a manager doesn't have to have a background check; anyone can look after an artist; there is literally nothing to keep us safe—naturally, human rights abuses are happening. As the University of Winchester report stated, 17% of women have been forced into sexual labour in the music industry. These figures

are outrageous. I strongly recommend that the Government immediately introduce some form of legislation to protect us and, as well as protecting us in that manner, stop allowing us to be slaves. The music creator is the lowest when it comes to the music industry. We get paid the very least, and that in itself has forced us into a level of servitude.

I hope that my account today can help to force change, and I hope that the recommendations to the Government are strong ones that will keep women safe in music.

Chair: Thank you very much, Rebecca—that has been very helpful—and thank you, Annie. Committee members will ask you questions in turn and indicate which of you they wish to respond. We will start with Kim Johnson.

Q346 **Kim Johnson:** Good morning, Annie and Rebecca. I would like to thank you for your opening comments and particularly you, Rebecca, for being here today and bravely talking to us so openly and candidly about your experience. Thank you for your written evidence, too. You mentioned that so few women want to come forward. Our Committee has tried for over a year to encourage women to come and give evidence to us. Why do you think women artists particularly are so reluctant to participate in this inquiry?

Rebecca Ferguson: Via my Twitter, I asked women to contact me who had been through terrible experiences in music, and continually, it was the same experience that I have just spoken about. There is a genuine fear. Music has become that unregulated that people feel they can threaten people's lives. They feel like they can use violence. They feel like they can use sexual violence. Because of how powerful they are in the music industry, nobody dares go against them. A lot of these women have been dreaming of being in the industry for their entire lives. It is what they are; they have trained for it since they were little girls. To then all of a sudden be faced with someone saying, "You're never going to work in music again if you speak about what I've just done to you"—that is the reason, in my opinion, why women don't want to come forward.

They want to come forward, and they want people to be held to account, but they are also faced with the fact that when they do come forward, those people never really are held to account. For some reason, it always gets covered up and hidden. Like the detective at the Metropolitan police said to me, "These people are known to us"—one particular person was known to him—"But he's surrounded himself with powerful people", hence why people don't want to come forward; they feel powerless and like the system isn't set up to protect them.

Q347 **Kim Johnson:** Thanks, Rebecca; hopefully this inquiry will highlight some of the issues you raised. I would like to put the same question to you, Annie: why do you feel women are reluctant to come forward and put their heads above the parapet?

Annie Macmanus: Well, the music industry is a boys' club. Everybody knows everyone at the top levels. All the people at the very top levels

have the money and thusfore the power. As Rebecca says, the system is kind of rigged against women in that way. Let's say you are an artist and something happens to you. I heard from an artist just this morning on my way here who got signed very young, was really trying to make it and believed that this record label could help her get to where she needed to be, make some money and have a career. She went to the pub with the record label head. He kept asking her to stay out, stay out, stay out, and then when they got out into the street, he sexually assaulted her. If you are her, you can either complain and risk the career that you have fought so hard for being compromised, or you can crack on, and that's what she did.

She is now in a more powerful position, but still, if you speak out as an artist, as Rebecca said, there are really serious connotations in terms of fear and sexual violence, and also on a status or perception level, you don't want to be defined by being deemed as "a difficult woman". You also don't want to be defined by something that happened to you that is deeply traumatic. You want your artistry to come first. You want that to be how you succeed.

If you speak out about something that happened to you, you will forever be defined by that. You will forever be seen within the industry and by the people who run the industry as the person who spoke out and thusfore can be difficult. I am here because I have nothing to lose. I have worked in the industry. I am now out of that, and I'm very glad to be here for this, but a lot of women felt the same—just fear.

Q348 **Kim Johnson:** We have heard about that same issue during this inquiry. Thank you for that response.

Rebecca, in 2021 the then Culture Secretary met with you in response to your concerns about discrimination and misogyny in music. Since then, do you feel that the Government have made adequate progress to tackle discrimination in the industry?

Rebecca Ferguson: I would say so, yes. I think the roundtable meetings that were set up did definitely improve the industry, and I know that a lot of the labels—Sony, for instance—set up things so that people who were struggling with mental health issues or were just generally struggling in the industry could go to somebody independently, and Sony was paying for them to receive help. I do think it pushed the industry to do better. I don't know if it's enough, though. I know that CIISA has been set up; I was really vocal in trying to push that through and that is going ahead, which is amazing, but I think that there should be somebody—maybe from DCMS or someone from the Government who sits on top of that, maybe a bit like Ofcom. It should be governed by Government, because a lot of the funding for these regulators comes from the industry and the amount of power the industry has worries me. CIISA is amazing and I back that 100% but I think we should add one more layer of protection.

Q349 **Kim Johnson:** Thanks, Rebecca. We will touch on CIISA later. Annie, we saw what happened with the #MeToo movement, addressing sexual

harassment in the film industry. Do you think something needs to happen in the same way within the music industry to expose and challenge those at the highest levels who are perpetrating these issues and acts?

Annie Macmanus: I think there needs to be some sort of a shift in women feeling like they are able to speak out without their careers being compromised, but I don't know how that can happen. I feel like there are a lot of revelations that have not been exposed. Even just from the conversations I have had for today—it is infuriating to hear the amount of women who have buried and carried with them their stories of sexual assault. It is just unbelievable. If something were to happen—if one person were to speak who had enough profile so that it got media attention—there could definitely be a tidal wave.

I watched the hearing you had with the label executives. I spoke to a few different label employees, and the general feeling was one of frustration, after watching what had been said. It was very much like those executives were toeing the company line. The people I spoke to felt infuriated to the point where they wanted me to say this here—to say that they did not experience a lot of what these women were saying.

One thing that came up quite a lot was the experience of being used for their gender: they would be pulled into pitches, photoshoots or meeting rooms, because the company did not have enough women and they had to show they had women to try to win a deal. They also felt like they were not heard when speaking up with regards to things like misogyny, and that women—young women especially—were always pushed to be sexualised. This was coming from men in their 40s who had opinions on what they should be wearing, what make-up they should be wearing and that kind of stuff. I just wanted to say here that people were frustrated with that meeting.

