



UK General Election

The case for a thriving theatre industry in the UK

The combined box office income of Society of London Theatre (SOLT) and UK Theatre's membership was more than **£1.28 billion** across London and the rest of the UK, **with 34 million tickets sold in 2018**. Theatre is one of the subsectors of the creative industries, which is worth £101.5 billion, growing at nearly twice the rate of the UK economy. As the world's leading theatre country, the success of the theatre and performing arts industry provides the UK with a creative competitive advantage and a valuable asset that must be protected and enhanced for the future.

The UK's theatre industry plays a key economic, social and place-making role. Theatre and the performing arts **make a powerful contribution to our society and to our national identity**. They make areas richer culturally and financially, and they make places more attractive to live and work. Much innovation takes place in the regions, for example HOME in Manchester was the first arts organisation (and therefore theatre) in the world to have 100% of staff trained in climate literacy.

Theatre is a **major UK export internationally (productions, staffing and licensing) and contributes to the UK's soft power**; from The Ferryman on Broadway, to English Touring Theatre's Othello at the Dubai Opera House, to the Curve theatre Leicester's production of Grease in Dubai, are just a few examples.

The West End is a **huge hit with visitors to the UK and London, with 2018 audiences exceeding 15.5m, and box office revenue of over £765m** – both record figures. London's theatres are a major tourism draw for international visitors. **Many popular shows, and the teams behind them, originated in regional theatre and through public investment**. Our talent creates some of the most recognisable and bankable international hits in film and TV, but all the initial support happens in theatre, for instance Phoebe Waller-Bridge and Fleabag or Peter Morgan and The Crown.

We are rightly proud in the UK of our dynamic and world leading theatre industry, and of the success of productions, actors and creative talent around the world. However, if we want to see our industry continue to thrive in ten or twenty years' time, **we need to make sure that we have the right skills in place, and that we are training and developing those working now, and attracting the right diverse mix of people for the future**.

In addition to a commitment to continued public funding of our sector, below we propose what the next government can do to help ensure the theatre and performing arts sector can contribute much to Britain's future prosperity, in terms of growth, talent development and international collaboration.

We ask you commit to the following:



Income generation



Talent development



International collaboration



1

Supporting new financial models and a bedrock of public funding

Our members are both commercial and subsidised, and everything else in-between: the theatre and performing arts sector is financed through a complex mix of public funding (where for many, Local Authority funding is the bedrock) private sector investment, earned income and charitable or philanthropic donations. Theatres and performing arts business across the UK are in an extremely uncertain financial planning environment – many are already operating on extremely tight financial margins. When regional theatres are under economic pressure it becomes harder for them to develop new and exciting productions, and to invest in skills development. This reduces the productivity and compromises the future success of theatre as a whole. Unlike the U.S, VAT is paid on commercial theatre tickets in the UK, **generating over £127 million for HM Treasury in London last year alone.**

- **Continue Theatre Production Tax Relief.** This relief has enabled theatre to extend tours and preserve high production values at a time when pressures on funding could have led to compromise. The relief is being invested directly into producing exciting, innovative theatre across the UK to the delight of audiences, employment and sustainable growth of the sector. It has brought vital support to the sector, allowing new productions to be developed, and tours to take place, at a time when other investment in the industry dropped.
- **Review Business Rates for theatre venues.** The removal of local government funding is by far the greatest threat to prosperity and growth in our sector. Local authorities are finding it increasingly hard to maintain support for their arts and cultural provision. As local councils look to retain 100% of business rates to meet the costs of services, many have begun withdrawing the 20% discretionary relief available to those of our members who are charities. We ask for this relief to be maintained.
- **Ask (and reward) LEPS to place the arts and culture at the heart of regeneration and growth strategies.** Including a commitment for LEPs to have a cultural strategy within their plans. Theatres and performing arts organisations contribute to the renewal of urban areas, LEPs must support initiatives to develop local growth and sense of place, and this also means protecting current spaces and working with theatres to think about how vacant or development spaces could be put to use.
- Access to the **Shared Prosperity Fund** post Brexit for theatre businesses.
- **A commitment to support theatres to reduce climate change** by opening up funds enabling them to be retrofitted to make them more energy efficient to support development of carbon neutral production.
- Theatre organisations to be an integral part of the **Tourism Sector Deal** by being part of the Tourism Zones and the **Data Hub**. We also ask that **Theatre organisations should be represented on all Tourism Boards.**

2

Opportunities for everyone to work in the theatre sector



We ask that it becomes a government priority to improve diversity, open entry routes and protect the talent pipeline to theatre and the performing arts, and for every child and young person to have the opportunity of strong cultural education. If we are to build on our strengths and extend excellence into the future we must improve the diversity of the theatre and performing arts workforce.

