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SOLT/ UK Theatre Members Advocacy Briefing

The theatre industry is a sector where venues are anchor institutions in cities, towns, and rural communities across the UK, creating and staging work shaped by the places they serve. Socio-economic data shows that theatre audiences are truly representative of their local population.

Last year, SOLT & UK Theatre members welcomed audiences of more than 37 million people. From pantomime to Shakespeare, from major musicals to community-led productions, theatre brings culture, creativity and shared experiences to communities across the country.

Boosting the Economy

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

The sector generates a turnover of £4.4 billion per annum, contributes £2.39 billion in Gross Value added, and directly generates 230,000 FT jobs. For every £1 spent on a theatre ticket, an additional spend of £1.40 is generated in the local economy.

Local Communities and Social Good

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.

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 Global Impact of 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 over 50 countries since its West End debut in 2014.

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. These generate ongoing economic benefits to HM Treasury via income from replica productions, licensing, and overseas tours.

British Theatre Sector at Risk

Production costs continue to outpace inflation, with energy costs alone having risen by 120% since 2019. This is compounded by public investment in the arts having declined by 48% in real terms over the past 15 years.

More than a third (36%) of theatre organisations forecast an operating deficit this year, and without serious investment in physical infrastructure in the next five years, almost 40% of venues risk closure, and 40% will become too unsafe to use.

SOLT & UK Theatre’s Top 3 Key Priorities

To create the conditions for theatre to thrive, we need to:

1. Support the UK’s domestic touring sector through strengthened Theatre Tax Relief so that everyone everywhere has access to theatre.

2. Kick-start local economies and deliver social good through investment in theatre buildings.

3. Break down barriers to opportunity with Theatre for Every Child.

Boosting Domestic Touring

Geographic equality in cultural access is something that we are passionate about. SOLT & UK Theatre have been working with the Department for Culture, Media & Sport, and Arts Council England to evidence how we can bolster the UK's domestic touring sector - without which, many towns and cities across the country would not have access to high-quality theatre.

As costs have risen, the economics of touring have deteriorated sharply. Of 571 touring organisations analysed in Arts Council England’s recent Touring Review, more than half recorded losses.

For touring to thrive, a viable financial model that can deliver work to audiences nationwide is needed. Theatre Tax Relief (TTR) has been fundamental to the sector’s post-pandemic recovery and to making the UK the best place in the world to create and see theatre.

We can secure the future of our touring industry by further improving TTR, so that it captures the additional costs of touring (such as transport, living away allowances, get-ins, and additional staffing). This would generate more than £364 million in Gross Value Added, 3,622 full-time equivalent jobs and incentivise distributing work across the country.

The ask: To strengthen Theatre Tax Relief so that it supports domestic touring.

Investment in Theatre Buildings

Theatres are an essential part of delivering social good and economic growth across the country. However, many theatres need urgent investment to enable growth, protect cultural infrastructure and to help meet net zero targets. A survey of our members shows that without significant investment, 40% of theatre buildings are at risk of closure.

Government has recognised the urgent need for capital investment in cultural buildings through the Creative Foundations Fund; however, the scale of need is vast. The Department for Culture, Media & Sport's Purcell report estimated the repair, maintenance, and renewal need for theatres and performance venues alone stands at about £4.04bn, including around £1.18bn of urgent works. With a £425m budget, the Creative Foundations Fund can only address only a fraction of that need.

Building a commitment to cultural capital investment into future spending reviews would give organisations the confidence to plan multi-year programmes, leverage private and philanthropic capital, and deliver against those priorities at scale. With a sustained framework in place, theatres can become greener, more resilient, more inclusive, and more productive civic assets for decades to come.

The ask: A long-term sustainable strategy for investment in cultural buildings.

Creative Education and Theatre for Every Child

SOLT & UK Theatre are delighted with the Government's commitment to scrapping the English Baccalaureate, it is going to take time and investment to reverse the damage it has caused by restricting children's access to a high-quality arts education.

If we are to ensure that arts and culture are for everyone, the classroom is only the start. School trips are often the only means by which young people experience live performance. However, both parents and teachers report a significant decline in such trips - most acutely affecting the most disadvantaged students, with participation dropping by 68% compared to 44% in more affluent areas.

Delivering on the promise of the new core enrichment entitlement – which must include opportunities off the school premises as well as opportunities within schools – will require sustained funding to ensure all children are able to access culture.

The ask: Ensure that there is dormant asset funding for theatre-specific initiatives, such as our Theatre for Every Child campaign.

Theatre in Numbers

- 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.

- Last year, SOLT & UK Theatre members welcomed audiences of more than 37 million people. Socio-economic data shows that theatre audiences are truly representative of their local population.

- In 2025, a record-breaking over **17.64 million people attended a West End show,** almost three million more than Broadway and two million more than the entire Premier League.

- 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.

- **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.

- **95%** of theatres deliver programmes contributing to social good. **86%** run workshops with local schools and **83%** provide tickets specifically for local schools

About SOLT & UK Theatre

This briefing is produced by the Society of London Theatre (SOLT) & UK Theatre. We are the membership organisations representing theatre producers, managers, owners, and operators across London and the UK. Our members span commercial and subsidised organisations, as well as independent not-for-profit charities.

While SOLT & UK Theatre each have their own members we work together as one. Our Vision, and the world we want to see, is a dynamic, sustainable and world class theatre sector. Our Mission, and what we do as an organisation, is to champion theatre and support our members to thrive.