Q350 **Chair:** Can I just interject on that? Did you feel that that session was—I am going to use an offensive term—"pinkwashed", and that the record label sent us a bunch of women just for the optics?

Annie Macmanus: Yes, I did. When I spoke to Hasan, I asked, "What happened with the label heads?" thinking that it would be the guys, so I was really surprised when it was women. You know, these women are doing their best, and clearly they are trying to implement change in what they are doing, but I just felt like I wish someone had given the real talk and said, "This is a real problem and I've seen it." The changes that we are describing are so recent. They are talking as if everything is fine, but the changes are still only a year or two old. I felt frustrated, I have to say.

Q351 **Chair:** Is the stark reality that if those women had been more candid with us, they would have been putting themselves in the firing line?

Annie Macmanus: I don't think so, because if their bosses are as progressive and feminist as they are trying to convey, they should have been able to tell the truth. I mean, Natasha was quite real at times. But, you know, you could see it even in the first question you asked them, which was about Emily Eavis and the Glastonbury line-up; of course labels

are not signing enough women—it is woeful. Why can't they just say that's true, instead of being like, "Well, I think you'll find it's 32%"? Just be honest. The reason they are not signing up women is because all the artists and repertoire people who sign and scout artists are men. I know that Universal are trying to change and have schemes, but I just felt a bit frustrated watching that.

Chair: Thank you. Kim, are you done?

Kim Johnson: Thank you, Chair, and thank you, Rebecca and Annie, for your responses to my questions.

Q352 **Kate Osborne:** Can I start by thanking you both for being here? It was upsetting and difficult to read your evidence, particularly Rebecca's. I think you are very brave and courageous to come here and give your evidence today, and I hope that it makes a difference and that you get some comfort in doing that.

My first question is to Annie. Major record labels have told us that, although they are trying to diversify, their rosters of artists remain up to two thirds male. How much do you think that this contributes to the abundance of misogynistic lyrics?

Annie Macmanus: I think it is dangerous to start singling out misogynistic lyrics. There is violence against women in all different forms of art, and that reflects society. There are undoubtedly misogynistic lyrics in music, and you see the objectification of women all the time in music videos. I think the answer is just equality. Having more women or non-binary people on your line-up will mean that you have more voices and more perspectives and be more representative of society. It is about pushing for equality. I suppose in answer to your question—a very long-winded answer—if you had a more equal roster, I think you would have less misogynistic lyrics.

Q353 **Kate Osborne:** Thank you. Rebecca, the same question, please.

Rebecca Ferguson: When it comes to misogynistic lyrics, again, I echo what Annie says. It reflects society, and I think it starts in the schools—that women should be respected and that certain words should not be used against women. Some of the misogynistic lyrics that are used within some forms of music then do directly impact culture. It affects how men treat women, and it affects their perception of women. If there were more women in certain areas, in certain spaces, there would be less misogynistic lyrics—definitely. But it starts at school. I think we should be teaching the youth very early how women should be talked to, spoken of and how women should be respected.

Q354 **Kate Osborne:** Thank you. You have both touched on my next question, which was around how misogynistic lyrics contribute to the normalisation of misogyny in society. Why do you think that it is so prevalent?

Annie Macmanus: Misogyny in society?

Kate Osborne: In music.

Annie Macmanus: First, it is prevalent across the board.

Kate Osborne: Within music?

Annie Macmanus: In music, I don't know. I actually don't know the answer to that. I don't think it is any more prevalent in music than it is in gaming or in other forms of culture. But, again, there is a disproportionate amount of male voices. I am not saying that all males are misogynistic, by any stretch, but you then have a chance for the ones who are to be able to be heard more.

Q355 **Kate Osborne:** Thank you. Did you want to come in on that one, Rebecca?

Rebecca Ferguson: I just echo what I said previously, really. I feel like it is so prevalent in music because it is so prevalent within society, unfortunately. Women continuously have to suffer things that we should not have to, and it seems that, throughout society, there is not the respect for women that there should be. I think a lot of the people creating this music are just echoing what they are seeing within society, and because there is no one telling them actually that that is going to affect culture. Maybe, if there was more awareness that their music and words have power, their words would be less misogynistic. As artists, we should be able to express ourselves freely but, equally, should be aware of the youth that we are influencing.

Q356 **Kate Osborne:** Thank you. Annie, record label executives told us that their criteria for deciding whether to sign an artist are exactly the same for men and women. Do you think that is true?

Annie Macmanus: No. Well, you can't really generalise; I can't speak for everyone. I have not ever worked in a record label; I have only ever looked at this from the outside, so I don't know how qualified I am to speak on it. But it is undeniable that how a woman looks is going to come into whether she is signed. It is also important to remember this. Obviously, men, male artists, have grooming—they get their concealer on and get their hair done. But when it comes to female artists, there are extra costs involved, with nails, hair, styling—men get styled too—and make-up. I can imagine—I could not confirm this as a fact—that that is a considerable extra cost when you are hiring someone, when you are signing someone. So yes, I think that what they are saying is a little tenuous.

Q357 **Kate Osborne:** Thank you. Rebecca, can you tell us what your experiences are with regard to the differing criteria for signing female artists compared with male artists? Have you seen any improvements at all?

Rebecca Ferguson: I would say that over the years, there has been a slight shift, but not completely. When I entered the music industry in 2010, it was very focused on—the criterion for women was to look a certain way. There is absolutely no doubt about that. Even your size was an issue. You would get put on diets at times. That wasn't necessarily

coming from the record label, but managers would say, "Oh, she's put a bit of weight on," and then they would get the people who look after you—maybe the tour manager—to bring in salads that they want you to eat. So how you look definitely is very important—compared with men—in the music industry.

As well as that, I would say that there seems to be an over-sexualisation of women—especially of black women, actually. I have noticed that, and I was very conscious of that when I entered the industry. People definitely do want you to become more sexualised, as it were. I noticed it was happening a lot to women—black women—in music and I didn't like it. I was very conscious of it, and I was therefore very conscious of how I dressed—very vintage, very conservative—more so because I didn't want young black women to think that that was the only example, that that was how people who look like me have to be. Not that there is anything wrong with a woman expressing her sexual identity—I just don't like it when it has been forced upon them by men.

Q358 **Kate Osborne:** Thank you. Annie, can I ask you the same question?

