



British Theatre: Boosting the economy, integral to local communities

British theatre is an economic powerhouse. The sector generates a turnover of £4.4 billion per annum, contributes £2.39 billion in GVA, and supports 205,000 workers. For every £1 spent on a theatre ticket, an additional spend of £1.40 is generated in the local economy.

It is vital to the UK's thriving creative industries and key to Global Britain, supplying talent to British film and television, driving inbound tourism, and exporting productions worldwide.

Theatres play an essential role in local communities, delivering transformative social good. They provide free play spaces for children, positively contribute to social mobility, and serve as designated warm spaces in winter. Theatre is a source of social good, promoting wellbeing, empathy, confidence, and boosting educational attainment.

British theatre is also leading the way for a sustainable future, pioneering initiatives that embed sustainable practices within productions and organisations.

But the British theatre sector is at risk. Production costs continue to rise faster than inflation, with energy costs up 120% since 2019. Public investment in the arts has declined significantly in real terms over the past 14 years. Without serious investment in physical infrastructure in the next five years, nearly 40% of venues risk closure and 40% will become too unsafe to use.

With your support, we can create the conditions for theatre to thrive.

- 1. Break down barriers to opportunity with Theatre for Every Child.** Expand access to culture by funding a theatre visit for every child before they leave school. Growing children's access supports educational attainment, boosts wellbeing and confidence as well as introducing young people to the range of skilled jobs in the creative industries.
- 2. Kick start local economies, deliver social good and make Britain a clean energy superpower through investment in theatre buildings.** This urgent and necessary investment will maintain our world-class theatre sector and enable it to reach its potential in benefiting individuals, communities, and society. Investment in theatre buildings, an essential part of cultural and community infrastructure, will help protect venues from closure, improve their environmental sustainability, reduce operating costs, create more jobs, deliver more outreach, and improve accessibility.
- 3. Kickstart economic growth through sustainable public investment in the arts.** Public investment in the arts delivers transformative social good and a net benefit to HM Treasury¹. But through a more strategic approach, considering both arts council and local authority

¹ Arts Council England distributes £446m of public funding each year, £111,870,446 of which goes to theatre, with £81,941,600 going to Combined Arts. This compares to an overall turnover of £4.44bn per year for the theatre sector, which generates £2.39 billion in Gross Value Added.

funding, we believe public funds could be more effective. Collaborate with us and other stakeholders to strategically review public investment in the arts to achieve the most effective results for taxpayers.

The Theatre Ecosystem

British theatre is a complex, networked ecosystem. Its different parts are inextricably linked through increasing cooperation and co-dependence which has accelerated due to rising costs and the persistent and structural impact of the pandemic.

The sector comprises of producers and producing organisations, and the venues that house them. Some producers and organisations receive public investment from Arts Councils and Local Authorities, but this often represents only a small portion of their turnover, which is mostly generated through ticket sales, sponsorship, philanthropy, membership schemes and some commercial endeavours.

Theatres may be owned or managed privately, by local authorities, not-for-profits, or charities. Many venues that receive public funds also undertake commercial activity in addition to selling tickets, such as renting space and hospitality in their buildings.

Commercial producers raise over £100 million per annum in fresh capital from individuals to invest in the development and production of theatre across the country. They are also the primary source of content for many regional and not-for-profit venues. A single pantomime may represent up to 20% of the annual box office for a regional presenting venue.

The sector also directly generates employment via services providers such as set builders, costume makers, sound and lighting hire companies, transport and storage companies, ticketing, marketing, accounting, and legal firms.

The Local Impact of British Theatre

Theatre is an economic powerhouse, a source for transformative social good and embedded in communities up and down the country. Theatres, service providers, or their workforce are found in every constituency in the UK.

For individuals, theatre attendance promotes wellbeing, empathy and confidence and can boost educational attainment. Cultural infrastructure is also vital to local business, with a thriving theatre boosting high streets.

Our members deliver a range of community outreach and access schemes, including free/subsidised performances for schools, skills development initiatives and space for up-and-coming artists and community groups.

The National Theatre's learning activity is now present in every local authority across the UK either in-person or digitally. In Leicester, over 28,000 people take part in the Curve's free and

low-cost community and learning programmes annually. 230 elders take part in regular sessions with Curve includes Memory Cafes for people living with dementia.

