



Make Work Pay: Safeguarding the Theatre Sector from Unintended Consequences

Detailed briefing from the Society of London Theatre & UK Theatre

Society of London Theatre and UK Theatre 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

Introduction

The purpose of this briefing is to engage constructively with the UK Government's plan to Make Work Pay and the associated Employment Rights Bill, as set out in the King's Speech. We are keen to work closely with the Government to ensure that **the strong and healthy employment relations the sector already enjoys are protected by preventing unintended consequences of Make Work Pay.**

To achieve this, we have:

- Provided background information on the theatre sector and the financial pressures it faces;
- Detailed the unique employment practices within the theatre sector that benefit both employees as well as employers; and
- Identified specific aspects of the Make Work Pay initiative that require careful consideration to prevent damaging unintended consequences on theatre sector employees and employers.

Background

The theatre sector is a driving economic force, providing essential social benefits to communities across the UK, and serving as a cornerstone for the fast-growing creative industries.

The industry is a delicate ecosystem with intricate interactions between its constituent parts. The ecosystem is symbiotic, all parts of the industry rely on other elements to remain sustainable.

- The West End is unique, the original creative cluster, where visitors from around the globe come to watch world-renowned productions. Comparatively, regional theatres are cultural place-makers – often the only place for a local community to access live performance.
- Producers create works to be presented in venues, although some venues also produce work. The roles they employ have some crossover, but their workforces are substantially different.

- Many productions and venues are commercially viable, but others require Arts Council, Charitable Trust, private sponsor, or Local Authority funding to provide a diversity of cultural experiences and nurture creativity. Often new work is subsidised initially before becoming a commercially viable production.
- Some productions will run in a single location whilst others will tour to many regional venues. As the challenges facing the touring part of the industry mount; the symbiotic nature of the industry means the whole theatre industry feels the effects.

As the representative body for those who produce, present, own and manage theatre throughout the UK, SOLT & UK Theatre are particularly well placed to support the Government to deliver its missions. In particular, the missions to kickstart the economy and to break down the barriers to opportunity.

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.

Theatres play an essential role in local communities, delivering transformative social good. In addition to providing entertainment and cultural enrichment, theatres strengthen our sense of community and belonging, cornerstones of the cultural placemaking agenda.

But the British theatre sector faces significant risks. Production costs continue to rise faster than inflation, over the past 14 years local authority funding has plummeted by 48% in real terms, and the Department for Culture, Media, and Sport (DCMS) has reduced its core funding to cultural organisations by 18%.¹ This has already resulted in some organisations reducing their programming activities.²

Many productions are only marginally profitable and carry significant risk. Touring productions and regional theatres in particular must balance a unique responsibility to provide affordable tickets for local cultural experiences whilst battling increased energy prices, maintenance of landmark, listed buildings and cuts to arts subsidies. Productions in not-for-profit venues are often loss leaders, supported by sponsorship, memberships and grant funding. Any further increases to production costs or additional periods of closure are likely to greatly impact the sustainability of the industry.

To unleash theatre's full potential, we want to work with Government to create the conditions for all elements of the theatre industry to thrive. You can read more about this in our [briefing for MPs](#).

Preserving Strong Employment Relations

Maintaining the strong and healthy employment relations the sector already enjoys is essential to the conditions that enable theatre to thrive.

The sector's robust employment relations are demonstrated through numerous collective agreements covering venue staff, creatives, technicians, stage management, musicians,

¹ The State of the Arts, by Campaign for the Arts and the University of Warwick, 2024. <https://www.campaignforthearts.org/reports/the-state-of-the-arts/>

² Bristol Old Vic to review shows in 'fourth year of losses', 7 August 2024. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/c4ng5p4xzjeo>

dancers, opera singers, performers and writers.³ These agreements have been developed over decades between SOLT & UK Theatre, as employer representatives, and our partners in the Trade Unions.

The agreements provide minimum terms and conditions that are typically more generous than statutory employment rights and accommodate the needs of the entire workforce, including many self-employed, against the unique requirements of theatrical work (see below for more information).

These agreements are carefully negotiated between us, as employer representatives, and our union partners to provide the sector with a clear and predictable understanding of staffing costs, essential for long-term planning and securing investment for productions that are often scheduled years in advance.