Annie Macmanus: Sorry, what was the question?

Kate Osborne: What are your experiences with regard to differing criteria for signing female artists compared with male artists?

Annie Macmanus: I don't think I can speak on that, I'm afraid. I'm not qualified; I just haven't been in those rooms.

Kate Osborne: That's fine. Thanks very much.

Q359 **Chair:** Annie, can I take you back to the issue of the record company executives? I don't want to labour a point here, but they used a term when they were talking about their rosters—"frontline artist". Subsequent to the hearing, people said to me that this was a way they were massaging the figures and they had effectively almost made up the term "frontline artist", which nobody really recognised as a term, in order to make it look like they had more women. Would you have any comment on that?

Annie Macmanus: Yes, I think it is probably the case that that happened. I don't know the specifics, technically, of what they would have done, but I can imagine they may have taken out the singles—signing for single records—and just taken that out fully, so frontline artists are signed for whole albums or that kind of thing: longer deals. That is complete conjecture, but I can imagine it would be very easy to extricate that.

Chair: Thank you for that.

Q360 **Bell Ribeiro-Addy:** I want to join my colleagues in saying thanks to both of you for being here today and being brave enough to speak about this. It is extremely important.

I want to take you back to some comments you made to my colleague Kate earlier because I want to ask some questions about expectations on

women. Rebecca, I think you had started with the discussion about the expectations on black women. There is an organisation called Black Lives in Music, which has described exactly what you have. Black women in music feel as if they were being oversexualised and objectified as women of colour. They also felt the industry was only investing in black women who they felt could be oversexualised. We have gone on to hear more evidence that black women in music feel that they must change something about themselves to be accepted, like lightening their skin or changing their name. Have you felt any such pressure in your own career?

Rebecca Ferguson: Yes, I definitely did feel it. I felt like with my clothes, especially very early on in the industry, people really wanted to control what I wore—they really wanted to control it. It was odd, because at the time, when I entered the industry, I had my own style. The way I dress is quite conservative and that is just how I like to dress, but people definitely wanted to change that and wanted to maybe make me more sexualised. Often, they do that to get more appeal. As they say, sex sells. So yes, I definitely did feel that people tried to micromanage my image and you definitely did feel like you were—I don't know—just like a pawn in people's games, as it were. It is almost as if your body was not your own.

There would be times when I would be in tears. You would have to do stylist fittings if you had a promo tour happening and you had a single to promote. I remember being in tears because people were saying, "This looks good on you," and I was saying, "I don't want to wear that; I don't feel comfortable." So yes, I have definitely experienced it and I think that a lot of black women in music experience it. But maybe not just black women; I think women in general experience it. They want to mould the women to be what is going to sell.

Q361 **Bell Ribeiro-Addy:** Thank you. You also touched on female artists having their weight monitored by label staff. We have had evidence that that is done to the extent that they are regularly weighed and measured. Is that something that you had heard of or seen, in terms of an invasive practice that happens quite often?

Rebecca Ferguson: Personally, I never saw anyone actually being weighed. You would not actually be measured. What would happen is that people celebrated when you had lost a lot of weight. So it would be more about when you had lost weight, it would be "Oh wow, look!" A lot of the time, they wanted you to get sample sizes from the designers and so you would be encouraged to be a sample size, which from memory is around a size six—a size zero to a size six from memory. I remember going to a photo shoot and I fit into a skirt. I think it was a Dolce&Gabbana fashion show, and it has just come off the runway. It was a skirt, and it was a size zero. I remember everyone in the room celebrating that I was a size zero and I remember thinking that that was really disturbing.

Also, when it comes to weight, you do not get time to eat because they keep you so busy that you are not even eating. Like I said in my written evidence, I would be constantly dizzy and constantly sick because I was not eating. Once, my security, Ian Alexander, flagged this and said, "She

hasn't eaten or had a drink, and it is 2 pm." They were like "Well, it's tough. She has interviews." So they find their ways to make sure you stay slim, I would say.

Q362 **Bell Ribeiro-Addy:** Annie, have you experienced that or witnessed comments about weight or strict weight monitoring of female artists?

Annie Macmanus: I am afraid I haven't, no. I can't answer that. I just haven't been in the rooms and I haven't been in the labels, so no.

Q363 **Bell Ribeiro-Addy:** You have already touched on the lack of women at the top of the industry and that reports have found that, in particular, there are no black women CEOs or chairs across the 12 separate trade bodies analysed by Women in CTRL's 2020 "Seat at the Table" report. We have even heard from the Musicians' Union that women have lost out on top jobs in certain organisations, because of concerns about how men would behave if a woman were introduced into that particular workforce. To what extent do you think that misogyny in music could be reduced by the inclusion of more women, including women of colour, in senior leadership positions?

Annie Macmanus: I think hugely. So many of the stories I have heard in the past week have been about men who are unable to maintain a professional relationship. It is the men who are not able to stay professional; the woman suffers, because she either loses her job for rebuffing a man, or she loses her job for being unprofessional and doing anything with a man. I feel that a lot of the time, women are very trapped in scenarios.

With regard to senior positions, absolutely that would make a difference. The global executives who come in are doing their best to employ and uplift women. That is a good thing. As a person who had power in the industry for a while—I had my own festival, I put on conferences and I created line-ups all the time—I always made a point, especially in the later years, of ensuring that I had women in the line-up. It is kind of an instinctive thing—you want to do that and you want to hear from other women. I think that having more women, and of course women of colour, in senior positions would undoubtedly make a difference.

It is interesting that there is a little bit of a generational discrepancy, which I felt from people. Some of the younger women coming through have different views of what is okay and what is not okay for a woman. For example, some women might have worked in the industry for 20 or 30 years, and have lived through all of that, having to be tough and go through it, but I sense from some of the label employees that they feel that their bosses might not be quite as sympathetic as their contemporaries would be about certain things. That is an interesting situation, but in general more women in the boardroom would make for a more equal industry, definitely.

Q364 **Bell Ribeiro-Addy:** Thank you. Rebecca, would you agree?