Birmingham Hippodrome offers free Young Community Drop-In Sessions for anyone aged 14+ to feel welcome, provide a creative outlet, and connect with others.

The Global Impact of British Theatre

Producers also export shows globally. Phantom of the Opera has been on stage since 1986 and has been seen by over 140 million people in 183 cities across 41 countries. The Play That Goes Wrong has been produced or licensed in 57 countries since its West End debut in 2014.

SIX the Musical played to 2.6 million people last year in the UK, U.S. and South Korea, with productions planned in Canada, Japan, Australia, and the Netherlands. The original studio cast album has been streamed over six hundred million times.

Theatre has also increasingly attracted foreign direct investment to the UK. New stage adaptations based on major American brands are increasingly developed and premiered in the UK, employing British creative teams, artists, and technicians.

Recent examples include Back to the Future the Musical, TINA: The Tina Turner Musical, and Netflix's Stranger Things. These generate ongoing economic benefits to HM Treasury via income from replica productions, licensing, and overseas tours.

Facts and Figures

- 91% of UK adults engage with the arts at least once a year, with 74% attending an arts event such as an exhibition or theatre performance.
- For every £1 spent on a theatre ticket, an additional spend of £1.40 is generated in local economies.
- The sector generates £2.39 billion in GVA and supports 205,000 workers.
- The global gross revenue of Phantom of the Opera, Mamma Mia! and Cats is over \$13.6bn, exceeding that of each of the James Bond (\$7.8bn) and Wizarding World (Harry Potter) (\$9.7bn) film franchises.
- The average West End ticket price has decreased in real terms by 9.26% since 2019.
- In the West End, most tickets sold are under £55, with nearly a quarter below £30. Less than 5% exceed £150.

SOLT & UK Theatre's Priorities

1. Theatre for Every Child

Expanding access to culture by funding at least one trip to the theatre for every child before they leave school will promote children's wellbeing, empathy, and confidence, and boost educational attainment. It would also end the reported decline in attendance from parents and teachers.

This would involve a maximum investment of £34 million per year from government and could be reduced by increased contribution from the theatre sector and/or delivery partners.

Polling conducted by SOLT & UK Theatre suggests this would have widespread public support, with 84% of parents supportive of such an initiative.

The ask: increase children's access to culture by funding at least one theatre trip for every child before they leave school.

2. Investment in theatre buildings

A survey of 65 theatre venues across the UK found that 1-in-5 venues require at least £5m in the next 10 years just to continue current operations. Without significant capital investment in the next five years, nearly 40% of venues risk closure and 40% will become too unsafe to use.

However, if theatres can access the investment they need:

- 54% could provide more jobs for their local communities and 62% would increase / improve their outreach work.
- 100% of venues would improve their environmental sustainability.
- 57% would increase the variety of programming.
- 100% of buildings built in the Victorian period would be able to increase accessibility.

The ask: co-create a sustainable system for investment in theatre buildings.

3. Public Investment in the Arts

Theatre organisations are increasingly being asked to deliver public services that used to be funded elsewhere – such as community cohesion, support for refugees, health and well-being, warm hubs, and arts education – leading fewer resources to support core activity.

In this context, SOLT & UK believe it is crucial to review how best to achieve the best outcomes from public investment. This includes:

- Ensuring there is a shared understanding across all partners regarding what public investment is trying to achieve.
- Purpose and delivery to be appropriately coordinated across the political objectives of central and local government and as well as arm's length distributors.
- Public investment also needs to support the whole theatre ecosystem and delivery expectations need to be realistic against funding settlements.

The ask: collaborate with us and other stakeholders to strategically review public investment in the arts to achieve the most effective results for taxpayers.

About the Society of London Theatre & 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.

SOLT & UK Theatre's mission is to champion theatre and support our members to thrive, ensuring a dynamic, sustainable, and world-class theatre sector in the UK.

As part of this mission, SOLT & UK Theatre work with our members and government to influence policy which has an impact on the UK theatre sector, providing the external conditions for theatre to thrive.

Find out more and work with us:

Visit our website:

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Get in touch:

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Let us know if you would like to be introduced to our members in your constituency, so they can tell you more about the work they are doing to support your local community.