SOLT & UK Theatre have worked hard with the industry Trade Unions to foster collaborative and constructive employee relations over many decades. By acting and advocating on behalf of the industry, our agreements ensure comparative terms and conditions for commercial and subsidised, producers and venues, West End and regional venues, and touring and non-touring productions alike.

By acting as collective employers, SOLT & UK Theatre can recognise the challenges faced by all parts of the industry, considering issues in the round such as ticket pricing, availability of subsidies for the arts, National Living Wage increases and the impact of pay-grade differentials. Acting collectively also allows small businesses to focus resources on producing excellent theatre while trusting the industry body to ensure high working standards across theatres.

Employment Practices in the Theatre Sector

The employment practices in theatre are distinct compared to other sectors. It is crucial that these are understood and reflected in any legislative changes affecting employees and employers. These include:

1. The Unique Nature of Theatre Work, such as:
 - a. **Fixed-Term Work:** Much of the work in the theatre sector is project-based with fixed-term contracts.
 - b. **Long-Term Planning:** Shows are often planned years in advance, necessitating accurate long-term cost projections.
 - c. **Show Cancellations:** Although rare, show cancellations can occur and impact the availability of work at short notice.
 - d. **Weekly Pay Rates:** Weekly, rather than hourly, pay rates are a key component of the collective agreements for a substantial part of the theatre workforce and are used to accommodate the fluctuating demands of a production and provide stability for employees⁴.

³ See list of collective agreements in Appendix 1

⁴ UK Theatre Bectu agreement which covers front of house and technical staff in theatre venues uses hourly rates

2. Enhanced Terms and Conditions for the Self-Employed Workforce

To protect the workforce's existing terms and conditions, it is essential that these unique practices are reflected in the proposed Make Work Pay legislation and accompanying guidance.

1. The Unique Nature of Theatre Work

Legislation designed for the broader economy can inadvertently create challenges for the theatre sector. Therefore, it is essential that any changes to employment laws consider the unique characteristics of theatre work to avoid unintended negative consequences.

a. Fixed-Term Work

Most productions have a fixed run, with a known end date for the work. Many workers are therefore on fixed-term contracts. These can vary but can typically last between 8 and 12 weeks.

Zero-hour contracts are used in Front of House, Box Office, Bar and Technical roles, allowing creative workers or those with caring responsibilities to earn income between productions or other commitments, such as studying or attending auditions. By allowing staff to swap shifts, and flexibly increase or decrease working hours, inclusive employers can meet the varying needs of their employees. This flexibility benefits both workers and employers, enabling effective management of seasonal fluctuations.

Dark weeks, where venues are closed to the public, are vital times for theatre venues to ensure technicians and maintenance staff have time to conduct regular health and safety checks. These necessitate weeks in which revenue is zero and non-salaried staff will not be required to work. Currently, zero-hours contracts are used to avoid regular periods where staff are laid off and rehired during these periods. This is particularly pertinent for some regional venues which are not programmed to the same extent as some busy London-based theatres.

Therefore, legislation aimed at improving the rights of individuals on fixed-term and zero-hours contracts must consider the specific nature of theatre work and the mutual flexibility these contracts provide.

b. Long-Term Planning

Funding applications and investment packs for new shows are prepared years in advance, with venues typically budgeting and programming shows 18-24 months ahead of time.

A significant portion of production costs relates to staffing, so any changes that could increase these costs need to consider this long-term planning cycle. Without this consideration, the viability of productions, producing organisations, and venues will be compromised.

c. Show Cancellations

Show cancellations, while rare, are not unheard of. If a show is unable to take place, it usually represents an unrecoverable loss of revenue, even though a show may still be liable for many of the same costs.

It also has a significant impact on the audience experience, damaging consumer confidence. As many productions have limited runs, it can be challenging to schedule audiences with a suitable alternative performance.

Our collective agreements already address these circumstances. For example, under the BECTU agreement, staff are entitled to 48 hours' notice of call cancellations; otherwise, they receive a cancellation payment equivalent to four hours at the appropriate rate.

We therefore propose that the Make Work Pay legislation should defer to these collective agreements for the theatre sector.

d. Weekly Pay Rates

Due to the nature of touring and of theatre work, some collective agreements (for example in relation to actors) specify weekly rather than hourly pay rates. This allows flexibility in working hours to meet the demands of a production while providing stability and certainty in pay.