Rebecca Ferguson: Yes, I definitely agree—definitely diversify the boardrooms. Just make sure that everyone can see somebody who looks like them, so that they feel represented. As has been said, it is like an old boys' club, and a few at the top are very powerful. We should diversify them a little, and perhaps get in some younger people. I would recommend getting in some of the younger generation, because some of them have a different mindset, and they do not tolerate what we tolerated—they are free thinking and accepting.

With more youthful people sitting on the board to mix it up a little, there would be more modern views. Some things come from an archaic mindset—the way things were done way back when is not how things need be done now. Personally, I know that a lot of the people I dealt with when I was in the industry had been in the industry for decades. They were about 65 years of age, while at the time I was early 20s—23. A lot of those things might not have happened had they had a more modern mindset. They were set in the old ways of how to treat women—not that that was ever acceptable, but I feel that times have changed a lot and people need to be retrained now on how to treat women.

Annie Macmanus: May I add something to that? I remember having a conversation with a young guy at a label, who had just told me that his new boss was a woman. I think she had been appointed to be the boss at a label at Universal Records. He told me how the atmosphere within the company had changed. Often, it feels from the outside that we have bidding wars—there is a kind of egotistical foundation to signing artists sometimes, of men trying to outdo each other—and he implied that the atmosphere in the company had become very different, in that this boss had encouraged everyone to be really collaborative. Instead of pitting people against each other, she had encouraged them to work together, and he said how much nicer an environment that was. I think that would really ripple across everything with regard to the artist as well. If your team is knitted tightly and they are all aligned, and are all with each other, and are not trying to outdo each other, that is going to make for a better experience for the artist.

Bell Ribeiro-Addy: Thank you.

Q365 **Chair:** Annie, can I take you back to your opening statement? You made a comment about having a female management team.

Annie Macmanus: Yes.

Chair: How unusual is that, or was that?

Annie Macmanus: I think that having a manager and an assistant and an agent who were all female was definitely quite unusual, yes. There is always women. You can always go, "Oh, there's your one, who's quite high up there in Live Nation, or your one who's quite high up over there." But they are always an anomaly, so to have a kind of cluster of women, including female artists—yes, it did feel quite unusual.

Q366 **Chair:** And how much difference did that make to you?

Annie Macmanus: A huge amount of difference. I felt really protected. My main manager for most of my career was incredibly conscientious and had really good attention to detail, so I really felt protected in that every aspect of what I did was looked after. I didn't feel like I was put in situations, although maybe there were some in my early days, when I was a DJ and trying to start out; I would tour America on my own, and I'd be coming out into Philadelphia airport, praying that the promoter would show up, and was getting paid in bundles of cash—$10 notes at the end of a night. I look back and I'm like, "Oh my God! That was so silly." But you're in a situation where you can't afford—you're not in a position to afford—a tour manager.

But I think in general, as I said, I've been incredibly lucky. Having these conversations has made me realise that even more. There is a huge surge of young female DJs coming through, which is amazing. The hope is that in five or 10 years they will be headlining festivals. A lot of your festival promoters or whatever—labels—will say that the bottom tiers of every festival line-up are chock-full of women, so hopefully they will then be headlining.

I feel like it's really unregulated at the moment for young female DJs. They are travelling about, they have no security and they have no tour managers. They are not believed that they are the DJs; a lot of the time they have to persuade the security guard to let them into the club. There is no protection for them in the booth—anyone can walk in. Most of all, they work till 4, 5, 6 in the morning, and the promoters or whatever are not prepared to pay for their travel. There is no understanding of the fact that it is not safe for a woman to travel home at that time of night. They constantly have to fight for their own rights when it comes to being safe and a lot of the time they don't get those.

Q367 **Chair:** Can I take you back to something you said that I thought was really interesting and perhaps a little bit revealing about women in line-ups? You said, "Especially in the later years."

Annie Macmanus: Yes.

Chair: Is the ability to support and promote women something that happens with seniority, with success, with maturity?

Annie Macmanus: Definitely, with regards to being able to physically help people and uplift them on a career level. My personal experience was that I was always the only girl in the line-up. A lot of the time, I was the only girl in the dressing room or backstage. My manager would have been with me a lot of the time, but I was the only artist who was a female.

That was just the way it was. I never really questioned that, because at the beginning there was a sense of curiosity about me, I suppose. It was kind of like, "Who is this girl?" And I felt like I had more to prove. But equally, there were a lot of women who would come to the shows and my audiences felt different to everyone else's, and it was quite exciting.

It wasn't until a few years in—life was crazy—that I started thinking, "This isn't okay". I actually remember the first time that I emailed a promoter back, because I got asked to DJ on a line-up and they sent me the festival line-up, and the first female name was 11 rows down. I remember going, "This isn't okay". And this is at the point when I felt like I could say that. I knew those promoters; they were contemporaries of mine. They would get quite defensive, saying, "Well, there isn't any other woman. I tried for her; she couldn't do it"—because there was such a small pool.

But I suppose my argument, which has been honed over the years, is that if you really want to—if you set out from the very start to have fair representation on your line-ups, and you are really conscientious about doing that—I believe that you can. I mean, I've done it. I have proven it at my own festival—an electronic music festival, where there is a bigger pool of women. I do not mean headliners, because there is a small pool, but, across a line-up, we know it is possible to do that and it has been done. We have the Keychange initiative—I do not know if you guys are aware of that—which is trying to persuade festivals to do that, and a lot of independent festivals have managed to, but a lot of the major ones do not and continue not to.

Q368 **Chair:** I suppose they would make the excuse that there are not enough female artists, but they are not getting signed in the first place, so it is a vicious circle.

Annie Macmanus: Exactly. As Emily Eavis said, the pipeline is not there. But you do not have to be signed as a DJ. You can be an independent DJ, and you can release music on your own labels. I think it is easier to progress as a DJ. It is quite interesting. In dance music, it has become quite progressive when it comes to equality. It's not there yet, but it's doing better.

Q369 **Chair:** A couple of times you have used the phrase, "It's not there yet, but it's getting better." In five years or maybe 10 years—how long should we be prepared to wait?

