



## **Apprenticeships for Thriving Theatres**

*"I have always been a hands-on learner. I thrived on the practical side of education... Since completing my apprenticeship, I have worked at... the English National Opera, Shakespeare's Globe as well as the National Theatre. I started out as a casual wig assistant at the ENO. I then progressed to a full-time member of the team.*

**Leah, Wigs, Hair and Makeup Department at the National Theatre.**

### **Introduction**

Apprenticeships are paid jobs that incorporate on and off-the-job training leading to nationally recognised qualifications, enabling workers to earn as they learn and gain practical skills in the workplace. Society of London Theatre (SOLT) and UK Theatre's [2017 Workforce Review](#) found that 37% of theatre employers surveyed provide apprenticeships.

Although 73% of those employed in creative occupations have a degree or higher-level qualification (compared with 44% across the UK workforce), a degree-level qualification is not required for many highly skilled theatre roles.<sup>1</sup> Apprenticeships therefore represent a sensible route into the industry for many, especially in the technical and production workforce, where there are significant skills shortages in areas such as lighting, sound, stage management, rigging, automation, costume, wigs hair and make-up.

*"Most days, I will be constructing metal frames that are assembled into the scenery. The frames are often unique shapes that require a bit of problem solving; making sure they are strong enough to hold a lot of weight. I have made some really interesting bits of scenery and I am always learning more every day. No two days are the same".*

**Harry Prescott, Scenic Metalworker, Royal Opera House.**

### **Portable Flexi-Job Apprenticeship**

The DfE is piloting a portable flexi-job apprenticeship model which enables apprentices to complete a series of short-term contracts with a group of employers, rather than being tied to one. SOLT & UK Theatre looks forward to the DfE's evaluation of this approach and exploring its long-term viability.

*"I 'fly' scenery and people using winches and computer programming. My apprenticeship is in automation but I'm also learning a little bit of electrics, sound and video".*

<sup>1</sup> <https://pec.ac.uk/news/national-statistics-on-the-creative-industries>

## **Policy Recommendations**

### **1. Improve Data Collection**

We ask that HMG improve publicly available data from DfE/HMRC/ONS on apprenticeship levy contributions from employers in the DCMS definition of the creative industries. The currently dataset based on sector subject areas (SSA) is inadequate as it fails capture the creative industries use of business and operational apprenticeships.

### **2. Improve Capacity**

Over 70% of the theatre and performing arts workforce is freelance and the sector is comprised of many SMEs which do not have adequate resources to fund and manage apprenticeship programmes. We ask that the DfE:

- Reinststate the employer incentive to enable larger organisations to employ apprenticeship coordinators and scale-up their apprenticeship intake.
- Regularly review funding bands to prevent apprenticeships from becoming financially unviable due to inflation.
- Recognise that Skills Bootcamps could offer a better fit than apprenticeships for some occupations.

### **3. Review Structure**

We ask that DfE:

- Review the extent to which generic standards and end-point assessments (EPAs) can be adapted to fit specialist job roles.
- Allow for the creation of bespoke apprenticeship standards for specialist jobs or add more options to existing standards.
- Correlate the employers registered on the DAS<sup>2</sup> against their Companies House declaration of their SIC codes to facilitate better analysis.

### **4. Widen the availability of Level 2 apprenticeships**

We ask that the government consider introducing more Level 2 apprenticeships to develop more work-based entry level routes into the theatre industry.

### **5. Apprenticeship Levy**

SOLT & UK Theatre calls on the government to introduce a more flexible skills fund to meet the training needs of our industry.

### **6. Improve Public and Employer Awareness of Apprenticeship Opportunities**

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<sup>2</sup> Digital Apprenticeship Service

Routes into offstage theatre careers are poorly signposted. This means that people with access to unpaid pathways into the industry such as internships find it easier to forge a career in theatre, contributing to a lack of diversity in the sector. Furthermore negative perceptions towards apprenticeships persist, including amongst parents.<sup>3</sup>

- We ask that DfE to promote apprenticeships with campaigns aimed at prospective apprentices, their parents, careers advisers, employers, and providers.

To improve creative/cultural organisations understanding of the apprenticeship system we ask that DfE:

- Liaise with industry on producing material for a “Best Practice Guide” on how to recruit, manage and adopt sustainable approaches to apprenticeships.
- Provide tailored messaging via sectoral trade bodies to facilitate more effective engagement with SMEs.
- Enable an API for data from the levy transfer sharing scheme, so that current pledges can be published automatically on trade body websites.
- Encourage SMEs to seek 100% funding via levy transfers in preference to claiming 95% non-levy funding from HMG.

## **7. Delivery**

We ask that the DfE provide incentives to smaller, specialist training providers to deliver skills bootcamps and apprenticeships that meet employers’ needs.

## **8. ‘Returnerships’**

To support older, experienced workers, we ask government to work with the creative industries to increase the visibility of mid-career opportunities in the theatre sector through targeted campaigns and support transition training.

## **Conclusion**

Taken singularly or as a combination, policy interventions in the areas outlined above would help to promote awareness of apprenticeships amongst young people and mid-career workers and make apprenticeships more financially viable for employers in the creative and cultural sector.

## **Further Information**

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<sup>3</sup> Louise Ryan & Magdolna Lőrinc (2018) Perceptions, prejudices and possibilities: young people narrating apprenticeship experiences, *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, 39:6, 762-777, DOI: 10.1080/01425692.2017.1417821 <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/01425692.2017.1417821>