

UK Theatre Member Toolkit for Reform Engagement



MAY 2026

Portland

In this document



01 Introduction



02 Reform's background



03 How to approach conversations with Reform



04 How to prepare for a successful meeting



05 The key points to land



06 Appendix



Introduction

Portland

Portland has been working with SOLT/ UK Theatre to help identify common ground with Reform stakeholders, position theatre as an essential local institution, and develop messaging that resonates with Reform representatives and their priorities.

As with all political parties, organisations must determine the extent to which they wish to engage with policies and politicians whose views may not align with their own. This guidance does not seek to make that decision on behalf of organisations. Instead, it takes a non-partisan approach, focusing solely on how to articulate the value of theatre and culture to elected representatives.

The guidance is designed to support the sector's broader objective of building constructive relationships with decision-makers ahead of funding, policy and investment decisions. It outlines Reform's priorities, offers practical advice on local engagement, and provides guidance on messaging most likely to land with Reform representatives in your area, and make a compelling case for theatre's value.

Reform UK's growing power

Reform UK is on the rise – with Members of Parliament, mayors and councillors taking seats across England, Scotland and Wales and a general election on the horizon, theatre leaders need to be ready to have confident conversations with Reform representatives about what theatre does for their area.

At the 2024 General Election, Reform UK won over four million votes and took five parliamentary seats. The 7 May 2026 Local Elections solidified this trend, with Farage's party having seized control of 14 councils, successfully winning votes from both Labour and the Conservatives.

Crucially, as devolution expands from Westminster and local political control strengthens, Reform stakeholders are increasingly becoming key budget holders with direct control over cultural funding, leisure spending and economic development investment at a local level. With these decision-makers now shaping funding priorities in their areas, engaging with them is no longer optional – it is essential to securing support for your theatre.

However, this does not mean diluting the sector's commitment to equality, diversity and inclusion. It means explaining that work in terms that are practical, local and easy to understand: making sure theatres are welcoming civic spaces, rooted in the communities they serve, where people from different backgrounds can take part, feel a sense of belonging and see their lives reflected on stage and in the building.

Getting in now, while relationships are still being formed, policy positions are not yet fixed and funding priorities are still being determined, matters. The decisions made today will shape funding availability for years to come.



Reform's background

Reform has been consistently rising in the polls over the past three to four years. The party is the latest iteration of a political project that began with the UK Independence Party (UKIP) in the 1990s, which drew significant support around the 2014 European elections before fragmenting. It was succeeded by the Brexit Party, founded by Nigel Farage in 2019, which later rebranded as Reform UK. The party now sits at the centre of a wider international shift towards populist, nationalist politics.

This is echoed across Europe and beyond, with the rise of right-wing parties and leaders such as Marine Le Pen's Rassemblement National in France, Giorgia Meloni's Brothers of Italy, the AfD becoming Germany's second-largest party and Donald Trump's return to the White House in 2025.

At the national level, Reform UK policies largely centre around restoring Britain's power by reducing immigration, protecting sovereignty, ensuring citizens are safe and moving away from net zero policies.

At a local level, Reform councillors tend to focus on practical, visible issues: potholes, public spending and local services. They are sceptical of what they regard as establishment institutions and are not yet operating with a coherent cultural strategy. That creates an opening for theatre leaders who can speak directly to local economic impact and community value.



How to approach conversations with Reform

How to win support

To undertake meaningful conversations with Reform and drive support and understanding of your sector, we advise the following approach:

- **Be proactive and lead with an invitation** – Bringing councillors to productions will repeatedly open doors in a way that formal meetings will not. Seeing the work in person can shift the conversation, and the earlier you extend that invitation the better. Relationships built well in advance are far more durable than those formed under pressure, so do not wait for a funding decision or a difficult moment to make first contact.
- **Position yourself as an investment partner** – Frame theatre as infrastructure that supports town centres, tourism and skills development. Avoid language around subsidy or cultural entitlement.
- **Lead with your local numbers** – Economic impact data is the strongest entry point – share what your venue contributes in jobs, visitor spend and business rate income. Make the case in terms of return on public investment.
- **Engage with children and young people’s work** – Programming around young people, skills and family activity has resonated consistently with Reform representatives across different areas.

Discussion principles:

When engaging Reform representatives, approach every conversation with the following in mind:

- **Respect** – Treat representatives as serious local decision-makers with their own priorities and pressures, and take a genuine interest in what matters to them and their constituents.
- **Transparency** – Be straightforward about who you are, how your theatre is funded and what you deliver locally. Openness about both strengths and challenges builds credibility.
- **Collaboration** – Come with the mindset of a partner. The goal is to explore what you can achieve together for the area.

Portland’s advice: The most effective conversations will treat Reform representatives as serious local partners. Organisations that present themselves as visible local institutions with a clear contribution to growth and community cohesion will have the most productive conversations. Position your organisation as a practical local asset with a defined role in the area’s economic and community life, rather than as a cultural body seeking support.



How to prepare for a successful meeting

Councillors and MPs are primarily motivated by demonstrating visible impact in their local communities and being seen to support local jobs, businesses and families. They will want to understand what the theatre means to their constituents in straightforward, tangible terms.

A successful visit starts from the moment they say hello to staff members. Front-of-house, box office, security, volunteers and wider teams should be aware of the visit, understand why it matters and feel prepared to engage warmly and professionally. Staff should feel comfortable explaining the theatre's local role, answer practical questions and handle different views constructively.

- **Know your strongest messages before the visit** – Familiarise yourself with the economic impact, community benefit and local pride messages in this document, as these are most likely to resonate.
- **Prepare one or two specific local stories** – A local business that benefits from your audience footfall, a community group that uses your space or a participant whose life has been changed by your work. Concrete examples will land far better than general claims.
- **Make sure the visit feels well run** – Ensure the venue is well presented and that any staff or volunteers who may meet the visitor are aware of the visit and ready to be welcoming.

Questions to ask your local councillor or MP

1. ‘What do you see as the biggest opportunities for [town/area] over the next few years?’
 - **Why ask it:** This helps you understand what matters most to them and gives you a clearer sense of how to position the theatre in relation to their priorities, whether that is growth, regeneration, the high street or community life.
2. ‘How do you feel the town centre has changed in recent years, and what do you think makes the difference to footfall?’
 - **Why ask it:** This creates a practical opening to talk about the theatre's role in bringing people into the area and supporting nearby businesses. It keeps the conversation focused on visible local impact rather than culture in the abstract.
3. ‘What would make you feel like this theatre was really working for [town/area]?’
 - **Why ask it:** This invites them to say plainly what they want to see from the theatre. It can help surface their expectations around local benefit, visibility, access or partnerships and gives you a better sense of how they will judge value.