Annie Macmanus: Ideally, no time. It is happening too slowly, in my opinion, and I find it very depressing seeing line-ups come round every year. There is an awareness now, so the bookers cannot ignore it. They have to be held to account. But the fact of the matter is that, for all the major festivals in the UK, the only female booker is Emily Eavis. Every other festival is booked by a man. Yes, he may have female assistants, but it is the same as labels. You have all these female execs, but all their top bosses are men. We need top bosses. We need a woman to run a live promotions company that is the size of Festival Republic or Live Nation. You need women at that level. In order to get them to that level, they need to be able to feel like it is an industry that they can stay in and where they can be safe, have the menopause, have kids, have maternity leave and still progress.

Q370 **Jackie Doyle-Price:** Can I start with you, Rebecca? You have previously said that when you tried to speak out about racism in the industry, doors

were closed. Why do you think that is?

Rebecca Ferguson: I think the doors get closed because the people at the heart of it do not want to be exposed, really. That is why the doors get closed. As well as that, there is this weird sense that people want to be associated with the known perpetrators in the industry, because they know that those known perpetrators are also powerful. One example is that my live agents, CAA, were representing the boyband One Direction. At the time, they were told to not give me any live work. They said, "You won't be able to represent One Direction if you don't do this to her." I would say there is a lot of blackmail and bribery, which I have personally experienced. You get blocked and people stop you from performing: "Don't give her any gigs if she speaks out. Stop her from doing gigs." I was told by one promoter that the words used are, "Take them out of circulation." That means they do not get any more work. If the phone rings, you do not say that they can do that job.

I would say that is the reason, really: people use bribery and blackmail. People do not want to be exposed, and these people are very powerful and often have very narcissistic personality traits. That is what I have experienced, anyway. They do not like to be called to account, and they certainly felt very disgruntled by me—at that time, a young 23-year-old girl from Liverpool who is mixed race. They felt like they were above me, and it was: "How dare she challenge us? How dare she think that she can break away from us?" That has been my experience.

Q371 **Jackie Doyle-Price:** Do you think it is widespread that people just ignore the fact that they are being victims of racism in the industry and choose not to speak out, for all the reasons you have outlined about wanting to get on?

Rebecca Ferguson: I think so—definitely, yeah. I shouldn't name him because he is quite a powerful guy, but I was asked to sing for a President and the person who wanted me to go and sing for that President was like, "He only wants you because you're black." In the end, because these people are so powerful, you just have to put up with it. You don't really have a way out. I felt like there was no way out for me. Who would I go to? There is no regulator where I can go and report what he said to me. There is literally no way out.

Q372 **Jackie Doyle-Price:** Both of you have made reference to the extent of sexual violence that is prevalent in the industry. I will start with you, Annie. Have you ever experienced or witnessed any sexual misconduct by anyone in the industry?

Annie Macmanus: No, I haven't, but I can talk about something that I was told by an employee of a label, who spoke to me about an incident that was reported in the news. An A&R man who worked for Universal Records was known to be having a relationship with the youngest member of a girl band that he signed. She was 19 and he was 36, I think. He was their A&R executive. He had all the power over them and was developing them as an act. A lot of people at the label knew about it. Apparently, it was widely known both internally and externally that this was happening—

that this guy with a duty of care to protect this girl band was having a relationship with one of them—and nothing was done. Nothing was done until an article came out in the *Daily Mail,* after which the guy got fired. But it wasn't until the article came out that something was done, and I think a lot of people at the time were upset about the fact that nothing was done until it had to be done.

Q373 **Jackie Doyle-Price:** So everyone looks the other way.

Annie Macmanus: Yes. There is an element of protection for the man, I suppose.

Q374 **Jackie Doyle-Price:** That is characteristic of a sector where women are vulnerable. How about you, Rebecca? Have you ever experienced or witnessed sexual misconduct?

Rebecca Ferguson: On sexual misconduct, I have received a lot of letters from women. One woman wrote to me about a very horrific, violent rape by some of the people who I have also had to deal with.

In my personal experience, someone very senior was sending me very expensive gifts. I was only 23 and they were very, very powerful in music. They were sending bags and things to the house. People from the label were conscious of it, and also my day-to-day manager. I said, "I've received this bag. What should I do? What am I going to do with this?" And they would say, "Rebecca, do not reply to him." I was like, "Okay, but isn't that bad because he is so senior?" I was so naive and innocent back then. Anyone who has seen me on telly knows that I was a totally different woman then than I am today.

I said, "Do we not even thank him? What do we do?" I wasn't conscious of what he was doing. They turned to me and said, "No, Rebecca, he is trying to groom you. He's sending you these gifts because he is trying to groom you. Why else would he be sending you a handbag? You don't just randomly send that to one of your artists." She said, "Just completely ignore him and completely blank him," which I did. But how are you to have a working relationship with someone so senior? He's sending you these gifts and you're just completely blanking him.

There are plenty of times when you are placed in situations where you are being compromised and where people abuse their power. As well as that, the thing that worries me the most is the rapes that go unreported. What concerns me the most is the fact that women feel that they can't speak up. One lady contacted me and said, "I've wanted to do this my entire life. He's so powerful. If I speak up against him, I will never work in this industry ever again."

That worries me, because that is a violent rapist going unreported, who can then go on to rape other people. It concerns me that music has got that bad that rape is not being reported, and therefore we have criminality operating in the industry. How many victims are there? How many people are silent because they are scared they will never work again? In a sense, people are being forced into servitude. That's what I feel like, anyway.

Q375 **Jackie Doyle-Price:** In your experience, though, you had people looking out for you and giving you some degree of protection, but at no point did they ever try to hold that individual to account. There was no reporting of it.

Rebecca Ferguson: That would never happen. They were so senior. There is not a chance they would have lost their job. It would never have happened. That person is so senior within entertainment—one of the most senior I've spoken about today. It was actually two women who were advising me at the time. The men were saying nothing in my team. It was the two women who spoke up. Had they contacted him and said, "What are you up to?", I strongly believe that they wouldn't have worked again.

Q376 **Jackie Doyle-Price:** I'm really grateful for your honesty, but this is making me very angry. Have you ever been made to feel that accepting someone's unwelcome sexual advances would have advanced your career?

Rebecca Ferguson: I think, 100%, had I played the game, accepted that man's gifts and replied to his emails, my career would be in a much different place. I 100% believe that. It is sad that some women might have felt that they have had to do things they didn't want to do. I know that each person is responsible for making their own decisions in life, but women should never be placed in a position where top bosses are trying to groom them, and in their head they're thinking, "Am I ever going to work again if I don't accept his advances?" It's a shame that people have ever been placed in that position.