Many of the collective agreements stipulate a working week of up to 46 hours to accommodate weeks where long hours are necessary, such as when a touring production changes venue. Consequently, minimum weekly rates specified in the collective agreements must comply with the National Living Wage (NLW) legislation for 40-46 hours per week, even though most workers covered under these agreements do not regularly work these hours.

Any significant and/or unexpected increase in the NLW undermines this structure to the detriment of both employers and employees. It may also have a significant wider negative impact on the viability of parts of the sector, creating an unsustainable compression on pay differentials.

Given the unique circumstances of the theatre industry, SOLT & UK Theatre recommend that the collective agreements, which are jointly owned with our union partners, are appropriately reflected in any new legislation related to Make Work Pay.

2. Enhanced Terms and Conditions for Self-Employed Workers

Our members take their responsibilities as employers seriously. Accordingly, SOLT & UK Theatre have negotiated 13 collective agreements with various union partners (see appendix 1 for details). These ensure pay, terms and conditions that are often better than statutory provisions for the whole workforce. This is particularly relevant for the large proportion of self-employed workers⁵ in the industry who, under our collective agreements, are granted terms and conditions that are at least as good as, if not better than, employed workers under statutory provisions in other industries. Due to the self-employed tax-status of these workers, producers and venues cover these costs without being able to claim them back from HMRC. Examples of enhanced terms include:

- **Weekly Pay Rates:** Based on 39-46-hour working weeks, even though most staff do not consistently work these hours.

⁵ Sometimes some parts of the self-employed workforce are referred to as freelance, however this is not a technical term.

- **Incapacity Pay:** In addition to statutory sick pay, performers and stage managers often receive up to full salary for up to four weeks during sick leave.
- **Annual Leave:** Artists receive 28 days of annual leave plus bank holidays, which increases to 30 days after five years of service.
- **Maternity Pay:** Some workers receive enhanced maternity pay, while others receive statutory pay, including the self-employed.
- **Pension Rights:** Day 1 pension rights with enhanced employer contributions of up to 5% are commonplace, often without a lower qualifying earnings floor.

Any new legislation regarding the status of self-employed workers cannot jeopardise the enhanced benefits package that the theatre workforce currently enjoys, or the ability for self-employed workers in the industry to participate in collective bargaining.

SOLT & UK Theatre propose that the status of a self-employed worker should be maintained in the entertainment sector.

If the Government does not protect this status which underpins the existing collective agreements, many in the sector would face reduced take home pay and potentially worse terms and conditions.

The Impact of Unforeseen Costs

Any additional unforeseen costs beyond what is covered by these agreements could jeopardise financial projections, which in turn risks the viability of both upcoming productions and the organisations involved.

Most of the theatre sector's expenses are related to people, both on and off stage. When these costs rise, venues and producers have limited options to balance the books.

Each performance is a perishable product with fixed delivery costs and a sales capacity limited by the number of seats in a venue. **Therefore, the only feasible way to manage increased costs is to increase ticket prices or reduce the number and/or scale of shows and/or closing venues, resulting in job losses.**

The Impact on Ticket Prices

Ensuring access to the performing arts is a priority for our members. The theatre sector works diligently to keep tickets affordable. In 2023, 45% of West End tickets were £50 or under, and nearly a quarter were £30 or under. Across the UK, the average ticket price in 2023 was £35.

Despite significant cost increases in set construction, building maintenance, salaries, training, and a 120% rise in utility bills, the sector has not passed inflationary increases onto audiences - the market will not bear what would be the increases in ticket prices required to offset the inflationary increases. Since 2019, the average ticket price in the West End has decreased by 9.26% in real terms.

However, the ticket pricing model may become unsustainable if further significant increases in employment-related costs occur. If theatres are not able to raise prices without affecting audience demand, they may not be able to cover the additional costs of putting on a show -

this could affect the diversity of programming in the industry and the availability of affordable tickets, making theatre less inclusive.

The Impact on the Number and/or Scale of Shows

With venues spread across the country and the increasing fragility of touring,⁶ any reduction in the number or scale of productions would result in fewer jobs and have widespread repercussions. This would especially impact regional growth, as theatres play a crucial role in local economies. For every £1 spent on a theatre ticket, an additional spend of £1.40 is generated locally.