The key points to land

This section sets out the three core message areas to draw on when engaging Reform representatives. Each section has a headline message, a single, clear statement of the argument, followed by three supporting messages that develop and evidence it.

In most conversations, you will not want to use all three areas at once. Lead with the message you believe is the most relevant to the representative's priorities and support it with local proof points specific to your theatre and area. The more concrete and local the example, the more persuasive the argument.



The key points to land – Economic Impact

Entertainment drives the tourism and visitor economy – The entertainment sector brings visitors from outside the area who spend on local accommodation, transport and local services, creating genuine economic stimulus.

- **Scale and continued growth*** – In 2024, members of the Society of London Theatre and UK Theatre welcomed over 37 million audience members. The West End alone surpassed 17.1 million attendees and generated over £1 billion in revenue for the first time in history, achieving 11% post-pandemic audience growth, unmatched in the UK's experience economy.

Theatres create measurable financial return – Theatre venues attract visitor footfall and spending that translates to tax revenue and business rate income for councils acting as an investment that pays back.

- **Exceptional public investment return** – Between 2015 and 2022, labour productivity in the arts and culture sector averaged 11% higher than the UK's non-financial economy. For every £1 of public investment, it returns over £11 to the Treasury.

Theatre generates real jobs and local spending – Every production creates work for local tradespeople, technicians and hospitality staff. Visitors spend money in local restaurants, hotels and shops which stay in the community.

- **Direct economic multiplier effect** – For every £1 spent on a theatre ticket, an additional £1.40 is spent in surrounding shops, restaurants and hotels – generating £1.94 billion in added value to local economies each year.

*Local data will always be most persuasive, but the national data may be useful where local evidence is not available.



The key points to land – Local Community Benefits

Theatre strengthens family bonds – Local theatres are places where parents and children spend quality time together doing something memorable.

- **Multi-generational programming** – Theatres offer diverse programming that appeals to all ages and backgrounds – from baby and parent classes, play spaces for children and afterschool/holiday activities, to workshops for over-65s and dementia-friendly performances. This breadth ensures theatre is accessible for families at every life stage.

Theatre gives a national voice to local stories and heritage – Theatre celebrates what our community has achieved, giving residents something to be proud of locally.

- **Community dialogue and storytelling** – Theatre has the capacity to amplify local stories and confront complex community issues on a national platform. We saw this in Nottingham with the Playhouse's production of *Punch* sparking national discussion on justice, accountability and forgiveness. Alongside the production, the theatre launched Talking Circle events offering space for community dialogue on youth violence, masculinity and mental health.

Theatre builds confident, skilled young people – Theatre develops communication skills, teamwork and resilience in young people through practical experience, equipping them with real skills that help them succeed in work and life.

- **Widespread skills development** – 80% of theatre leaders run free or subsidised programmes that support young people's mental health, offer skills development initiatives and provide platforms for emerging artists. These programmes develop the communication, teamwork and resilience young people need to succeed in work and life.

Local audiences reflect the communities they serve – Programming ultimately has to respond to what local people see. Otherwise, theatres would not survive.

- **Programming shaped by local demand** – Venues curate seasons that reflect the tastes and needs of their communities, from family shows and musicals to new writing, dramas and community-led work.



The key points to land – Local Pride

Theatre stages local talent and achievement – Local theatres put homegrown performers, writers and creative workers centre stage, raising our area's profile and showing what local people can achieve.

- **International reputation and craftsmanship excellence** – Theatre is a significant export industry. Nearly one in four international visitors to London attended a West End show in 2024, but beyond London, regional UK theatres' production capabilities build sets and produce work for international stages, showcasing British craftsmanship and creative excellence on the global stage.

Theatre puts our community on the map – Our shows provide an opportunity to attract visitors, media attention and investment, giving our area a reputation for being vibrant and forward-thinking.

- **Town centre revitalisation and identity** – From city centres to coastal towns, thriving theatres can help revive high streets, attract investment and instil pride in place. When theatres invest in their venues and communities, they create new gathering spaces that draw people into high streets and attract broader urban regeneration, positioning theatre as a catalyst for local identity and economic growth.

Theatre celebrates local heritage and heroes – Theatre celebrates local achievement and tells the stories that matter to our community – who we are, what we've built and what we are proud of.

- **Regional heritage and storytelling** – Theatres celebrate and preserve regional narratives and heritage, giving communities a platform to tell their own stories. From coastal theatres hosting local playwrights to regional companies preserving dialect and cultural traditions, theatre ensures local identity and history are valued, celebrated and passed on to future generations.

Theatre venues are community landmarks – Theatres are housed in iconic buildings that define town character and give residents something tangible to take pride in and care for, helping to create a focal point for community identity.

- **Civic institutions that anchor communities** – Theatres are found in every constituency and act as civic institutions that anchor local communities. Many are historic buildings that form part of the UK's cultural identity, heritage and tourism economy.

Theatre signals economic confidence – Investing in vibrant venues demonstrates that the community believes in growth and isn't just cutting costs; it attracts talented people and businesses who want to build their futures there.

- **Investment in theatres drives local growth** – Hall for Cornwall shows this in practice: a £30 million investment transformed a Grade II* listed building into a cultural hub, increasing audiences by 54%, doubling youth theatre and dance participation, increasing local job opportunities by 29% and supporting wider regeneration in Truro.



Appendix



Draft letter of introduction

Dear [Cllr / MP name],

I am writing to introduce myself as [job title of theatre name] and invite you to visit [theatre name] in your capacity as [local councillor / Member of Parliament] for [area].

[Theatre name] is one of [area]'s important civic and community assets. Each year, we welcome [audience number] people through our doors, support [number] jobs and work with [schools / colleges / community groups / local charities] across the area.

However, our role extends beyond productions on the stage. The theatre brings people into the town centre, supports nearby hospitality and retail businesses, gives young people opportunities to build confidence and skills, and provides a shared space for families and residents of all ages.

We would be pleased to show you around the theatre, introduce you to members of the team and discuss how we can support your priorities for [area]. In particular, we would value the chance to talk about how we can work together to drive local footfall, positive community life, skills and civic pride.

Please let me know whether there is a convenient time for you to visit over the coming weeks.

Yours sincerely,

[Name]

[Job title]

[Theatre name]

[Contact details]



Key Statistics from *The Theatre In the UK Report 2026 & The State Of British Theatre In 2025*

2026

Audience & growth

- In 2025 theatre members welcomed over 37 million audience members.
- Audiences reflect the full occupational spectrum of the UK population.
- The West End alone surpassed 17.46 million attendees in 2025, 3 million more than Broadway and 2 million more than the entire Premier League.
- The West End generated over £1 billion in box office revenue.
- Audiences reflect the full occupational spectrum of the UK population.