Q377 **Jackie Doyle-Price:** Annie, have you ever been made to feel that your career would have been advanced if you'd accepted someone's unwelcome sexual advances?

Annie Macmanus: Thankfully, no. I am very grateful that I haven't been put in that position.

I will tell you a story about a young female photographer who shared her story with me for today. She was employed by the management company of an up-and-coming male artist to photograph him on tour. Already that is an unprofessional environment—being on tour with a male artist and his band who are all male, and it means sharing a tour bus with them. When you think about it, it's so mad, because she is going there as a professional photographer, but in order to do her job well she has to get on with the man in question; she has to be able to keep up with the banter on the tour bus, take the piss and give it back and all that. She said that she did that for the first three weeks; she's a gregarious girl, she was able to keep up with it and everyone liked her, and he was really nice to her and liked the photos.

Then, about three weeks into the tour, the artist started to become quite emotionally abusive and tell her that her photos were not good enough, and he threatened to sack her in front of people. That happened consistently, so she started to lose her confidence and to be mentally affected. In the end, he confessed to her one drunken night that he

fancied her—and she didn't fancy him back, and she got fired straight after the tour and has never worked for the label again.

Her thing—the point she spoke to me about—is that she couldn't have won. If she had gone with him, she would have been fired for being unprofessional, and she didn't want to go with him anyway. Thus, he didn't want her around. Hearing her story, it struck me just how unbelievably vulnerable she was; she was getting paid so little money to be there. It was a way to progress her career. She was doing a really big part of trying to convey his personality to the world and boost his social media, which she really did—she said his social media went right up really fast. She felt like she was playing a big part in that and doing it well, and then she just lost all her confidence. It took her a long time to get back into it, and now she only works for women because she doesn't want to have to go through that again. But that obviously limits the boundaries of what she can do.

Jackie Doyle-Price: How depressing.

Annie Macmanus: Yes, very.

Q378 **Chair:** Can I ask the flip of that? If she will only work for women, is there a danger that the opportunities then head to male photographers—we will use photography as an example because that is the one we have— and that you end up with even more all-male environments, because women are opting out of it as they do not want to be in that situation?

Annie Macmanus: I think so; I think you are right. We need to look at the basic level of what happened to that girl. She is a young freelance photographer. She has no regulatory system. She did not have any awareness of anyone she could call for advice or legal advice. She had no manager. She had no team. I do not think she should have been put on the tour bus in the first place. She is so vulnerable in that position. It is a distinctly unprofessional environment being on a tour bus. You cannot maintain professionalism there. People are getting hammered every night—it's all over the gaff. For her to be put on that, there should have been some sort of regulations in place, and people should have been spoken to, to even try to make it work. But given the very nature of the job she was doing, all the odds were stacked against her. I don't blame her for wanting to work with women after that. I don't know what the answer is—have more women artists, maybe?

Q379 **Chair:** Rebecca, in your written evidence you made some comments about CIISA and the important role that you feel it could play, and you also referred to it in your opening statement. I want to dig a bit into whether you think CIISA, as it is currently set up, goes far enough. You referred to there being no reporting mechanism and no regulation. We know that CIISA is going to have the power to name and shame but not a lot more than that.

Rebecca Ferguson: No, and I believe that there should be accountability. There needs to be something introduced into CIISA so that there is

accountability. That is what worries me the most—there does not seem to be any accountability.

I think it would help if people were licensed, much like football has the PFA, and a lot of the agents have to have a licence. I will use my husband as an example, because he is a football agent and a cricket agent. He has to sit exams, and if he fails them, he is not able to represent his players. The exams will ask various, very detailed questions, and in order for him to be a manager, he has to know these things, to make sure he is treating his players well. Music does not have that, and I find that really concerning and very odd.

It concerns me that every time there is any potential change in music—for instance, Kevin Brennan's Bill was going to ensure that music artists are paid better—and whenever anything looks like it is on the cusp of changing so that we are getting treated more fairly, the music industry appear to lobby the Government. I personally don't know what they say, but I get the sense that they lobby the Government and get people to stand up at Westminster and say, "Musicians don't need that. They don't need the extra money" and so on. That worries me.

People need to start seeing musicians and people within the music industry as human beings. There seems to be this fantasy that people who create music are living this amazing life. Actually, if you look at the Winchester University report, you will see that there are some awful things that people are having to suffer when they go into work every day—they are having to deal with bullying, harassment, sexual assault and so on.

The Government really need to step up. Where people are trying to make legislative change, like Kevin Brennan was, they need to listen, and they need to start putting musicians and artists at the top of the pile. Yes, the record labels serve their purpose, and managers serve their purpose, and I am not saying that they should not be respected, but the people creating the music should be at the top.

Q380 **Chair:** Do you think there is a perception problem? Early on in your evidence, you said that the average earning for a musician is £14,000 a year, and yet there is a perception that you are all earning millions. Is part of the challenge that there is an assumption that your income is very high and therefore you are in some way protected from these sorts of abuses?

Rebecca Ferguson: I do think that. There is a misconception, but I would add that it is not that a gross amount of money isn't being earned. There are millions and millions of pounds being earned, but that is not going to the artists, which is odd. For instance, some footballers will get paid a couple of hundred thousand a week, just to play football. What is odd about music is that the musician is receiving pennies. It is the oddest thing. It is almost as if, "You get to be on the telly. People get to know your name. Here's a penny. Take the crust and we'll take the rest of the loaf," as it were. That's what it strikes me as. I find it really odd that, decades on, this is being allowed. It is so strange. It is like servitude. How

is it that the creator is generating billions and is only receiving, for instance—I don't want to name the band, but it is a very famous band—

Chair: Please don't.

Rebecca Ferguson: Do you want me to name them?

Chair: No, don't. Let's not name anyone at any point.

Rebecca Ferguson: Okay. There is a very famous band—a household name—and in their recording contract they receive only around 10%. If the public were aware of that they would be so shocked, because they are so famous and, on the surface, seem so wealthy. How is it that the record label is taking 90% of the earnings? That would not happen in any other industry. You are creating the product but taking only 10%. For that you get the ability of people to know your name and to sit on television.

