

## **UK Theatre & SOLT - Feedback on T Levels**

*(For DCMS, DfE, IFA, Gatsby Foundation, Creative & Cultural Skills and other relevant stakeholders)*

We welcome the prioritisation of technical qualifications with the Sainsbury Review and the subsequent work. Theatres employ many people with a range of both academic and technical qualifications into their workforce. [UK Theatre and SOLT's Workforce Review](#) identified that there are several skills gaps in the talent pipeline to the theatre industry, and that we currently are not representative of the population as a whole. We want to ensure that these new qualifications help fill the talent gap, whilst diversifying our workforce across the country.

We have been engaging with DfE, Gatsby and DCMS on the ongoing development of T levels – from the first consultation, through to the Birmingham session, the roundtables and individual meetings with these three stakeholders. We have also brought together Playful Productions (who trialled one of the Challenge's early T Level Placements), the ROH and the National Theatre to think about our collective issues and solutions for T Levels.

In addition we also sit on the CIC's Skills and Education Group and have fed in our sector's concerns on the placement element of the T Level.

We thought it would be helpful to bring together the thoughts and feedback from all these engagements in one place as the development of T Levels continues.

### **UK Theatre/SOLT main concerns**

- **Health & Safety issues**
  - Regulatory responsibilities and general H&S administration of under 18's
  - Safeguarding
  - Practicalities of having a young person working in many offstage roles such as at heights or in dressing
- **Placement length**
  - We are unconvinced that 45 days is the right length in relation to what a quality placement looks like in the UK
  - We have asked that if it is to remain 45 days, then this placement can be split so the pupil spends time with say two or three employers – coordinated by the college
- **Diversity and inclusion**
  - Any financial barriers or geographical barriers will not help with the sectors current lack of diversity
  - For example, placements can not only be for those who can afford not to work, or who have family who can put them up in city areas, especially London
- **Placement location**
  - Does the whole 45 days have to be in a theatre building, or could it be at a range of locations? We believe 45 days in one venue is not achievable across the country
- **Regional supply**
  - We currently have a survey out to gauge what placements in these routes would be available in theatres. Our intelligence is that not many theatres across the UK have the departments and staff in house to take on the placements.
- **Frequency**
  - We are concerned that even if we were to overcome many of the practical issues with the placements we outline, even our biggest and most well-equipped

theatres will be unable to offer more than a few placements (especially when they might already take internships, work experience and apprentices)

- **Hours**
  - Working hours are not 9-5. Theatres operate during the day and in the evening
  - Transport issues for more rural areas during these hours (and again relates to safeguarding)
- **Wellbeing**
  - We have concerns around the other responsibilities learners will already have at this age. Some may have jobs.
- **How to engage SME's and Freelancers**
  - Could government use some of the Apprenticeship Levy to pay skilled technical freelancers to deliver part of the placement element in colleges (thereby partly solving the in-theatre part of the placement; provision of placements regionally; engaging the huge amounts of freelancers we have in our sector. This would help give a realistic impression of how the sector works and who works in it)

## **Sector Feedback**

The below feedback primarily focuses on the Placement element and is collated from the following theatres. We have grouped these together by issue:

- Royal Exchange
- Ambassador's Theatre Group
- Storyhouse
- Leeds Playhouse
- Mercury Theatre
- National Theatre
- Playful Productions
- Royal Opera House

## **Provision of placements - Supply / Demand issues**

- 'What is the plan for provision of wigs/make up? Most theatres don't have that facility in-house so will be unable to provide a meaningful work experience in regard to this.'
- 'There are only a very small number of West End productions that are both large enough in terms of the size of their technical departments, and secure enough in terms of advance bookings, to be able to accommodate a placement.'
- 'I think there is a world in which we could agree a recruitment process to select at the start of the year those people for whom we may be able to offer the placements. But I'm not sure we could guarantee a placement for everyone – particularly with the requirement for specific experience.'
- 'As with apprenticeships I don't think we will have any shortage of young people wanting to take on these qualifications. It is going to entirely depend on the capacity of the industry to host the placements.'
- 'So, as a medium sized business and employer, that already offers placements from apprenticeships, internships and work experience my initial concern is how would we be able to create the capacity for another sizable T-Level placement?..'

- Not just in terms of the right members of staff, who as well as their own jobs would have to find additional time to take on those educational responsibilities? As with all industry placements we often do get lumbered with a sizable amount of paperwork to do as well - it is never just handled by the education institution. I think some of that funding has to go towards the business side to incentivise and cover the costs of that placement.'
- 'I think I suggested a version of a lead employer and we could potentially offer space to be host a freelance hub, but there are cost and capacity issues. Who will cover those?'

### **Length, Timings & Hours of Placements**

- '45 days' work experience outside of the education environment is a huge ask. We struggle to find work experience in the theatre and design industries currently and that is a lot less than 45 days.'
- 'In relation to the West End, the additional challenge is that productions are generally mounted on the basis that the producer rents the theatre. Most shows (especially dramas) only run for a limited period, say three to four months, and sometimes come together at very short notice, so it is impossible to do any long-term planning to get a placement set up.'
- 'At the start of an academic year one cannot even to predict which productions will be playing in half the West End theatres by the following February. Once the show closes (and this can be at two weeks' notice of the show isn't successful) then another producer will come in to the theatre with a different show and a completely different set of production staff, so there is no continuity between, say, the wigs department, of one show and the next.'
- 'Unclear if the placement was 45 days in one block or over a number of weeks?'
- 'Awareness of the concerns regarding practicality of delivering a 45 day placement in conjunction to the increasingly under resourced and over stretched venues and organisations, that are having to deliver more additional activity that is not their core business.'
- 'Most practical theatre roles are not 9-5, and involve evening and weekend work, as well as peak business times during Christmas. Evening & weekend work would need to be agreed with provider. And placements may not match the academic calendar including half terms/Mon-Fri 9-5 day.'
- 'Timing and scheduling of T-levels needs to be thought through as theatres do not work office hours. Rather our work is often at unsociable times across 7 days a week'
- 'Would T-levels be during term time only? This would also pose challenges for our cycle of work'
- 'A receiving house being very different to a producing house, means the scope for hosting a placement needs to go through additional organisational and logistical hurdles, and presents inconsistencies for the learner...'