Affordability & accessibility

- 95% of theatres deliver programmes contributing to social good.
- 86% run workshops with local schools.
- 83% provide tickets specifically for local schools.
- All respondents operate free or subsidised ticket schemes.
- A UK median ticket price of £41, with 41% of tickets £35 or below.
- Most West End tickets sold for £56 or less with more than a quarter under £35. Fewer than 4% exceeded £150.
- West End ticket prices down by 8.9% in real terms since 2019.

Financial risk & infrastructure

- 36% of organisations forecast an operating deficit this year.
- That rises to 51% among subsidised organisations.
- Only 36% expect turnover to increase this year, down from 60% last year.
- 91% expect total costs to rise, especially staffing, supply, energy, and building maintenance.



Key Statistics from *The State Of British Theatre In 2025*

2025

Economic value & return on investment

- For every £1 of public investment, the theatre sector returns over £11 to the Treasury.
- Every £1 spent on a theatre ticket generates an additional £1.40 for surrounding businesses.
- The sector contributes nearly £2 billion annually in added value to the economy.
- Between 2015 and 2022, labour productivity in the arts and culture sector was 11% higher than the UK non-financial economy .
- Theatre is a cornerstone of the UK's wider Creative Industries, which are worth over £126 billion to the national economy.
- In 2021–22, £38 million in Theatre Tax Relief (TTR) generated at least £163 million in production investment – a return of more than 4:1.

Financial risk & infrastructure

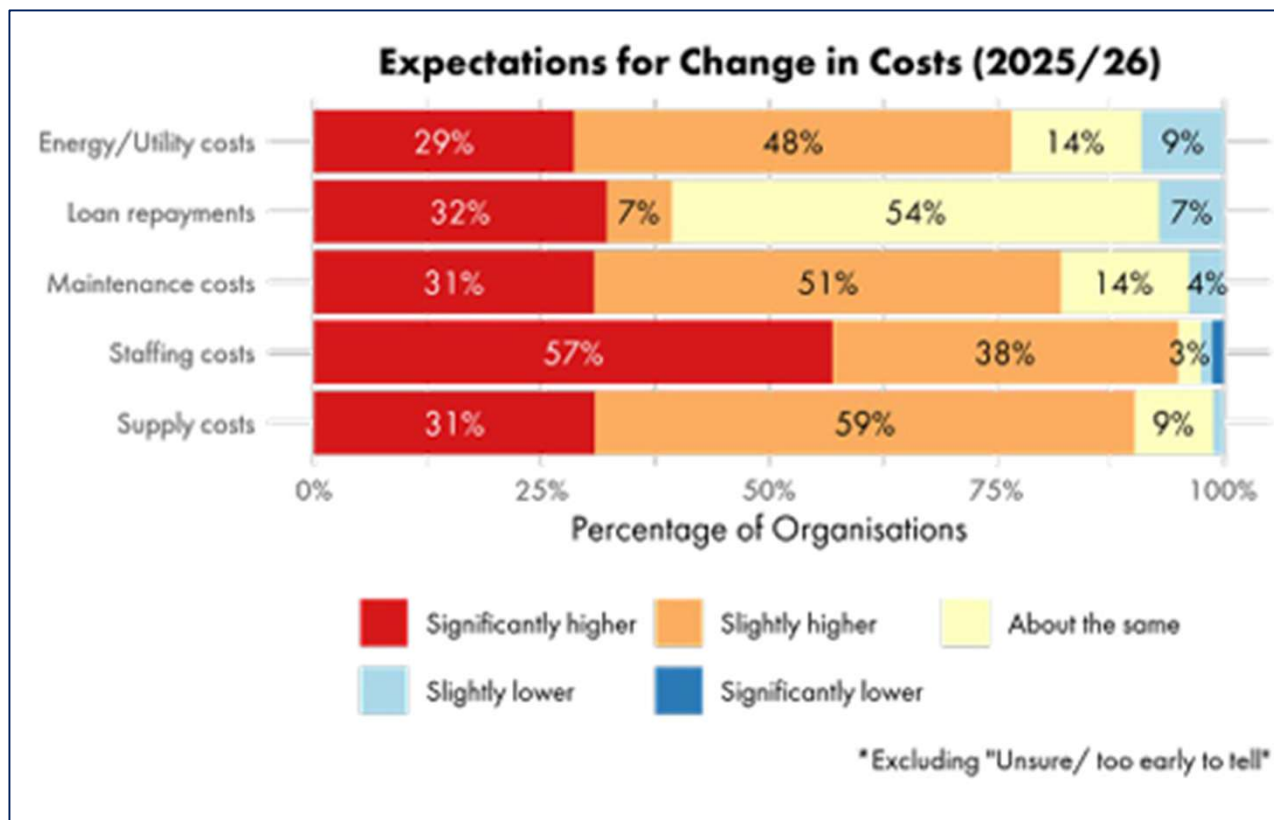
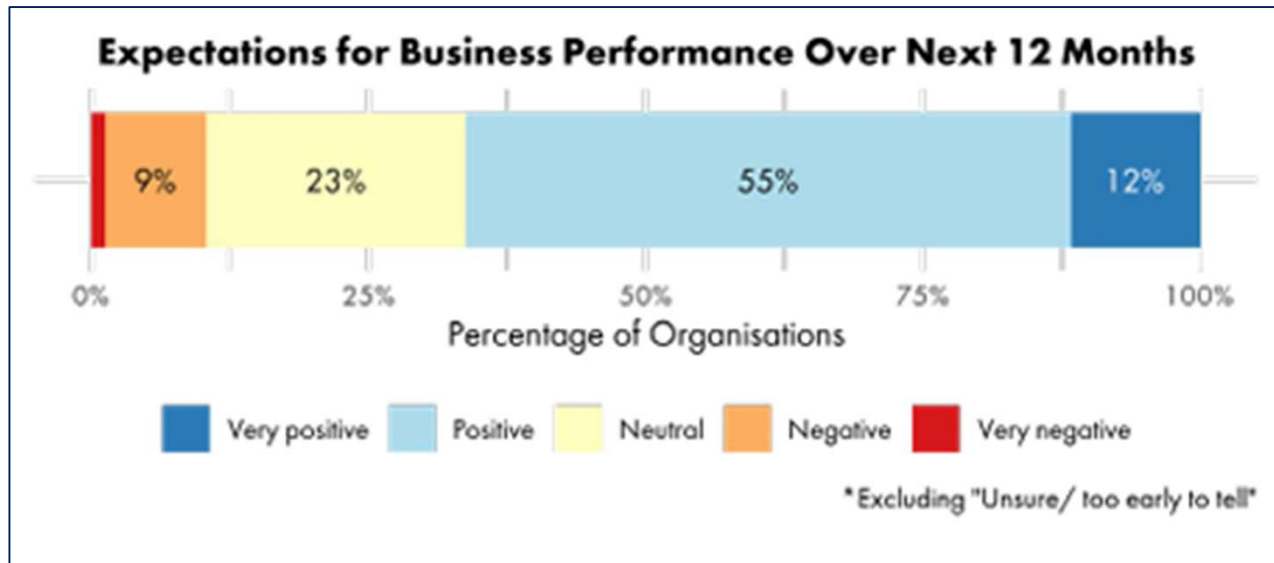
- One in five venues requires at least £5 million in investment over the next decade just to remain operational.
- Without substantial capital funding, nearly 40% of venues could close or become unusable .
- Public investment has fallen by 18% per person in real terms since 2010.
- Local authority support has declined by as much as 48% in some nations since 2010.