The whole mechanism is odd to me. I think it is at the point now where the Government cannot continue to ignore it, especially as AI is now coming to the surface. That is the next big thing that is going to take over. That £14,000 is going to get even less, if we don't change the model of the music industry and ensure that creators are looked after and paid fairly.

Q381 **Elliot Colburn:** I echo my colleagues in thanking you both for coming in today. I would like to ask some questions around live music events and festivals. I will start with Annie. The first obvious question, given the conversations we've been having today, is whether you have personally felt unsafe, or have spoken to other artists, DJs, women in the industry, who have felt unsafe performing or working at live music events or festivals?

Annie Macmanus: Yes, a lot of the feedback I got from people I spoke to, especially DJs, was a general sense of feeling unsafe, of being a lone girl in an environment that a lot of the time is being run by men, where men have the venue, a man is the promoter, and all of that. The sound engineer is a man. Yes, is the answer.

One story in particular struck me. A young girl was trying to put on events and went to the venue where she was promoting the event. She went there early and realised they did not have a table to put the decks on. She spoke to the venue owner to say she needed a table for the decks. He called her some horrific words, basically verbally abused her badly. When the two 50-year-old men she had booked to come and DJ came in and asked for a table, of course, they got one immediately.

That is emblematic of what happens consistently to women, young women trying to make a career in dance music and at live events. There is a sense that they do not know what they are doing. There is a sense that they do not understand the tech. I know every female who is a DJ who hears this would agree that time and again sound engineers lean over you, take up your personal space and start fiddling with the volume. They don't even ask, they just lean in and start fiddling, as if you don't know what

you're doing. That has happened to me countless times. I know that they don't do that to men because I have watched.

There is that kind of thing. There is a general sense of women not knowing what they are doing, or not being taken seriously. Also, young female managers are just not believed. They are not believed to be the managers. They are not believed that they could be running anyone's career. They come to events and festivals and are not allowed in, for instance. They are not allowed to stand on the stage—stuff like that.

Q382 **Elliot Colburn:** Some of the other evidence we took as part of this inquiry, including from the Musicians' Union, described a lack of facilities and structural support at these sorts of events. Do you recognise that description? Is that something you have come across or that people have told you about?

Annie Macmanus: Yes. A lot of these places do not have a dressing room. You only get a dressing room if you are a certain level of DJ. You are having to get changed in portaloos. It is not ideal. I don't think that helps, but I don't think that is a cause for it. You cannot attribute there not being enough women in line ups to that; I think it is much bigger than that, and I think it is all to do with the fact that women are not booking festivals and women are not being signed.

Q383 **Elliot Colburn:** I would like to delve into that in a bit more detail, but I would like to bring you in first on those same questions, Rebecca. Have you felt unsafe at live music events or festivals?

Rebecca Ferguson: I have never actually felt unsafe at a festival, if I am honest. The only time I have felt unsafe—I stated this in my written evidence—was as a result of actual threats that I have received. That affected how I was outside of the house; I was very fearful. But I have never experienced anything at a festival. That is just my experience, but I know from working with the Ivors Academy and other women in music that my experience is not the same as other women's experience.

Q384 **Elliot Colburn:** You mentioned that, while the lack of facilities and support structures are a problem, they are not in and of themselves the main reason that we are seeing a lack of female representation in line ups. What do you think is the main cause behind that? You mentioned a festival earlier where the first female name was 11 names down. What do you think are some of the other factors that are making that a reality?

Annie Macmanus: I think it is that classic thing. What is it? Be the thing you wish to see? What is it?

Chair: You can't be what you can't see.

Annie Macmanus: Thank you, Caroline. It is that thing. Going to festivals and seeing only men all day is going to go into young girls' heads. That is going to be put in their heads whether you like it or not. They will not feel like there is a place for them on that stage.

It is undeniable that a lot of young Billie Eilish-influenced artists are coming through on the back of the existence of Billie Eilish and the fact that she is able to wear baggy clothes and dress exactly how she wants, and that feels like such a huge step in the right direction. Billie Eilish is managed by her parents. She is very protected and she is very precociously clever and smart—I am not insinuating that this doesn't happen to you if you are not, but she is in a unique position to be allowed to be herself. That, to me, is an example that shows that it can be done.

The more Billie Eilishes, Lizzos, Taylor Swifts and Adeles, the more people will be forced to admit that women can sell tickets. That is what has come to me over and over again over the years: "We don't have any headliners that will sell tickets. We are a business; we need to sell tickets." People have to invest in the bottom line. They have to invest in women from an early age. They have to allow women to have a real sense of independence as an artist, to understand how the business works and to understand how the music works, and ideally to understand how to produce music so that they are not at the whim of male producers.

There is so much work to be done, but ultimately it is about investing in young women at the start of their career and giving them a safe, protected way to progress through the industry where they have someone to call and, if they need legal advice, they can get it. There is always a period, I suppose—your first five years when you are starting out when maybe you don't have a manager or an agent and you are trying to get one. I think that is when you are probably at your most vulnerable, and you have no one fighting your cause. I could talk about it for hours. It is hard to pinpoint.

Q385 **Elliot Colburn:** You raise a really poignant—but, as Jackie was saying, depressing—situation. You mentioned artists like Billie Eilish and Taylor Swift. I have to admit that I didn't know a lot about the music industry and the way that artists were paid until Taylor Swift became so vocal and started re-recording her back catalogue. I didn't realise that she didn't control what she produced. I suppose that feeds in to the earlier question about whether we need a #MeToo movement for the music industry, similar to that of the movie industry.

On festivals and live music events, Glastonbury had no female headliners this year—we heard that in evidence quite a lot—yet we had representations from music festivals that had managed to find an equal roster. I think the evidence that we received on that was from Spain. Why do you think it is that some people are managing to do it—you have spoken of your own experience of putting on these events—but events like Glastonbury seem unable to? Is it literally just the will of the people who are organising them?