- This could make for an inconsistent schedule for learners, where some roles will be dependant on productions being programmed, and then support for placement would need to be agreed with producers. A plan would need to be considered for Dark time...
- This does however, present the opportunity to consider an approach where the placement can be organised as a set of shorter placements building up over time. Such as a costume & wig placement agreed with visiting productions, this would need be agreed by the producer and those touring production teams will need to be prepared to meaningfully support this placement around tight production riders - and to that end, the practicality of this should be thought through thoroughly and scrutinised.'

### **Financial Support for Theatres**

- 'There is no way that without additional funding, we would be in a position to co-ordinate the number of placements that this will generate. For a large theatre organisation such as ourselves (and also being the only producing house in the city region) we will likely be the only provider for a vast number of students. It will be intensely difficult for us to deliver on expectations.'
- 'How are the costs going to be covered?'
- 'If these costs come out of the Levy won't that reduce the number of apprenticeships and therefore the progression pathways for these students?'

### **Non-financial support for theatres**

- 'Equally, is there any room for there to be a DfE Regional Co-ordinator in each area who can collate the experiences/placements available? People will be calling us for advice no doubt and that could be a fairly large job in itself.'

### **Course development**

- 'Perhaps local Creative Engagement teams in theatres could work with the DfE on how to create a workshop that supports technical staff to use the curriculum/understand and deliver the course to its maximum when people are on placement? Obviously, this would also be done in conjunction locally with Technical Directors and HR teams (if they have them). These would need to be paid for by someone of course!'

### **Health & Safety**

- 'The restriction of 16-18 years olds is a challenge. How many 16-year olds are ready to work in a professional environment? It also blocks learners who have come through Level 1 and Level 2 provision onto the L3 technical as they would be too old by the second year.'
- 'Our trail placement will introduce a 16/17 year old into our carpentry workshop, which is brilliant! But is taking and will continue to take up a lot of the workshop staff's time. Fine, but not all departments have the necessary skills and experience to do this work properly, nor the capacity to effectively supervise a young placement. So would rather refuse to host a placement than risk an accident.'

- 'The biggest challenge is related to H&S and insurance. I know of no professional theatre environments that would allow a 16-year-old to access all of the technical spaces, work at heights, work the unsocial hours etc.'
- When a number of colleagues asked in the meeting about this the response from DCMS was "we will have to change industry practice in this area". That seems unlikely.'
- 'Risk Management considerations for technical placements that would involve working at night and lone travel, and higher risk activity.'
- 'Safeguarding considerations'
- 'Dangerous activities would need assessing for risk and suitability for placements'
- 'How would the admin and pastoral care of placements be handled. Although we are one of the largest regional producing theatres we are not a large organisation and do not have capacity for extra admin or pastoral support'
- 'How would DBS checks for our staff be processed and paid?'
- 'Some organisations involve remote working / outreach from theatre that needs to be considered in terms of management and support for learner.'
- 'Unsure as to who has overall responsibility for the young persons health and well being and providing support for any obstacles and barriers that they may face - we feel this should be the education provider. Likewise who prepares them for the workplace and being work ready?'

### **Marketing / Awareness of T Levels**

- 'The perception of theatre and roles in theatre, will need to be managed in terms of expectation with the learner, and training provider.'
- 'There may be a need to increase awareness & understanding within some organisations as to what a meaningful T Level placement looks like.'
- 'I worry how this qualification sits alongside Apprenticeships as well? Is it a gateway to an apprenticeship, how does it 'differ' in content and how is that communicated to industry so that they know how to pitch it...clearly the work based vocational experience needs to reflect the level of the qualification.'

### **Miscellaneous**

- 'Confidentiality and Intellectual Property was discussed at the round table as a topic for consideration, however there is scope for organisations to allow restricted access.'
- Some organisations involve remote working / outreach from theatre that needs to be considered in terms of management and support for learner.

- Many 16-year olds are not sure of what they want to do as soon as they leave school. Will it be easy for a student studying this qualification to change to a HE bound pathway?
- 'It conflicts with our current programmes that we already run in xxx'
- 'There was not enough information in relation to what students will be studying, the employer knowing this would mean we could offer a more meaningful placement.'
- 'Didn't appear to be regulated enough with the education provider working regularly with the employer.'
- 'Many of our staff are on contracts governed by BECTU in terms of hours/wage etc '
- 'Support for the learners will need be considered - this includes social, management & structure.'
- 'Confidentiality and Intellectual Property was discussed at the round table as a topic for consideration, however there is scope for organisations to allow restricted access.'
- 'Further thoughts from the round table group:
  - Join with local theatres and cultural organisations to share a placement across a partnership.
  - Developing a portfolio with multiple employers, with a lead organisation coordinating the placement.
  - Organisations becoming a 'Freelancer hub' and offering office space for freelancers as an incentive to support placements.
  - Client-Commissioned briefs can be set by employers, that offer set real life tasks, providing feedback throughout, with the provider to verify the work.
  - Virtual working approaches through an online workplace, and learners communicating with employers regarding their set tasks.'