

## UK Theatre and SOLT Submission to The APPG on Apprenticeships Inquiry

### About us

Society of London Theatre ([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 subsidised, not-for-profit and commercial theatres.

### 1. What are the opportunities and challenges you have faced in response to COVID-19?

- Theatre is part of the £111 billion Creative Industries sector which is the fastest growing part of the economy. Theatre is made up of 290,000 workers (70% self-employed/freelancers including all actors and musicians). But the necessary measures taken in response to COVID-19 have brought the Sector close to terminal closure.
- Therefore, UK Theatre and SOLT's government lobbying has focussed on what immediate support the sector needs to recover from COVID-19. But we are aware more needs to happen and differently as the sector recovers. And one of these is about how our workforce recovers and rebuilds.
- The Job Retention Scheme has avoided large-scale redundancies to this point, although theatres across the country are increasingly announcing redundancy consultation processes due to no cashflow and reduced reserves. Without intervention, job losses are likely to number over 200,000 (employed and freelancers). Although the government's announcement of 5 June will be of help, as the BBC [reports](#) 'it will not save all jobs'. Therefore we must think about the impact this in turn has on apprentices.
- The Creative Sector workforce is characterised by a high proportion of small and micro businesses or self-employed / freelancers who have portfolio careers consisting of multiple short-term contracts. These factors make the deployment of Apprenticeships, particularly in freelance roles challenging and often impossible. However, there are sub-sectors within the creative industries with larger employers or where roles tend to be permanent or long-term contracts which are making apprenticeships work effectively within the current funding rules.
- Our sector is graduate dominated, and Apprenticeships are one way of ensuring we have another route into the sector.
- Funding applications to The Andrew Lloyd Webber Foundation demonstrate that there is underfunding for performing arts organisations delivering to those who are socially, economically, geographically disadvantaged as well as to Black, Asian, Minority Ethnic, disabled and LGBGT+ people. In addition, these organisations will be further impacted by the pandemic, which is now evidenced to disproportionately negatively impact the health of socially disadvantaged and ethnic minority groups. As a result of COVID-19, local councils are diverting extra funds to immediate social care and most will have little or nothing left for cultural activities despite the recognised health benefits of theatre & arts engagement. This must be considered by government.
- The theatre workforce is still overwhelmingly white, in spite of years of initiatives and reports, so it is imperative that we embed anti-racism policies and actions within the industry (as above and as a result of the recent Black Lives Matter movement), and the need to make diversity and inclusion integrated in our working practices, especially for D/deaf and disabled workers and artists (following the We Shall Not Be Removed initiative).

- Apprenticeships are one of the ways in which we can increase the UK's skills base through life-long learning and not just entry level, and deliver benefits for productivity, regional levelling-up, inclusion and social mobility.

## 2. What recommendations would you have for policy makers to support Apprenticeships policy going forward?

- Our 2017 [research](#) told us that unpaid routes into the sector are rife and appear to be increasing. Careers advice for those looking to enter an offstage career is perceived to be substandard. Most of the current training for routes into the sector present high barriers to entry, militating against a more diverse workforce.
- Therefore, **we encourage flexibilities in the use of the apprenticeship levy** but only in the context of it still supporting apprenticeship training.
- Apprenticeships suffer from a fragmented approach, confused guidance from government and are still a minority pursuit, despite being generally popular with the sector. So there needs to be **improved communication, focused on maximising take-up by SMEs and microbusinesses**. Therefore, one thing that could be introduced is a formal **system of matching Levy Payers with those Non-Levy Payers** who wish to employ apprentices so funds can be distributed within the sector (thereby helping with the future talent pipeline for the whole industry).
- There is a shortage of in-career training (and CPD and retraining) and careers advice options, especially for freelance workers. This appears to be resulting in some loss of talent from the sector. As such **we would welcome the introduction of modular Apprenticeships and flexibilities in the use of the levy to fund modules of study to help people reach competence**, removing the minimum 12-month training/employment rule.
- **Allowing bulk transfers of levy to reduce administrative burdens and increase levy usage**
- More radically, **transforming the Apprenticeship Levy into a broader Skills Levy** could enable increased investment to meet a wider range of industry-defined critical skills needs, in addition to apprenticeships.
- Think about how **unspent levy money could help the delivery of T Level placements** for theatre – perhaps use this money to **pay the large number of freelancers we have in the sector to deliver engagement and live briefs, instead of so much of the placement being asked to be spent in venues** (which we know is unrealistic, especially if we are aiming at levelling-up and opportunities across the UK – not all theatres will have the departments or resources to deliver what is needed).
- Recognise that the pilot that is taking place in film and TV is not the same for Theatre. These already large companies have the resource and structure in place to take on apprenticeships – the real work needs to be done on SME's and engaging freelancers.

## 3. How can we ensure that apprenticeships play an important role in economic recovery beyond the COVID-19 crisis?

- **There will be a lack of starts against some of our apprenticeship standards over the next two years as our sector faces mass redundancies and then begins the rebuilding process.** The DfE should not see this as an indicator of a lack of demand for Apprenticeships and withdraw Standards as a result. Our sector will need the Standards to help rebuild the workforce.
- If an **Apprenticeship wage subsidy scheme** is reintroduced, how can we make sure this won't just be absorbed by sectors/companies that already have high Apprenticeship

starts? Our sector will need to use apprenticeships to rebuild but employers will need help to do this.

- The sector will need government support to continue building parents', teachers', students' confidence in Apprenticeships and specifically in the viability of a career in our sector. The **continuation of the Creative Careers Campaign** will help with this and bullets mentioned above.
- Think about the **employer capacity** and the impact of T Level Placements - organisations who already take on apprentices, work placements, work experience, now additionally trying to take on T Level Placements. This is going to be a struggle for some organisations and impossible for others.
- Look to the excellent **London Theatre Consortium's model of Apprenticeship delivery**:

[London Theatre Consortium](#) is made up of 14 leading London producing theatres.

The London Theatre Consortium (LTC) offered four Apprenticeships to begin in May 2019. Each Apprenticeship is at one of the following theatres in London: Battersea Arts Centre, the Donmar Warehouse, the Gate Theatre and the Lyric Hammersmith. They recruited for two apprentices in business administration and two apprentices in cultural venue operations.

In 2017 they piloted a new apprenticeship training hub at the Lyric Hammersmith with qualifications accredited through the National College for Creative and Cultural Industries. [A report published](#) on the programme's first three years (now in its 7<sup>th</sup> year) shows the scheme's success in diversifying the theatre workforce and creating new entry routes into theatre. £800,000 invested in the creation of 56 apprenticeships in first three years. 62% of apprentices to date have been from non-white British backgrounds and 27% have a disability.