

**UK Theatre and Society of London Theatre
Response to the Home Affairs Committee Immigration Inquiry
20 January 2017**

1. Summary

- 1.1. The UK's creative industries are world-leading. New Government figures show they employ more than 1.7 million (more than 1 in 20 UK jobs). One of the reasons for this success is our exchange and collaboration and our openness to new ideas.
- 1.2. Another is the skills base from both home and abroad; arts organisations and audiences benefit from world class creative talent from the EU and further afield who have made their home in the UK. Immigration and free movement play an important role not only in the make-up of the theatre sector, but also in making our sector resilient, thought-provoking, relevant, highly skilled and entrepreneurial.
- 1.3. Theatre plays a role in developing community integration and cohesion. Either by creating works, being part of a work, or by seeing a work. It can bring communities together, promote understanding and explore social issues.

2. About us

- 2.1. This submission is made on behalf of **Society of London Theatre (“SOLT”)** and **UK Theatre Association (“UK Theatre”)**.
- 2.2. SOLT and UK Theatre are the trade associations 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.
- 2.3. SOLT represents approximately 200 London-based producers, theatre owners and managers, including all the major subsidised theatrical organisations in London.
- 2.4. UK Theatre represents approximately 220 theatres, concert halls, dance companies, producers and arts centres throughout the UK. UK Theatre also operates as a professional association, supporting over 1,000 individuals working professionally in theatre and the performing arts in the UK.
- 2.5. Combined annual attendance at our member venues exceeded 33 million people in 2013. This is more than the entire cumulative attendance at all English Premier League (13.6 million), English Football League (15.6 million) and Scottish Premiership (1.9 million) matches for the 2012/13 season.

3. Why we are responding

- 3.1. We welcome this inquiry as an opportunity to highlight the positive impact immigration plays in culture and, in turn, the unifying role culture can play in communities and society.
- 3.2. We have a number of concerns about how restrictions on immigration from the EU and overseas might adversely impact theatre and the performing arts.

4. Headline key points

- 4.1. This submission is made in the context of another recent submission we made to the Culture, Media and Sport Select Committee Inquiry into the *Impact of Brexit*, in which we raised similar points on workforce, movement of artists and work, funding and the economy, and the role that culture plays in public life.
- 4.2. We welcome this Inquiry's move towards a 'plan for people arriving in the country', in order to unite communities. Arts and culture can promote integration, help manage the impact of migration in communities, play a role in creating places, and in creating opportunities to share ideas and promote and encourage discussion.
- 4.3. We especially welcome the Inquiry's country-wide approach to this debate. At SOLT and UK Theatre our membership increasingly reflects the existence of one sector encompassing the regions and London. Our combined support is for one UK-wide theatre and performing arts industry, and acknowledges that our national success in the creative industries is stimulated and sustained by a fabric of people, talent and audiences across the country.
- 4.4. The recent DCMS Select Committee's *Countries of Culture: Funding and support for the arts outside London* report also highlights the need for arts to be strong in the regions whilst reinforcing both the intrinsic and instrumental value of the arts, including 'where culture has been used to support other policy objectives, for example on education, health and well-being and criminal justice.' We believe Immigration is also one of these policy areas.
- 4.5. Many theatres, arts, culture and creative industries groups have specialities in the field of working with migrants and asylum seekers. Some have an ongoing role in facilitating a national conversation and understanding social change. Theatres such as the National Theatre, The Albany, Farnham Maltings, and Nottingham Playhouse, are examples of theatres working with migrant communities and artists. In addition to this, there are broader organisations such as Counterpoint Arts, whose work explores the value of the arts in relation to issues around migration.
- 4.6. As part of its evidence collection, including the citizens' panels and participation and deliberation events, we would urge the Inquiry to involve local theatre and arts leaders with experience of working on these types of community cohesion projects.

4.7. Movement of artists and work

- 4.7.1. As the Inquiry highlights, 'businesses competing in a global market place are hungry for the best international talent', and theatre is one of these businesses.
- 4.7.2. The free movement of artists and work, in and out of the UK must be protected. We recognise that this Inquiry is broader than the EU, but in light of Brexit, we are concerned that an increase in regulatory frameworks and administration could see people, innovation and investment 'drain away.'
- 4.7.3. In addition, some of the schemes working well with support of governments across countries could be disrupted. Such as the scheme operated successfully for many years for the short-term encouragement of on-stage actors between the UK and the USA, operated by SOLT and Equity in the UK, with their equivalent bodies in the USA.

- 4.7.4. Limiting programmes to only UK artists and companies, and losing opportunities for cultural and artistic exchange would undermine the UK's position as a global leader in culture and its desirability as a destination both for visitors and inward investment. There may be unintentional economic effects, for example, not only on London's reputation as a cultural capital, but on other major UK cities' economies, whether they be part of the Northern Powerhouse or Cornwall's strong tourism industry.
- 4.7.5. Many of our members host or produce work with international artists (bringing artists from Europe and other world regions to the UK) and for international markets. There is a concern that artists and international companies will simply find it cheaper and easier to remain within the EU or cease to trade with UK companies.
- 4.7.6. Many of our members are concerned that we may see a drop in the number of available skilled staff particularly in technical, lighting and audiovisual. When asked, some referred to 'a third of our staff' or '50%' currently being EU nationals. Performing arts companies need to be able to source performers and other workers with specialist technical or creative skills from the EU and beyond in order to maintain the high production standards which audiences expect.
- 4.7.7. Our members are also concerned that the UK's leading ballet and dance companies remain able to recruit both from Europe and internationally. The occupations of "skilled classical ballet dancer" and "skilled contemporary dancer" are on the shortage occupation list, reflecting the need for such companies to have access to the small global pool of exceptionally skilled dancers in order to maintain their international reputations and compete on the world stage.