Workforce & skills

- The performing arts sector supports a highly skilled workforce of 244,000 people.
- 48% of theatre leaders report that new hires lack the necessary skills, especially in technical roles.

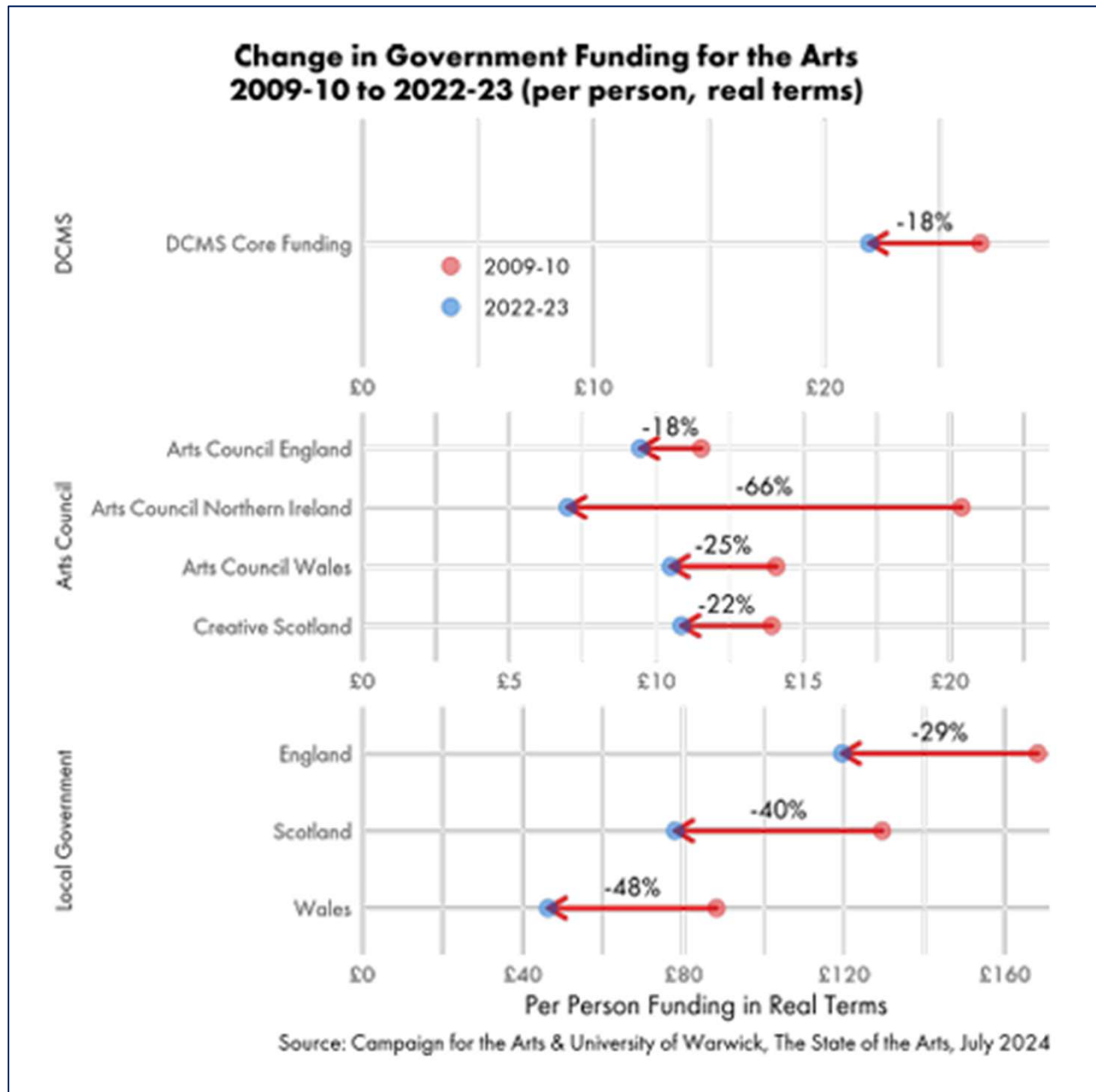


Key Statistics from *The State Of British Theatre In 2025*



Source: [The State Of British Theatre In 2025: Growth, Risk And The Urgent Need For Public Investment](#)

