



Response to Advanced British Standard Consultation, March 2024

About SOLT & UK Theatre

The Society of London Theatre (SOLT) & UK Theatre are employer bodies for those who are actively producing or presenting theatre and managing or owning theatres. Our memberships are made up of over 500 organisations and 1200 individual practitioners across the UK, predominantly presenting theatre in large and medium scale venues.

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1. Summary

SOLT & UK Theatre broadly welcome the ambitions of the Advanced British Standard proposal. The theatre sector is a key component of the creative industries, one of the fastest growing sections of the UK economy. The theatre industry faces significant skills gaps and shortages so strengthening technical education routes will be central to the sector's long-term prosperity. As a member of the Creative Industries Council's Technical Education Group, we support the group's response to this consultation.

In this response to the consultation on the Advanced British Standard (ABS) proposal:

We welcome:

- The plan for young people to study a broader choice of subjects for longer.
- The aim of creating parity of esteem between academic and technical education.
- Proposals for high-quality work placements.

We call for:

- Teaching capacity to be strengthened.
- A broad and balanced curriculum.



2. Consultation response in full

a. Greater subject breadth

We welcome the ABS proposal for young people to study a broader choice of subjects and believe that this would help to dissolve the artificial divide between STEM and arts subjects. Most SOLT & UK Theatre members rely on the expertise of a vast range of technicians, many of whom would not describe themselves as creative, but who nonetheless play a pivotal role in the success of our creative industries.

We support the Cultural Learning Alliance's call for a broad, balanced, modern and arts-rich education as detailed in [Arts in Schools: Foundations for the Future](#) by Pauline Tambling and Sally Bacon.

b. Skills Shortages and Gaps

The theatre sector is facing skills shortages and gaps in technical, operational and production teams, including front of house, lighting, sound, rigging, automation, costume, wigs, hair and make-up, among others. Technical education pathways such as those detailed in the ABS proposal offer a potential solution to many of these shortages and gaps.

A new Advanced British Standard would need to be developed in close consultation with the theatre industry to ensure it meets the sector's workforce needs. We note that our 2017 [Workforce Review](#) found that only 37% of theatre employers surveyed offer apprenticeships and therefore emphasise the importance of providing employer incentives and a flexible skills levy to maximise the potential of any future proposals.

To a certain extent, the theatre industry's skills shortages have their roots in the education system, which leaves many uninformed about the career opportunities within the theatre sector. This is one of the reasons we have launched [Theatre for Every Child Campaign](#), to ensure that all children experience theatre as well being introduced to the exciting career opportunities on offer in the industry. The campaign calls for a funded government commitment to ensure that every child has the opportunity to experience a professional theatre visit before they leave secondary school.

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. However, costs could be reduced through contributions from theatres and the wider private sector, and we estimate that the maximum cost of this proposal would be approximately £14-18m per year.

c. Strengthening teaching capacity

For the ABS proposal to function effectively it would need to be supported by a reforms of the education system, including pre-16 education. The ABS proposal to increase teaching hours, giving students more direct contact with teaching staff and less self-directed study is very welcome, and is likely to drive better outcomes but it must be properly resourced.

As members of the [Cultural Learning Alliance](#), we wish to highlight that although the number of arts teachers has remained stable over the past two years and hours the arts are taught



have increased by +2% in the last year, we are concerned that there has been no overall recovery in the number of arts teachers and hours taught over the last decade.

d. Academic and technical parity of esteem

SOLT & UK Theatre strongly support the ambition of parity in esteem between academic and technical education routes. However, as stated in the CIC's Technical Education Group's response to this consultation, simply putting these qualifications together into one framework will not in itself achieve that parity. That will instead be secured through the quality of teaching, the student experience and the value placed on these routes by higher education and employers.

Research from the [Creative Industries Policy and Evidence Centre](#) indicates that that 73% of those employed in creative occupations have a degree or higher-level qualification (compared with 44% across the UK workforce). However, degree-level qualifications are not required for many of highly skilled theatre roles which are currently in shortage so technical qualifications such as apprenticeships represent a sensible work-based route into the industry for young people and older workers looking to reskill.

e. Clear progression routes

There must be clear progression routes into and out of the ABS. We would like to draw attention to the CIC's Technical Education Group's recommendation that the government remedy the current progression challenges faced within creative occupational routes, particularly in relation to the lack of occupational standards for certain roles at level 3. We welcome the Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education's (IfATE) Creative and Design [Occupational Map](#) illustrating where technical education can lead however not all jobs are included yet.

Furthermore, it is important to note that creative organisations rely on broad range of skills, which are not necessarily associated with the theatre industry. Non creative industries specific IfATE maps, such as the Sales, Marketing and Procurement [map](#) are crucial for the theatre industry which relies on strong customer services skills particularly in areas such as ticketing and marketing.

f. Careers support

As outlined by the CIC Technical Education Group, we welcome a clear, comprehensive but simple menu of choices for young people and greater clarity over the routes they could follow, through strong careers support. Given the significant growth and employment opportunities predicted to be generated by the creative sector over the next decade, creative careers must receive greater prominence within careers education.

e. Access to work placements

We echo the CIC Technical Education Group's response which agrees with the UK government that all young people should have access to any of the ABS subjects near where they live, and that this presents significant challenges in some areas. But these challenges are not limited only to providers. Significant work will be needed to increase capacity and identify new approaches to delivering industry placements within the ABS (occupational) route.



Although the creative industries are dispersed in creative clusters across the UK from, companies with the capability to deliver specialist work placements are not. If significant work is not set in train now to address this over the next decade, it will perpetuate and exacerbate the problems already being experienced with T levels and industry placements. The Creative Industries Council has recommended how further work placement flexibilities.

Conclusion

SOLT & UK Theatre welcome this opportunity to comment on the plans for an Advanced British Standard, which has the potential to have a positive long-term impact on the skills pipeline for our sector.

As part of the Creative Industries Technical Education Group, we welcome continued constructive engagement with the DfE to ensure these reforms deliver the skilled entrants our fast growing, rapidly evolving sector needs, enabling us to create many more well paid, enriching jobs and create life changing opportunities for future generations of young people.

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