Annie Macmanus: No, I don't think it is in that case, because I know for a fact that Emily Eavis has strong intentions, as much as she can. It kind of makes me cross that she gets so much flak for that when she has championed very hard to try to support women and sign women for Glastonbury. I wish I had come here armed with the actual statistic of how

many women were on the line-up for Glastonbury—the ratio—because that would be good to know. If anyone can get that, that would be really good. The focus is always on the headliners, but then, if you zoom out, she has, I can imagine, made a very big effort to make sure there is parity in the line-up at large. I know that there is a will from her.

You are booking these artists a year in advance and there are always conditions upon which you would book an artist; they have to have an album campaign or something that they are promoting. They have to be at a certain level—your pool gets much, much smaller. They have to want to do it and be available to do it—much, much smaller again. She will be thinking of headliners two, three or four years ahead, and the other thing that you can never account for is if someone pulls out. We don't know what happened behind the scenes, but I trust that she will have done her utmost to make that work.

I kind of feel cross on her behalf that she has had to defend herself so much, but, you know, fair, because it is good to bring the conversation forward and make it public. You could look at Reading and Leeds festivals; I think they had a female headliner this year, but they hadn't in forever. There's TRNSMT festival, there's—there are so many festivals that just haven't done it in the past. I think it is about zooming out, as opposed to pinpointing one festival, and looking at the fundamental problem, which is that the companies that own the festivals are not investing enough in women moving through the company to a senior level and not giving them the power and autonomy to do their thing.

Elliot Colburn: Thank you both for your evidence.

Q386 **Chair:** In defence of Emily Eavis, we know that she bust a gut. We did give her the opportunity to come and give evidence to the Committee but she hasn't been available to do so. That offer remains open, because we know that she wanted to book female headliners. But, as you said, if you can't be what you can't see, you can't book what isn't available, can you?

Can I move on to non-disclosure agreements? We heard from the record label executives, who sought to reassure us that NDAs were not used here, yet Deborah Annetts gave us evidence earlier in this inquiry that NDAs have been used to silence allegations. I will give this a health warning—please, both of you, be very careful not to name anybody—but are either of you aware of NDAs being used in the UK, and of people being pressured to sign them? I will start with you, Rebecca.

Rebecca Ferguson: NDAs are very common in the music industry, and usually, they are obtained by using the British court system. A false claim will be brought against you and, as with all claims, you have to defend it. Defending a claim costs money, so you have to instruct solicitors to make a reply. They control the economic system; they control how much you earn. They know that you have to pay for these solicitors, so they then come to you and say, "You sign this NDA"—maybe a little apology as well—"and we will then get this pressure of this claim against you off."

That has happened to me twice, actually. One claim made against me was made from a shell company. The company did not even have a bank account; it is listed as having £1 in the bank on Companies House. They made a false claim against me and I was forced to defend it. They then said, "Well, if you just write all these things about me in a letter and sign this NDA, I will make that go away." Thankfully, the judge threw that case out, but I know that that is a tactic used in the industry to obtain NDAs. I don't know how we can stop that, but financial pressure is being placed on these women.

For instance, something happens to woman A and the perpetrator says, "She's going to speak. Okay, well I'll bring a false claim against her. Either way, she's going to have to defend it and that's going to cost her money, and then I'll just bring this NDA. She'll sign the NDA and that goes away." I don't know how we stop that in the industry. I'm not sure how that will ever be able to be quashed, but I know that that is what is being done.

I had to renegotiate a contract. The contract I entered into was entered into without independent legal advice. In order for me to get paid an extra 2% on my earnings, I had to renegotiate. They then said to me, "Here's an NDA." I actually received an apology for how I had been treated in the industry, but then they said, "But if you want to negotiate and you want 2% extra, you need to write this NDA. You can't tell anyone that I've apologised to you; you can't mention that meeting." So yes, NDAs are very prevalent, and they are used by people who have a lot of money to get their desired result.

Q387 **Chair:** We had a debate in this place recently about banning the use of NDAs. Should they be banned?

Rebecca Ferguson: I think so. If you have nothing to hide, why do you need an NDA? I understand it in terms of protecting commercial things—maybe a patent or something like that—but when it comes to how somebody has personally treated someone, I don't really understand why they would need an NDA. Well, I do understand why someone who is not behaving in a very good way would want an NDA, but if you have nothing to hide, why do you need an NDA? For instance, in my example, you have apologised to me and acknowledged that this is wrong, and now you don't want me to tell the world that you have apologised to me? It is a total abuse of power.

I don't like that the British court system is being used against women who are already victims and already being abused. They are using their money and power to use the British court system as a blackmail tool. That is what I flagged it as, and I am happy to share any documentation you like if it would help with recommendations. In my case, because the judge became aware of what was happening to me, it actually got thrown out of court. I am happy to provide you with that evidence as an example so that you can see how it is being used to obtain NDAs.

Q388 **Chair:** Thank you. Is it your impression that women in the music industry are more likely to be subject to NDAs than men?

Rebecca Ferguson: I would say 100%, because, for whatever reason, we are more vulnerable. We are placed in a much more vulnerable situation and the men in the music industry, at present, have more power. An NDA is very common. It is sad, because some people don't realise that they can speak regardless of an NDA, which I find interesting. As far as I am aware, where there has been criminal activity, an NDA doesn't stand. That is my knowledge of the law, but I could be wrong.

So many women end up being bound, not thinking that they can even go to the police. They think that they can't do anything because they have signed this piece of paper. A lot of people entering the industry, like me and the others who entered with me, are working-class kids just trying to change their lives. We didn't know a lot of the things we were entering into; we weren't completely conscious of these things. Again, I feel like it was exploitation and that they abused their powerful positions.

Q389 **Chair:** Annie, do you have anything you want to add to that?

Annie Macmanus: Nothing more than what Rebecca just said. I don't have any evidence of NDAs. One of the employees I spoke to at Universal Records said that they were aware that when you left Universal you did have to sign something saying that you wouldn't say anything bad about the label.

Q390 **Chair:** Indiscriminately? All employees leaving Universal?

Annie Macmanus: That is what they inferred. I don't have that as fact, though. I wouldn't be able to show you evidence of that, of course.

Chair: Thank you very much. Rebecca, we are going to finish the Zoom call in a moment, but you will have been emailed a Teams link, which I hope you have received. Can I thank both witnesses for your evidence this morning? It has been hugely appreciated.