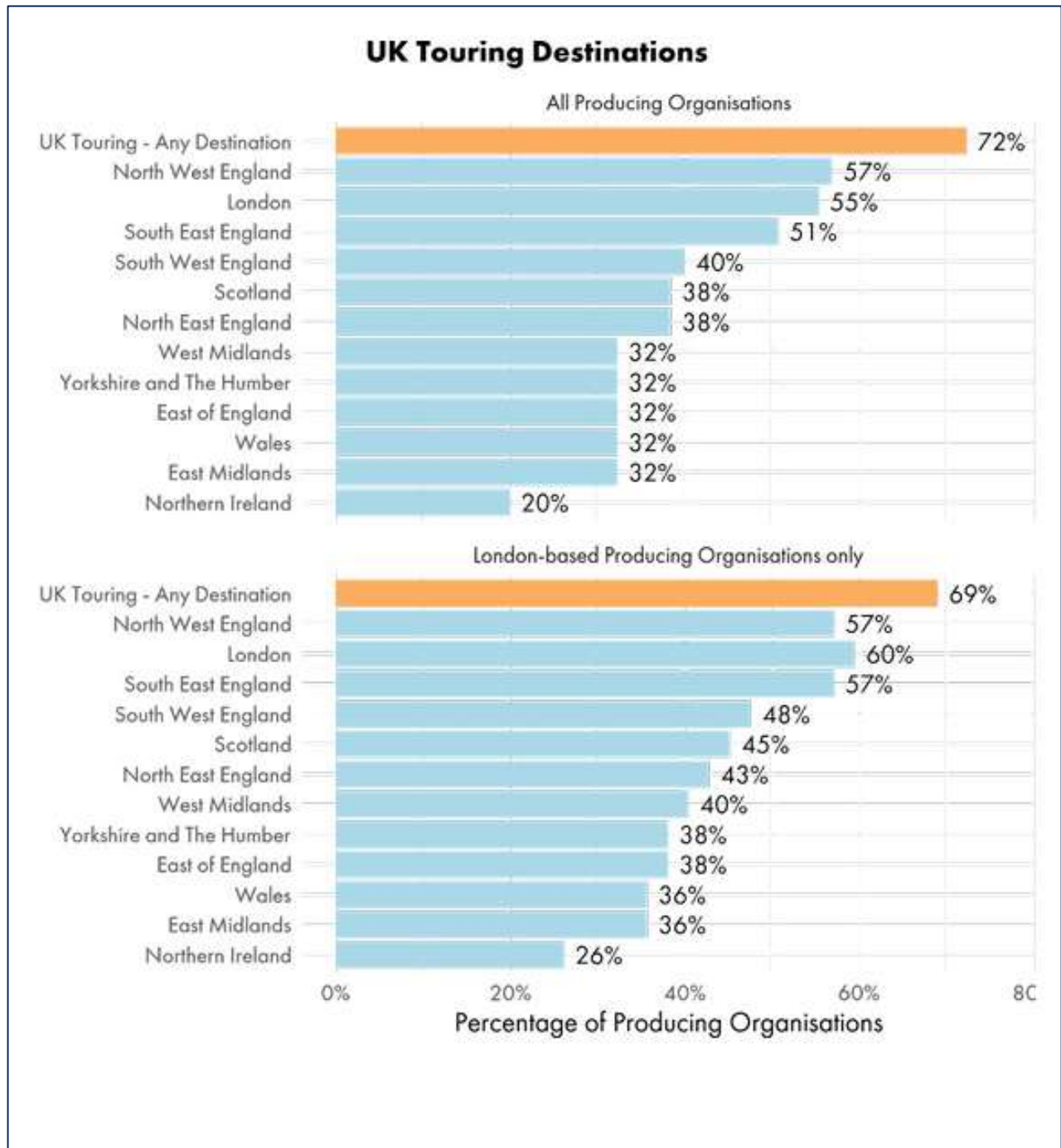
Key Statistics from *The State Of British Theatre In 2025*



Source: [The State Of British Theatre In 2025: Growth, Risk And The Urgent Need For Public Investment](#)



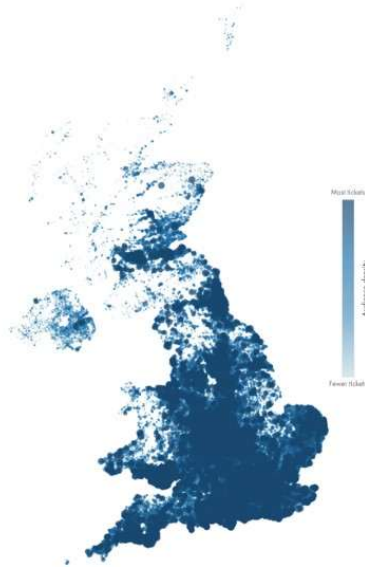
Key Statistics from *The State Of British Theatre In 2025*



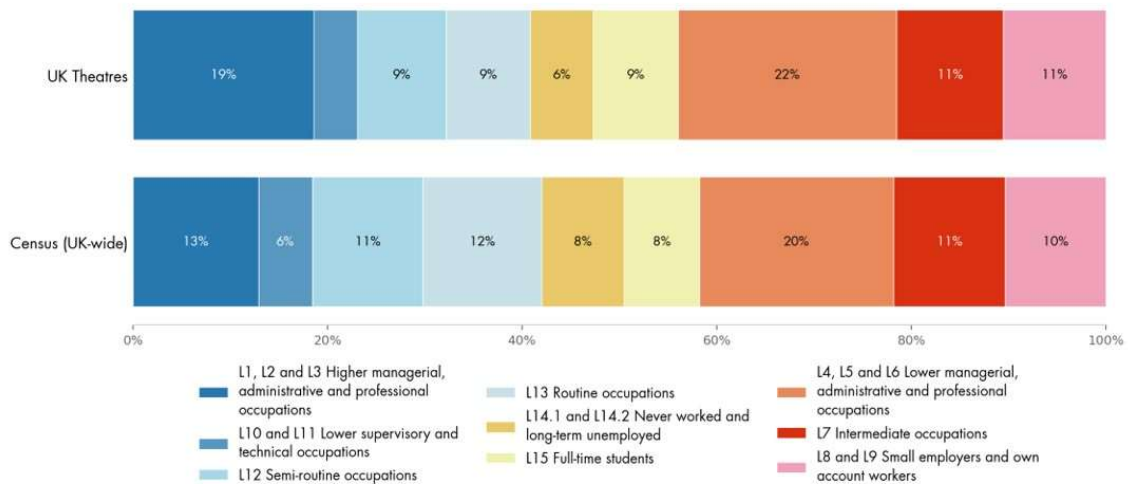
Source: [The State Of British Theatre In 2025: Growth, Risk And The Urgent Need For Public Investment](#)

Key Statistics from *Theatre In the UK 2026*

National Reach of SOLT & UK Theatre Venues



National Statistics Socio-economic Classification



Portland



X: @PortlandComms
LinkedIn: company/Portland-communications
portland-communications.com

LONDON · DOHA · PARIS · NAIROBI

Appendix



Draft letter of introduction

Dear [Cllr / MP name],

I am writing to introduce myself as [job title of theatre name] and invite you to visit [theatre name] in your capacity as [local councillor / Member of Parliament] for [area].

[Theatre name] is one of [area]'s important civic and community assets. Each year, we welcome [audience number] people through our doors, support [number] jobs and work with [schools / colleges / community groups / local charities] across the area.

However, our role extends beyond productions on the stage. The theatre brings people into the town centre, supports nearby hospitality and retail businesses, gives young people opportunities to build confidence and skills, and provides a shared space for families and residents of all ages.

We would be pleased to show you around the theatre, introduce you to members of the team and discuss how we can support your priorities for [area]. In particular, we would value the chance to talk about how we can work together to drive local footfall, positive community life, skills and civic pride.

Please let me know whether there is a convenient time for you to visit over the coming weeks.

