



Skills Gaps Research Brief

Who are we?

The Society of London Theatre (SOLT) and UK Theatre work with and on behalf of our members to champion theatre and the performing arts and to create the conditions for theatre to thrive. Together, we represent 500 of the UK's leading theatre producers, venue owners and managers and performing arts centres, as well as 1,350 professional theatre makers across the UK.

Project overview

SOLT & UK Theatre are commissioning a primary research and data gathering project which aims to understand where and why skills gaps exist within the off-stage workforce in the theatre industry. It will have a secondary purpose to understand why theatre organisations are not making greater use of technical qualifications.

Background

SOLT & UK Theatre's 2017 [Workforce Review](#) found skills shortages¹ and gaps in technical and production teams, specifically those working in lighting, sound, stage management, rigging, automation, costume, wigs, hair and make-up.

In 2020 the Policy Evidence Centre reported that 42% of creative industries employers were struggling to recruit people with the required skills. COVID-19 and the economic impact of subsequent lockdowns resulted in the loss of thousands of staff across the sector. In 2019, 315,000 people worked in music, performing and visual arts. In 2021, this figure was 296,000, a 6% drop in the workforce, including a decrease of 17,000 (-7.7%) in self-employed roles.

We are looking to update our understanding of the *current* off-stage technical workforce skills gaps.

Research questions

Primary research questions

- In the theatre industry, which off-stage technical roles are hard-to-fill for SOLT & UK Theatre members?

¹ 'Skills shortages' refer to deficiencies in the external labour market, whilst 'skills gaps' refer to deficiencies within an existing workforce.

- Where hard-to-fill vacancies exist, which are due to skills shortages?

Secondary research questions

- What are SOLT & UK Theatre members doing to address skills shortages in their organisation?
- Why are theatre organisations not making greater use of technical qualifications² to address their technical, craft and production skills needs?

This could include exploration of the following themes:

- Perception of barriers to making greater use of technical qualifications.
- The demand for technical training within theatres, and the perception of its value.
- Appetite for wider industry standards/shared competencies.

The research will be used to:

- Strengthen the SOLT & UK Theatre evidence base for advocacy work calling for more effective and viable work-based routes into the theatre industry.
- Collect theatre-specific workforce data to position us as the leading authority on the skills needs of the sector.
- Understand the differences in workforce requirements between London and the rest of the UK.
- Highlight good practice for addressing skills shortages from member organisations.
- Demonstrate our commitment to forging more equitable work-based routes into the sector.

Outputs to enable this will include:

- Robust, quotable statistics on the scale and severity of skills gaps in the sector, particularly in technical occupations which do not require a degree.
- Testimonials from member organisations about their work to address skills gaps, including understanding the barriers to making greater use of technical qualifications.
- A report to be shared with key stakeholders, including the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS), the Department for Education, sector agencies and SOLT & UK Theatre members.

² Technical qualifications include apprenticeships, Higher Technical Qualifications (HTQs) such as Higher National Diplomas (HNDs) and Higher National Certificates (HNCs), T-levels and BTECs to address skills gaps and shortages.

Methodology

We are inviting researchers to develop the methodology that they propose to use. Proposals should include how the chosen methodology will address the research questions and ensure the data is robust and reliable.

We expect at least part of the project to include a quantitative survey in order to demonstrate the scale and severity of the skills gaps in the theatre industry.

SOLT & UK Theatre can provide support in survey dissemination using our email distribution channels, professional networks and support from key partners including the Association of British Theatre Technicians (ABTT), Alliance of Associations & Professionals in Theatre & Live Events (AAPTLE), Freelancers Make Theatre Work, The Stage and SkillsScene.

Budget

The budget for this work is £16,000-£18,000 excluding VAT. Please provide a breakdown of how the budget would be used.

Timelines

The full timeline will be agreed with the winning bidder and will be determined by the methodology selected. We expect the final report to be delivered by the end of October in order to feed into policy and advocacy work with the new government.

How to apply

Proposals for this work should include:

- A detailed breakdown of the methodology you propose to use, including how it would address the aims and objectives of the research project.
- An overview of potential risks and challenges and how these would be overcome.
- A short breakdown of how you would use the budget.
- Any support that you would require from SOLT & UK Theatre to ensure successful delivery of the project.
- Details of the lead researcher and any partners, detailing relevant experience and understanding of the theatre or wider creative sectors.

Please send your bid to: publicaffairs@soltukt.co.uk by 10AM, Monday 8 July 2024. The winning researcher will be informed by COP, Wednesday 10 July 2024.

If you have any questions about the research or the application process, please contact SOLT & UKT's Research and Insights Manager, Becky Gregg at rebecca.gregg@soltukt.co.uk