- **A commitment to a strong cultural education and futureproofing our skillset.** A good cultural education fosters creative and divergent thinking, which encourages young people to innovate and create in any field of expertise. Take up of arts subjects has declined in schools, which has serious impact on both the quality and diversity of applicants the sector is able to attract in the future. We therefore support and recommend the Cultural Learning Alliance's three asks: A National Plan for cultural learning; An Arts Premium giving children universal access to quality arts provision; and Continuing Professional Development & Learning blueprint for teachers and cultural learning leaders.
- **A commitment to support the sector to address skills gaps and shortages**
 - **Reform the Apprenticeship Levy.** Introduce a **Skills Levy** rather than an Apprenticeships Levy, allowing money to also be used to help deliver T Level placements.
 - **Apprenticeships:**
 - Identify ways to adopt carousel delivery models that enable employers to share apprentices without the use and added cost of an ATA.
 - Improve awareness, knowledge and understanding about apprenticeships to increase employers' confidence about using this employment route
 - Increase support and reduce bureaucracy for SMEs and freelancers to enable them to play a more central role in the delivery of apprenticeship training.
- A commitment to further funding of the **Creative Careers Programme** beyond Spring 2020.
- **Make it easier for schools to go on theatre trips.** Enable and incentivise schools in the most deprived areas to use their local theatres. This could be done through a government supported scheme rather than isolated philanthropy or one-off grants. For instance, government could build on the '*Every Child a Theatregoer* in Newham or *Primary Schools Into Theatre* in Southwark' model, or it could remove one of the other barriers – transport – by asking Local Authorities to provide free travel, off peak for school trips, as done by TFL.
- Encourage more cross departmental working between DCMS, HMRC and local DWPs to make it easier for **people on benefits and support to undertake paid work experience/ placements** in theatre such as Hull Truck Theatre have.



3

International opportunities and strong connections

The UK's theatre and the performing arts are world leading. It is vital to their long-term prosperity that we stay open to exporting and importing high-quality theatre talent, ideas, products and relationship, from the EU and further afield. The international standing and economic success of the whole theatre industry, including West End shows such as War Horse, Matilda The Musical and Harry Potter, depends on the relationship and talent transfer between the subsidised sector and commercial sector.

- Government support is crucial in maintaining the position and influence of the theatre sector in the EU and beyond. We would encourage government to include **a commitment to include at least one Theatre delegate on all trade missions.**
- **Make it easier and then support for UK theatre companies to break into markets** such as China and others wanting UK work and experience. For many, international working is essential both for income and artistic exchange. For instance, the National Theatre received £250,000 from the Treasury for a co-produced version of War Horse in China and to be part of a Sino-UK skills exchange; that show is still touring in China each year.
- A commitment to advance **new import and export deals** for theatre/the arts both within and outside of Europe. This would also include helping cultural businesses and relationships within any commercial relationships and frameworks, whilst building stronger relationships between cultural organisations and the **Department for International Trade.**
- **Ensure the theatre sector is not negatively impacted when exiting the EU** so the UK can continue to attract vital talent from the EU and beyond, alongside a framework that ensures theatre workers (on and offstage) can continue to operate abroad without incurring additional financial and time costs. This could also include a **fund for the Theatre sector to help it recover from financial damages incurred through exiting the EU.**
- A commitment to reinstate the **Entertainment Sector's Immigration Taskforce and commit to dialogue** on any new immigration rules affecting the theatre and performing arts sector. This would include committing to having experts who understand the theatre sector and the other creative industries in the **Home Office** to answer any questions the sector may have on movement of people.

About us

- [SOLT](#) and [UK Theatre](#) are the trade associations and members' organisations representing the interests of those engaged in the production and presentation of medium to large-scale dramatic and lyric theatre in the UK. Their memberships are drawn from both subsidised and commercial theatre.