Yours sincerely,

[Name]

[Job title]

[Theatre name]

[Contact details]



Key Statistics from *The Theatre In the UK Report 2026*

Macro-Economic value & return on investment

- For every £1 of public investment, the theatre sector returns over £11 to the Treasury (page 5-2025).
- Every £1 spent on a theatre ticket generates an additional £1.40 for surrounding businesses (page 6-2026).
- The sector contributes nearly £2 billion annually in added value to the economy (page 5).
- Between 2015 and 2022, labour productivity in the arts and culture sector was 11% higher than the UK non-financial economy (page 5).
- Theatre is a cornerstone of the UK's wider Creative Industries, which are worth over £126 billion to the national economy (page 5).
- In 2021–22, £38 million in Theatre Tax Relief (TTR) generated at least £163 million in production investment – a return of more than 4:1 (page 19).
- In 2024, the West End welcomed nearly 5 million more attendees than Broadway, reversing pre-pandemic parity (page 12).

Audience & growth

- In 2024, theatre members welcomed over 37 million audience members (page 5).
- The West End alone surpassed 17.1 million attendees in 2024, an 11% increase above pre-pandemic levels (page 5).
- The West End generated over £1 billion in box office revenue for the first time in history in 2024 (page 5).
- Since 2024, the Premier League has grown by just 1%, with 2.5 million fewer attendees than the West End.
- Regional theatres reported a 4% increase in occupancy since 2019 (page 5).

Affordability & accessibility

- Since 2019, the average West End ticket price has fallen by 5.3% in real terms (page 5).
- Average regional theatre ticket prices have fallen by 9.8% in real terms since 2019 (page 11).
- The majority of theatre tickets across the UK were sold for £39.50 or less (page 5).
- Most West End tickets were sold for £56 or less, with over a quarter priced under £35 (page 5).
- Outside of London, 99.7% of all theatre tickets were priced below £100 (page 5).

Financial risk & infrastructure

- One in five venues requires at least £5 million in investment over the next decade just to remain operational (page 5).
- Without substantial capital funding, nearly 40% of venues could close or become unusable (page 6).
- Public investment has fallen by 18% per person in real terms since 2010 (page 6).
- Local authority support has declined by as much as 48% in some nations since 2010 (page 6).
- 28% of theatre leaders ran a deficit in 2023-24, with 32% projecting a shortfall for 2024-25 (page 5).

Workforce & skills

- The performing arts sector supports a highly skilled workforce of 244,000 people (page 6).
- 48% of theatre leaders report that new hires lack the necessary skills, especially in technical roles (page 6).
- 94% of producers expect staffing costs to rise as a share of income (page 5).
- 75% of producers foresee higher energy and utility bills (page 5).

Source: [The State Of British Theatre In 2025: Growth, Risk And The Urgent Need For Public Investment](#)



Key Statistics from *The State Of British Theatre In 2025*

Economic value & return on investment

- For every £1 of public investment, the theatre sector returns over £11 to the Treasury (page 5).
- Every £1 spent on a theatre ticket generates an additional £1.40 for surrounding businesses (page 5).
- The sector contributes nearly £2 billion annually in added value to the economy (page 5).
- Between 2015 and 2022, labour productivity in the arts and culture sector was 11% higher than the UK non-financial economy (page 5).
- Theatre is a cornerstone of the UK's wider Creative Industries, which are worth over £126 billion to the national economy (page 5).
- In 2021–22, £38 million in Theatre Tax Relief (TTR) generated at least £163 million in production investment – a return of more than 4:1 (page 19).
- In 2024, the West End welcomed nearly 5 million more attendees than Broadway, reversing pre-pandemic parity (page 12).

Audience & growth

- In 2024, theatre members welcomed over 37 million audience members (page 5).
- The West End alone surpassed 17.1 million attendees in 2024, an 11% increase above pre-pandemic levels (page 5).
- The West End generated over £1 billion in box office revenue for the first time in history in 2024 (page 5).
- Since 2024, the Premier League has grown by just 1%, with 2.5 million fewer attendees than the West End.
- Regional theatres reported a 4% increase in occupancy since 2019 (page 5).

Affordability & accessibility

- Since 2019, the average West End ticket price has fallen by 5.3% in real terms (page 5).
- Average regional theatre ticket prices have fallen by 9.8% in real terms since 2019 (page 11).
- The majority of theatre tickets across the UK were sold for £39.50 or less (page 5).
- Most West End tickets were sold for £56 or less, with over a quarter priced under £35 (page 5).
- Outside of London, 99.7% of all theatre tickets were priced below £100 (page 5).

Financial risk & infrastructure

- One in five venues requires at least £5 million in investment over the next decade just to remain operational (page 5).
- Without substantial capital funding, nearly 40% of venues could close or become unusable (page 6).
- Public investment has fallen by 18% per person in real terms since 2010 (page 6).
- Local authority support has declined by as much as 48% in some nations since 2010 (page 6).
- 28% of theatre leaders ran a deficit in 2023-24, with 32% projecting a shortfall for 2024-25 (page 5).