A [recent survey of SOLT & UK Theatre members](#) revealed that in response to anticipated cost pressures, 83% planned smaller-scale productions, and nearly two thirds expected to reduce the number of productions.⁷

Key Areas in Make Work Pay Require Attention to Avoid Unintended Consequences

The following tables outline how the key proposals within Make Work Pay impact the theatre sector and highlight the specific areas that need to be addressed to prevent any unintended consequences.


We welcome a detailed discussion on these points before any consultation or draft legislation is released.

They include

- Ending “Exploitative” Zero-Hours Contracts (ZHC)
- Move Towards a Single Status of Worker (rather than employee/worker)
- Genuine Living Wage
- Voice at Work (Repealing Trade Union legislation from the Conservative government)
- Maternity Discrimination (Making it unlawful to dismiss a woman who is pregnant for six months after her return, except in specific circumstances)
- Health and Safety at Work
- Right to Switch-Off

⁶ Arts Council England are currently exploring how best to support touring with a dedicated fund

⁷ Asked in relation to the planned reduction of theatre tax relief

Ending “Exploitative” Zero-Hours Contracts (ZHC)
How Make Work Pay Affects the Theatre Sector
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The theatre industry uses zero-hours contracts, especially for roles such as front -of-house and other staff covered by BECTU agreements. • Many in the theatre workforce genuinely prefer ZHCs due to the flexibility they offer. Creative staff, in particular, value the ability to cancel shifts on short notice for opportunities like auditions or other freelance work. Non-creative staff also appreciate the flexibility to balance their work with commitments such as studying. • Staff covered by the BECTU agreements include additional payments to cover overtime, sixth working day, and premium payments meaning those on ZHCs are compensated for working additional hours above the “typical” working week. • Theatres have ‘dark weeks’, periods without performances or associated revenue, scheduled in advance. Therefore, in some weeks there are no hours available to work.
What are the implications?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The current proposals are likely to have a negative impact on workers in the sector. Employers are likely to have teams comprising fewer people in order to minimise the risk, and therefore employment opportunities will diminish. • This limitation could significantly decrease their income, this is because employers will only be able to offer a minimum number of core hours, potentially forcing some to leave the sector altogether. • Recruitment for key front-of-house and performance roles, such as followspot operators⁸ and dressers, could also be adversely affected. • For employers, this would make it more challenging to manage seasonal fluctuations in workload, leading to increased operational costs and reduced efficiency.
How to prevent unintended consequences
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We recommend continuing to allow zero-hour contracts, as the current system is mutually beneficial to both employers and employees in the theatrical workforce and we recommend an exception for creative industries. • It is important to highlight that the relevant Trade Unions recognise that this type of contract is well-suited to the creative industries. • We also propose implementing provisions that include flexibility clauses to enable employers to serve notice of a lack of “typical” hours in a particular week, such as during Dark Weeks, without the need for lay-offs to be implemented
Parts of the ecosystem affected
<p> Venues use ZHCs to support a creative workforce in front of house roles and to support a business where some weeks do not require any work from a large proportion of staff.</p>

⁸ A spotlight technician who operates a stage lighting instrument known as a “followspot”.

Move Towards a Single Status of Worker (rather than employee/worker)

How Make Work Pay Affects the Theatre Sector

- A significant portion of the theatre workforce is self-employed, with many covered by a SOLT or UK Theatre / union collective agreements that ensure better employment conditions than the statutory minimum for employees.
- Preserving the ability to treat self-employed workers as employees is vital for maintaining the strong and healthy employment relations that are the hallmark of the theatre sector.

What are the implications?

- If the relevant self-employed workers are unable to maintain their status under employment law and for tax and National Insurance purposes, it would become more challenging for them to claim expenses and could require them to make payments upfront.
- This change would also likely jeopardise their existing benefits package and result in a lower take-home pay, placing additional financial strain on these workers.

How to prevent unintended consequences

- Maintain the status of a self-employed worker in the entertainment sector, as established in the McCowen & West ruling⁹.

Parts of the ecosystem affected



Producers and producing venues which employ actors on individual short-term contracts currently benefiting from the McCowen & West ruling to maintain the status of a self-employed worker who use from the existing benefits package under SOLT & UK Theatre agreements.



Venues will sometimes employ genuinely casual staff – such as those with caring responsibilities or pursuing other creative endeavours - as **workers** on zero-hours contracts to reflect the nature of the role.

