

THEATRE FOR
EVERY CHILD



Society of London Theatre (SOLT) & UK Theatre want every child to attend the theatre by the time they leave school.

The Current Context

In 2019/20 only 26% of 5-10 years old and 54% of 11-15 year olds engaged in theatre and drama activities. For 11-15 year olds, only 25% engaged in theatre and drama 'outside of school'¹.

The National Curriculum requires every state-funded school to promote children's cultural development, preparing them for the experiences of later life. Whilst the private school sector is able to invest in cultural education, the state sector has suffered a significant reduction in provision, due in part to the marginalisation of arts subjects in schools over the last twenty years².

Children from low-income families are missing out the most because they are less likely to have access to cultural experiences outside of school³. Furthermore, the ongoing cost-of-living crisis has led to a reduction in school trips, including theatre visits. When surveyed by SOLT & UK Theatre, 42% of parents reported that their children had fewer school trips in the 2022-2023 academic year than in previous years⁴.

A recent report from the Sutton Trust states that since last year "reports of cuts to trips and outings have more than doubled, now standing at 50%, up from 21% – a proportion that is even higher in schools with the most disadvantaged intakes, at 68%, compared to 44% in the least deprived schools"⁵.

¹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/taking-part-201920-annual-child-release/arts-taking-part-survey-201920>

² <https://pec.ac.uk/blog/class-inequality-in-the-creative-industries-is-rooted-in-unequal-access-to-arts-and-cultural-education>

³ <https://www.ukonward.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/Beyond-school-enrichment-report-onward.pdf>

⁴ Nationally representative by region survey of parents conducted by SOLT & UK Theatre between 30th-31st August using Find Out Now.

⁵ <https://www.suttontrust.com/news-opinion/all-news-opinion/cost-of-living-crisis-hits-school-spending/>



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Why does this matter and what can be gained?

To secure improved access to our cultural capital and sustain our world-leading theatre reputation, we must ensure all children have the opportunity to experience theatre. A visit to the theatre can:

Provide cultural enrichment

- Theatre broadens children's horizons, shaping their sense of the world and their place within it.

Offer educational benefits

- The immersive experience of theatre helps children to learn⁶, whilst structured arts activities can increase cognitive skills across all subject areas⁷.
- Children from low-income families who participate in arts at school are three times more likely to get a degree⁸.

Help build empathy

- Watching theatrical performances helps children to develop emotional intelligence^{9,10}.

Promote well-being

- Children and young people report that engaging in cultural and creative activities, such as drama, helps them to "relax and de-stress"¹¹.

Spark a lucrative career and address skills shortages

- This campaign will raise awareness of the highly skilled off-stage STEM orientated theatre jobs open to young people at a time when the industry is facing significant skills shortages¹².

Boost audience figures

- This initiative would help to raise audience figures over the long-term, boosting economic activity, resulting in more jobs across the UK.

⁶ <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.3102/0013189X18761034>

⁷ <https://www.culturallearningalliance.org.uk/evidence/key-research-findings-the-case-for-cultural-learning/>

⁸ <https://www.culturallearningalliance.org.uk/evidence/key-research-findings-the-case-for-cultural-learning/>

⁹ <https://bmcpublichealth.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/s12889-021-11233-6>

¹⁰ <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S002210312100038X#bb0050>

¹¹ <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/wellbeing/articles/childrensviewsonwellbeingandwhاتمakesahappyifeuk2020/2020-10-02#what-children-told-us>

¹² [https://www.nordicity.com/de/cache/work/15/Nordicity UK Theatre Workforce Review Report 2017.pdf](https://www.nordicity.com/de/cache/work/15/Nordicity%20UK%20Theatre%20Workforce%20Review%20Report%202017.pdf)



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Support the growth of our economy

- Theatre is a key component of the broader creative industries which, prior to Covid, contributed £116bn in Gross Value Added (GVA)¹³.
- Our research indicates that the theatre industry alone generates £2.39bn GVA and supports 205,000 workers.
- For every £1 spent on a theatre ticket, an additional spend of £1.40 is generated in local economies¹⁴.

Our Proposal: ring-fenced funding to ensure all children can attend the theatre before they leave school

For the reasons set out above, we want children and young people to experience as much theatre and live performance as possible at every age.

As a minimum benchmark, our Theatre for Every Child campaign asks for a manifesto commitment to pledge that **all children have the chance to see a professional theatre production before they leave school.**

This initiative has widespread support.

In a recent, nationally representative poll, carried out on behalf of SOLT & UK Theatre, 84% of parents were either very supportive or supportive of a government programme to ensure at least one free trip to the theatre for every child before they leave school¹⁵.

Costing

SOLT & UK Theatre stand ready to work with the government to develop and implement this pledge. Our initial policy costing work suggests that to provide annual funding for approx. 800,000 children a year to visit the theatre, covering transport, theatre tickets and teacher supervision would cost:

A maximum of **£42.33 per child**, or a total cost of **£34m per year.**

This figure assumes that theatres charge £25 per ticket. However, costs could be reduced further through voluntary contributions from theatres and private sector sponsorship. With these contributions from theatres and the wider private sector, we believe that the maximum cost would fall to around **£14-18m per year**. Further, when surveyed by SOLT and UK Theatre, a majority of

¹³ <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/dcms-economic-estimates-2019-gross-value-added/dcms-economic-estimates-2019-provisional-gross-value-added>

¹⁴ Economic Impact Assessment of UK Theatre Sector, Sound Diplomacy, June 2023.

¹⁵ Nationally representative by region survey of parents conducted by SOLT & UK Theatre between 30th-31st August using Find Out Now.



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parents said they would contribute between £5-£10 to the cost of seeing a professional performance, which is not currently accounted for in our costings¹⁶.

Theatre for Every Child - Conclusion

Theatre should be for every child. Funding a minimum benchmark would help to vastly improve access to the theatre for all children, providing cultural enrichment and an investment in the future workforce of the creative industries, one of the fastest growing parts of the UK economy.

SOLT & UK Theatre call on all parties to include this ambitious yet deliverable pledge in their manifestos ahead of the 2024 General Election.

Contact us

For further information contact publicaffairs@soltukt.co.uk

Demonstrate your support for the [Theatre for Every Child Campaign](#) on social media using **#TheatreForEveryChild**

Who we are

Society of London Theatre (SOLT) represents approximately 230 London-based producers, theatre owners and managers, including all the major subsidised theatrical organisations in London.

UK Theatre represents approximately 240 theatres, dance companies, producers and arts centres throughout the UK. UK Theatre also operates as a professional association, supporting over 1,400 individuals working professionally in theatre and the performing arts in the UK.

Our Vision, and the world we want to see, is a **dynamic, sustainable and world-class theatre sector**

Our Mission is to champion theatre and support our members to thrive

We have **3 priority focus areas** that allows us to deliver on our vision and mission

1. A growing, engaged and united **membership**, including a skilled, diverse and productive workforce for now and the future
2. To inspire, attract, retain and diversify theatre **audiences**
3. **Advocate** to support growth across the sector, underpinned by robust evidence.

¹⁶ Nationally representative by region survey of parents conducted by SOLT & UK Theatre between 30th-31st August using Find Out Now.



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