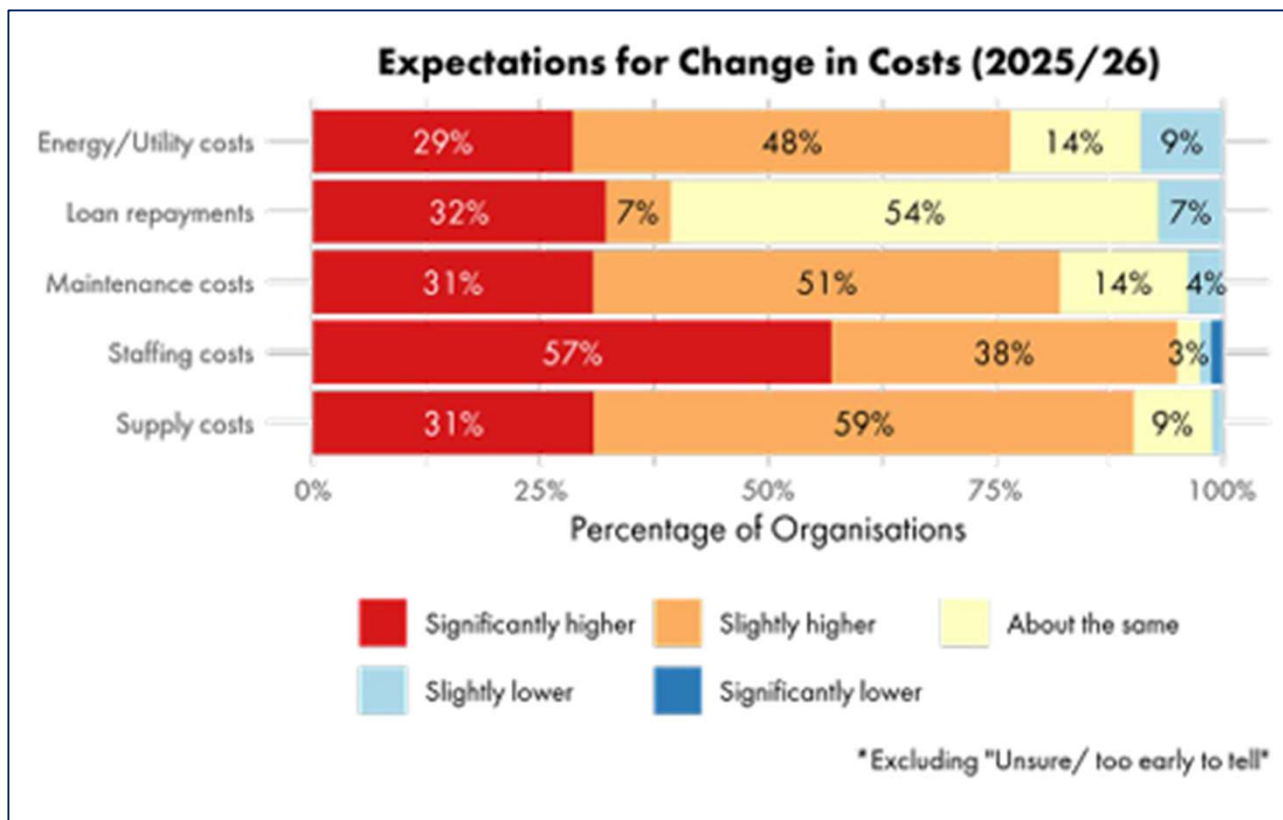
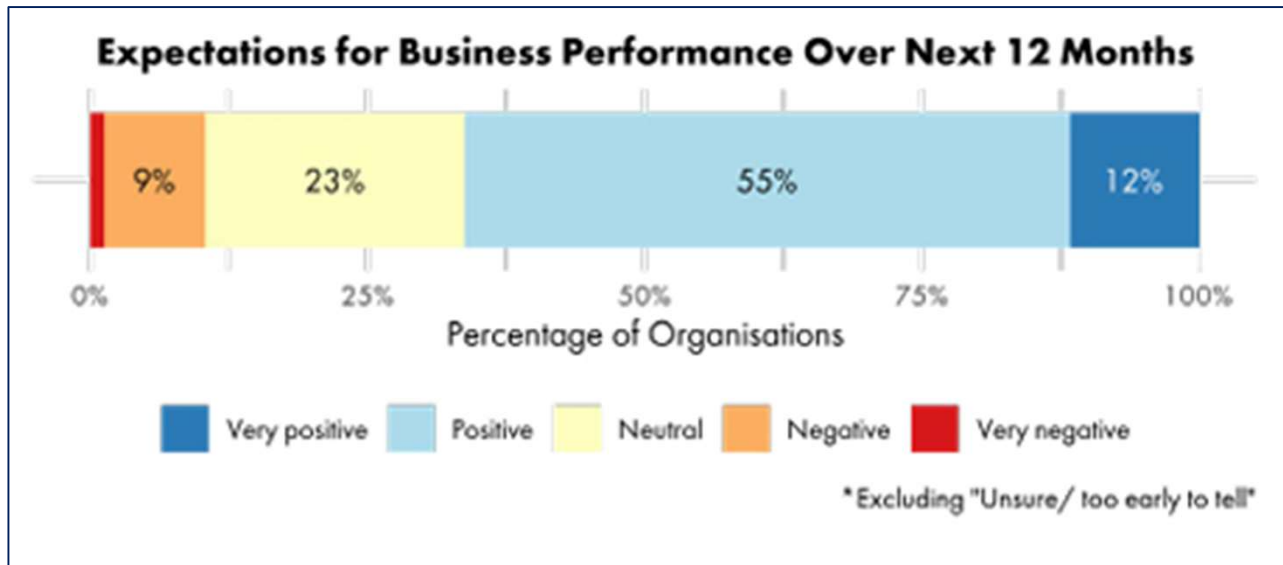
Workforce & skills

- The performing arts sector supports a highly skilled workforce of 244,000 people (page 6).
- 48% of theatre leaders report that new hires lack the necessary skills, especially in technical roles (page 6).
- 94% of producers expect staffing costs to rise as a share of income (page 5).
- 75% of producers foresee higher energy and utility bills (page 5).

Source: [The State Of British Theatre In 2025: Growth, Risk And The Urgent Need For Public Investment](#)



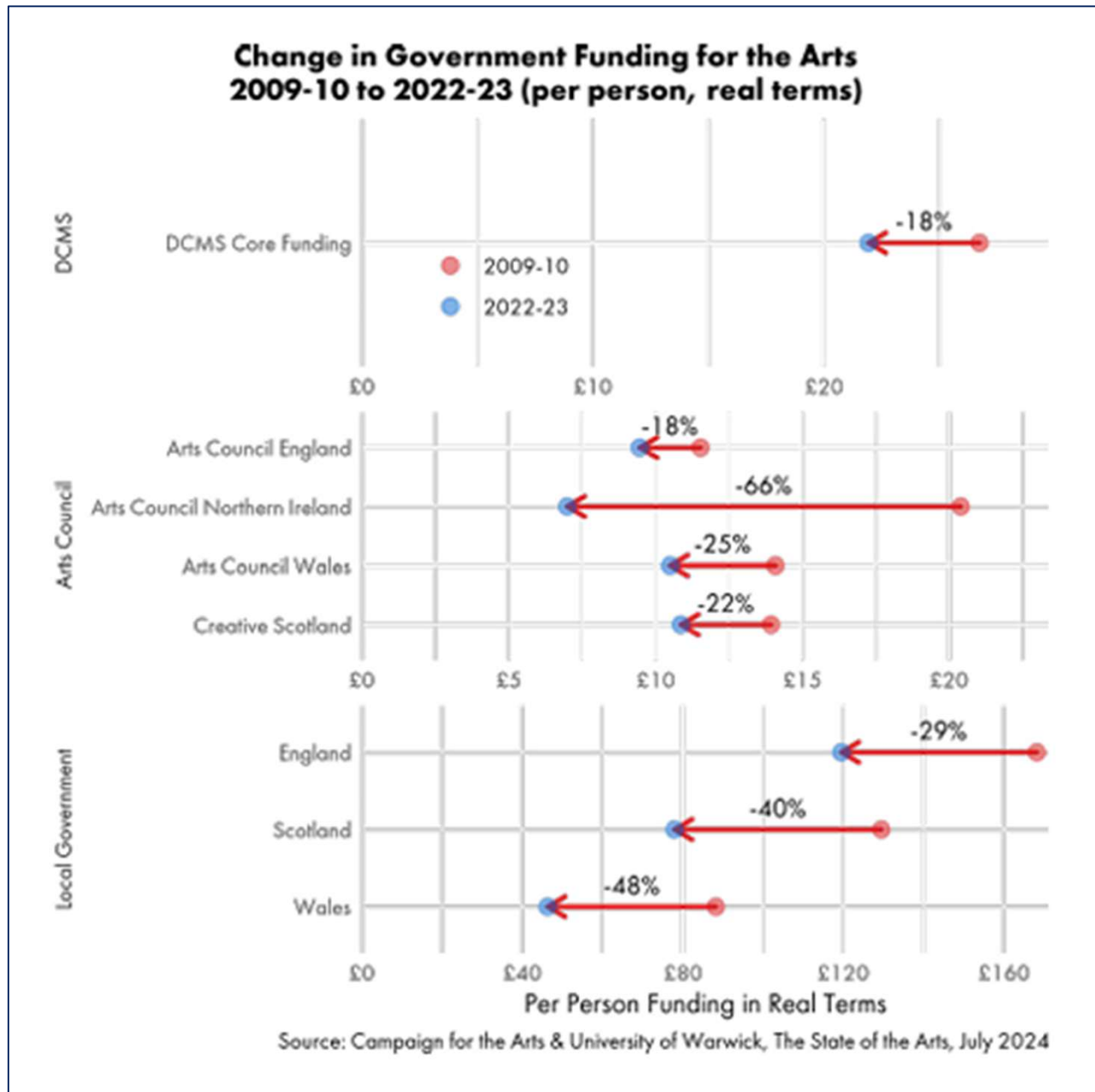
Key Statistics from *The State Of British Theatre In 2025*