⁹ [a_d_mccowen_and_s_a_west.pdf\(hmrc.gov.uk\)](https://www.hmrc.gov.uk/a_d_mccowen_and_s_a_west.pdf)

Genuine Living Wage
How Make Work Pay Affects the Theatre Sector
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Productions and producing organisations set budgets well in advance for the purposes of raising investment and applying for funding. This requires budgeting for staff costs sometimes years in advance. • Employers already incur additional costs for many self-employed staff, therefore any rise in staffing expenses – including increases to the living wage – has a disproportionately large impact on the sector. • While most staff under SOLT agreements earn above the National Living Wage (NLW) and the London Living Wage, certain entry-level BECTU grades, such as front-of-house and box office positions, are at the NLW level. • Contracts covered by the BECTU agreements include additional payments to cover overtime, sixth working day, and premium payments in addition to base pay rates.
What are the implications?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This would impose greater cost pressures on theatre employers compared to other sectors, penalising them for having existing collective agreements. • Unexpected increases in staff costs, not accounted for during the long-term planning of a show (often done years in advance), could lead to higher ticket prices, organisational deficits, and a reduction in the number and scale of future productions. • The current practice of announcing rates in November for implementation the following April severely disrupts theatres' financial planning. Theatre organisations, particularly those in receipt of arts council funding, budget far in advance, and this short notice threatens their ability to maintain financial stability. • Some SOLT & UK Theatre collective agreements have specified wage differentials (in percentage terms) between grades, thus any large increases to the National Living Wage would consequently result in higher pay increases to higher pay points which could be prohibitive to some theatre organisations. Alternative approaches – such as renegotiating compressed differentials – could have implications for recruitment and retention of mid-career workers.
How to prevent unintended consequences
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The interaction between the Genuine Living Wage and existing collective agreements needs careful consideration. We are concerned that the rising costs associated with employer benefits under these agreements could render jobs in the theatre sector unaffordable. • We are committed to working with the Government to ensure that implementing the NLW, where collective agreements exist, does not lead to job losses within the industry. • SOLT & UK Theatre advocate for as much advance notice as possible of new NLW rates.

Parts of the ecosystem affected



Regional theatres working with very thin margins: juggling the ticket prices they can reasonably charge in less economically affluent areas of the country with the rising costs of staging a show.



Productions which are budgeted years in advanced and have raised the capital or received funding for a planned project with unknown variables such as the wage bill. These employers need time to carefully plan for wage increases.



Productions typically use weekly rather than hourly pay rates as specified in SOLT & UK Theatre collective agreements. These specify maximum rather than expected weekly working hours and therefore staff on these contracts are paid at least National Living Wage for hours they are rarely required to work. This is particularly relevant for **touring shows** where variable hours are common, this arrangement gives certainty and stability of income over the tour.

Voice at Work (repealing Trade Union legislation from the Conservative government)

How Make Work Pay Affects the Theatre Sector

- Repealing the 2016 Trade Union Act would reduce the notice period that Trade Unions are required to give before industrial action, from two weeks to just one.
- Lowering the threshold for industrial action similarly creates greater instability for an already precarious sector and for members of other unions whose incomes will be affected, as will non union members.
- In the case of limited-run productions (for example, those lasting only 8-12 weeks), a one-week notice period is insufficient to reschedule performances within the available timeframe.
- Any show cancellation, such as those caused by strike action, leads to significant financial losses and in some cases can cause show closures.
- We are concerned that changes to the rules around Trade Union recognition would inadvertently undermine our existing collective agreements, which operate an industry-wide level, if Trade Union recognition becomes workplace-by-workplace. This would jeopardise the enduring, consistent and stabilising nature of the collective agreements and could inadvertently lead to unequal working conditions across our diverse industry.

What are the implications?


- A reduction in the notice period or lowering of the thresholds would make it increasingly challenging to plan for cancelled shows.
- Any show cancellation, such as those caused by strike action, results in substantial income losses that are typically irrecoverable, a financial impact that is particularly unique to this sector. The cancellation of a single performance may result in revenue losses of anywhere from £15,000 to £150,000 or more.