Source: [The State Of British Theatre In 2025: Growth, Risk And The Urgent Need For Public Investment](#)



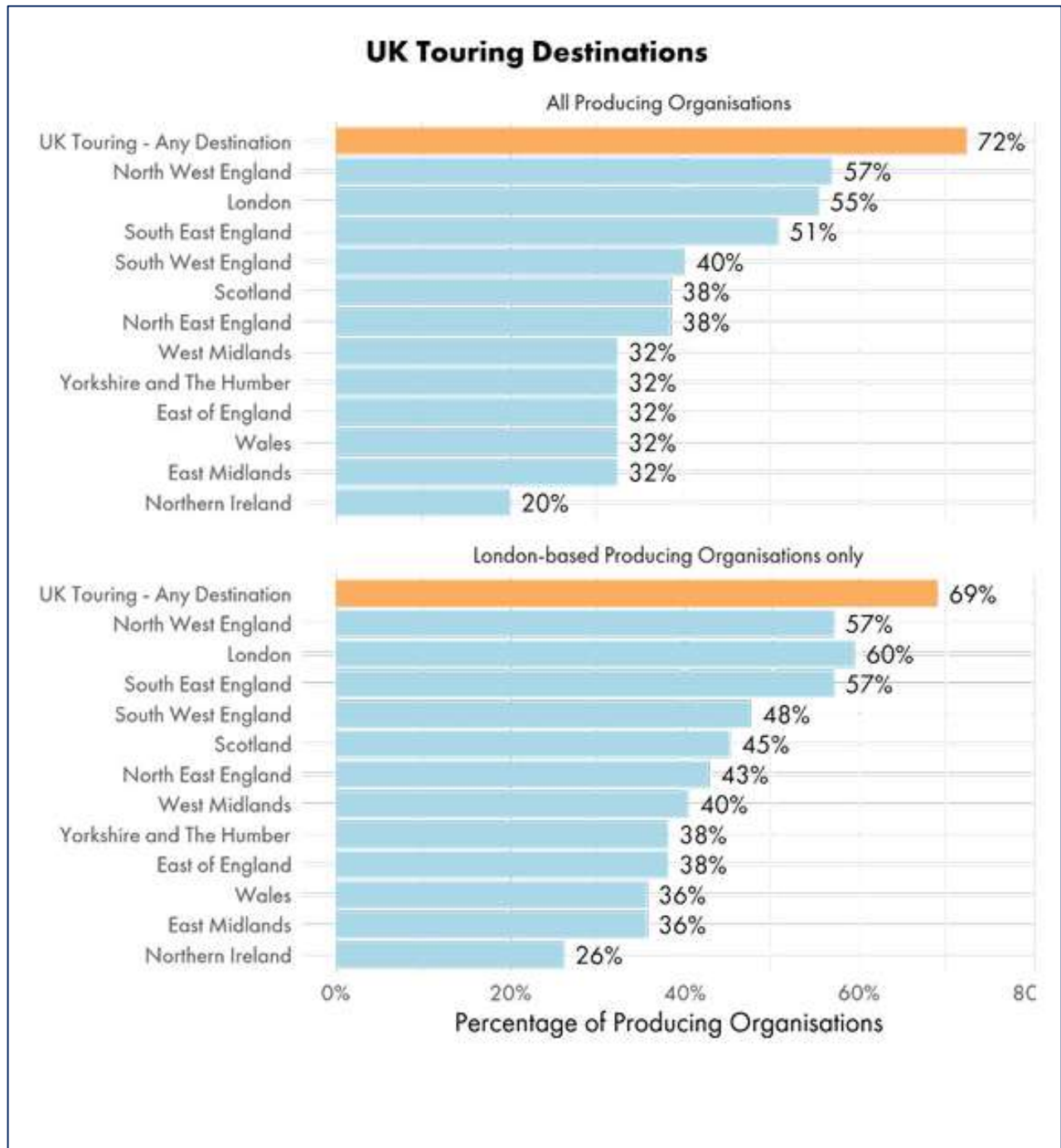
Key Statistics from *The State Of British Theatre In 2025*



Source: [The State Of British Theatre In 2025: Growth, Risk And The Urgent Need For Public Investment](#)

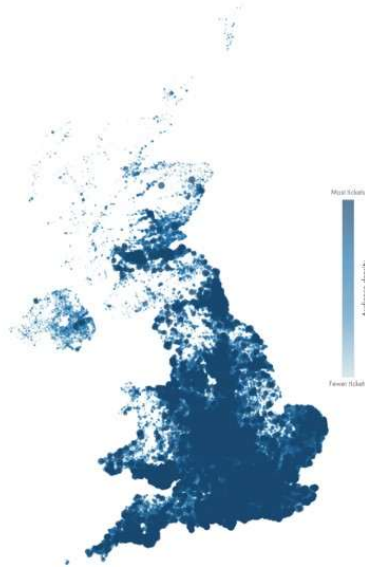


Key Statistics from *The State Of British Theatre In 2025*



Source: [The State Of British Theatre In 2025: Growth, Risk And The Urgent Need For Public Investment](#)

National Reach of SOLT & UK Theatre Venues



National Statistics Socio-economic Classification



Portland



X: @PortlandComms
LinkedIn: company/Portland-communications
portland-communications.com

LONDON · DOHA · PARIS · NAIROBI