- Whilst all workers in the sector benefit from the collective agreements, the membership of each union is not entirely representative of those working in the sector. Lowering the threshold for industrial action reduces the validity of such mandate, whilst inflicting harm upon workers in other unions and non-unionised workers who will be affected by such strike action.
- With multiple union agreements negotiated on a rolling basis, lowering the threshold creates significant financial instability for the sector, leading to genuine harm and impacting growth.
- It also creates a hardship on audiences, many of whom may also incur additional irrecoverable losses associated with travel and accommodation costs. Such uncertainty is likely to deter audiences from making advance bookings. This erosion of consumer confidence threatens to undermine the stability the sector has painstakingly achieved in its recovery from the pandemic.
- When audiences have been impacted by industrial action in other sectors, such as train strikes, theatres have supported customers by moving tickets, less notice would make this more difficult.

How to prevent unintended consequences

- We strongly recommend retaining the current two-week notice period for industrial action, as this is critical to maintaining fiscal stability.
- We strongly recommend retaining current thresholds for industrial action to allow effective planning. One week is insufficient time to plan and limits opportunities for negotiation.
- We further propose that any future legislation must fully recognise and incorporate the provisions for strike action already established in collective agreements.
- It is important to protect the strengths of existing collective agreements, direct recognition on a workplace basis could unintentionally undermine positive industrial relations in the industry.

Parts of the ecosystem affected

 Both **commercial operating groups** and **small businesses** appreciate the ability to collectively negotiate via an industry body rather than negotiate locally. This allows business and trade unions to maximise negotiating time and expertise: prioritising promoting good employment practises across the whole industry rather than inexperienced negotiators agreeing separate local deals across hundreds of small workplaces.

Maternity Discrimination (Making it unlawful to dismiss a woman who is pregnant for six months after her return, except in specific circumstances)

How Make Work Pay Affects the Theatre Sector

- Under employment law, the conclusion of a fixed-term contract is considered a dismissal.
- In the theatre sector, the end date for a production, and consequently the contracts for cast and crew, is typically determined well in advance.


- What are the implications?

- When a show concludes productions may be obligated to continue employing a pregnant woman for up to six months after her return.
- This requirement could apply even in cases where the production is scheduled for a limited run, which may consist of five weeks of rehearsals followed by nine weeks of performances (a total of 14 weeks).

How to prevent unintended consequences

- We would suggest an exemption for any planned show closure – it is unreasonable for an employer to be liable for all maternity pay when the employee was only ever engaged on a short, fixed term contract. When an end date of a production is predetermined, we would suggest that employers are also exempt from extended employment obligations due to these ‘specific circumstances’.
- This could be established as an exemption for fixed-term contracts or as a specific provision tailored to the unique conditions of the theatre industry.

Parts of the ecosystem affected

-  **Producers** with fixed-run shows could be liable for staffing costs for long after the show ends, which they would be unable to plan for when fundraising for a show.

Health and Safety at Work

How Make Work Pay Affects the Theatre Sector

- Theatres may experience high temperatures, and if specific maximum working temperatures are enforced, it could prevent shows from proceeding.
- Common measures used in other sectors, such as rotating shifts, are impractical in the theatre sector, where specific performers are required for the duration of the show.
- Additionally, many theatres are listed buildings, making the installation of air conditioning systems more challenging, more costly, and consequently less feasible.
- Summer is a peak time for many theatres, particularly in areas with high levels of tourism, closing productions during this time would cause significant losses in revenue.

- The unpredictability of heat, and associated actions and consequences would have the effect of creating sufficient customer uncertainty that it would result in fewer summer productions, less revenue and less employment across the industry.


What are the implications?


- Implementing strict maximum working temperatures without flexibility or reference to sector specific mitigations could have a significant detrimental impact.
- In 2022, measures were introduced to address high temperatures in theatres, including:
 - Installation of air conditioning units and industrial fans;
 - Alterations to costumes;
 - Scheduled pauses during performances;
 - Modifications to performance tracks;
 - Provision of fridge-freezers in dressing rooms; and
 - Use of ice-packs, frozen towels, water fountains.
- The Theatre Safety Committee has issued guidance on managing high temperatures effectively, which our members report has been beneficial in addressing the issue.



How to prevent unintended consequences

- We propose that MWP endorses the previously agreed-upon guidance, which has proven effective for the theatre sector. This includes adhering to the Theatre Safety Committee's [Guidance Note 1.22 Working during hot weather](#).
- We also recommend the Government continue to work with us to explore ways to support investment in theatre buildings to improve working conditions. This could involve upgrades such as installing cooler, more environmentally friendly lighting systems to improve working conditions for performers.

Parts of the ecosystem affected

 Many **theatre buildings** are listed buildings which makes it costly to retrofit with air conditioning or other cooling measures. The average age of an ATGE venue (the largest commercial venue group in the UK) is 105 years old and not configured for increasing temperatures.

 **Producers** will not receive any revenue for a performance which is cancelled due to high temperatures but may be liable for costs such as energy bills and staffing costs where a minimum number of hours is paid for last-minute shift cancellation.

Right to Switch-Off
How Make Work Pay Affects the Theatre Sector
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The theatre sector typically operates on working hours that differ from the rest of the economy, primarily due to the scheduling of performances.
What are the implications?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The definition of “out of hours” is unclear in our context. It may be necessary to communicate updates to staff outside of regular working hours to comply with Union agreements. It may also be in the best interests of employees. For example, we may need to inform show personnel of changes such as role adjustments due to illness or injury. Timely communication in these situations in the interests of the employee so that they may respond and adjust accordingly.
How to prevent unintended consequences
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> We advocate for the "right to switch off" to be tailored to the unique demands of the theatre sector. It is crucial that this provision does not negatively affect our ability to fulfil obligations to audiences or to provide our employees with necessary and timely information. We would prefer this to be a Code of Practice, enabling employers to work within broadly defined parameters to ensure a balanced approach to this.
Parts of the ecosystem affected
  <p>Anybody working directly on productions: from front of house staff who need to be contacted about urgent scheduling changes (employed by venues); to technical staff being “on-call” in case of emergency (employed by venues and producers); or understudies being notified that the lead is unwell, and they will be performing urgently. There are many reasons why theatre staff may need to be contactable outside of their regular working hours.</p>

The Society of London Theatre (SOLT) & 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.

Find out more about us, the theatre ecosystem and how to create the conditions for theatre to thrive in our [briefing for MPs](#).

Visit our websites [Advocacy Resources - UK Theatre](#) & [Advocacy Resources - SOLT](#)
Follow us on socials @SOLTnews & @uk_theatre #TheatreForEveryChild #ThrivingTheatres
Get in touch publicaffairs@soltukt.co.uk

Appendix 1 List of collective agreements

SOLT Agreement	Start date	End date	UK Theatre Agreement	Start date	End date
MU	2 October 2023	4 October 2026	MU	3 April 2023	5 April 2026
Bectu	16 October 2023	18 January 2026	Bectu	1 April 2017	Ongoing – rates agreed until 30 March 2025
Equity Performers and Stage Managers	3 April 2023	5 April 2026	Equity Performers and Stage Managers (Subsidised)	3 April 2023	5 April 2026
Equity Designers	2 October 2019	Ongoing – rates agreed until 29 September 2024	Equity Performers and Stage Managers (Commercial)	3 April 2023	5 April 2026
Equity Choreographers	7 April 2014	Ongoing – rates agreed until 3 October 2027	Equity Designers	2 October 2019	Ongoing – rates agreed until 29 September 2024
Equity Directors	1 August 2018	Ongoing – rates agreed until 3 April 2027	Equity Choreographers	7 April 2014	Ongoing – rates agreed until 3 October 2027
SOLT/UK Theatre Opera and Ballet Stage Management	6 April 2009	Ongoing – rates agreed until 7 October 2024	Equity Directors	1 August 2018	Ongoing – rates agreed until 3 April 2027
SOLT/UK Theatre Ballet and Dance	4 April 1994	Ongoing – rates agreed until 3 January 2025	WGGB (Subsidised)	1 May 2014	Ongoing – rates agreed until 4 May 2025
SOLT/UK Theatre Opera Directors	1 April 2006	Ongoing – rates agreed until 7 October 2024	Equity Overseas Touring	4 January 2010	Ongoing
SOLT/UK Theatre Opera Guest Artists	6 April 2015	Ongoing – rates agreed until 7 October 2024	SOLT/UK Theatre Fight directors	4 April 2016	Ongoing
SOLT/UK Theatre Opera Singers	6 April 2009	Ongoing – rates agreed until 7 October 2024			