AUTUMN 2026 BUDGET BRIEFING

Place, Touring, and Growth

Three targeted measures to sustain live performance, widen access, and drive local growth

Executive Summary

Theatre is a major engine of growth, local regeneration, and creative innovation. It generates almost £2 billion in GVA, supports more than 200,000 jobs, and underpins the talent pipeline that drives the UK's globally successful creative industries.[i]

Demand remains strong, but touring is contracting. SOLT & UK Theatre venues welcomed more than 37 million attendances in 2025. Yet since 2019, touring events have fallen by 24%, including a 64% fall in touring plays and drama.[ii]

Rising costs are making smaller and mid-scale dates unviable, shortening tours and concentrating them increasingly in larger cities.

The Autumn Budget should deliver three targeted reforms:

1. **Make touring-specific operating costs eligible for Theatre Tax Relief**, including freight, living-away allowances, and transfer labour.
2. **Correct the inequity facing touring opera and** ballet, from 14 performances to seven, and from six premises to three.
3. **Extend the existing Pubs and Live Music Venues Relief in England to theatres and other live performance venues.**

These reforms correct a market failure: producers bear the cost of reaching another community, while the economic benefits are spread across its high street. **Every £1 spent on a theatre ticket generates a further spend of £1.40 of local spending.**[iii]

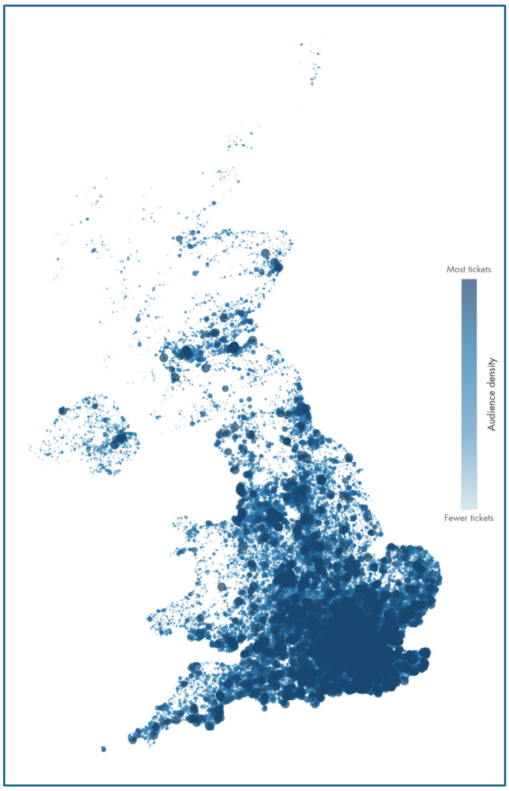
The proposal use established tax and rates systems, and would have a limited net Exchequer cost.

Together, they would unlock investment, extend tours, protect skilled jobs, and support growth in towns and cities across the UK.

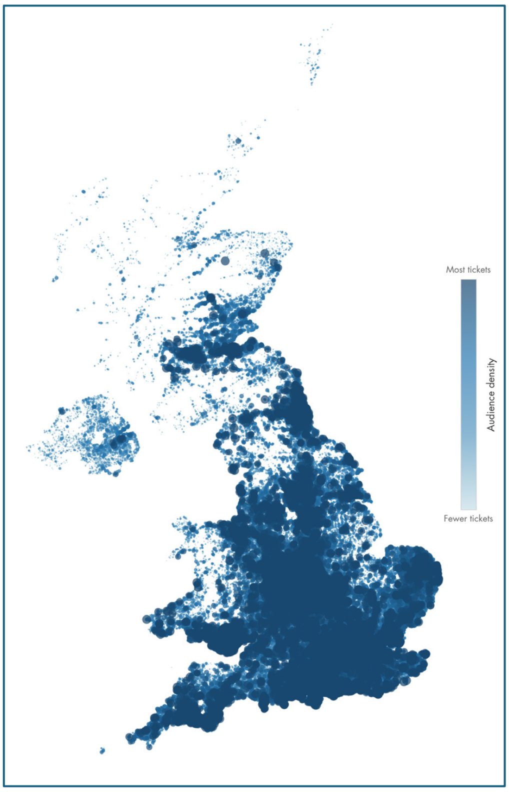
A national asset with a broad audience

In an age of abundant digital choice, audiences still value shared, in-person experiences, in London, and in theatres across all four nations.

Audience density by ticket-buyer postcode



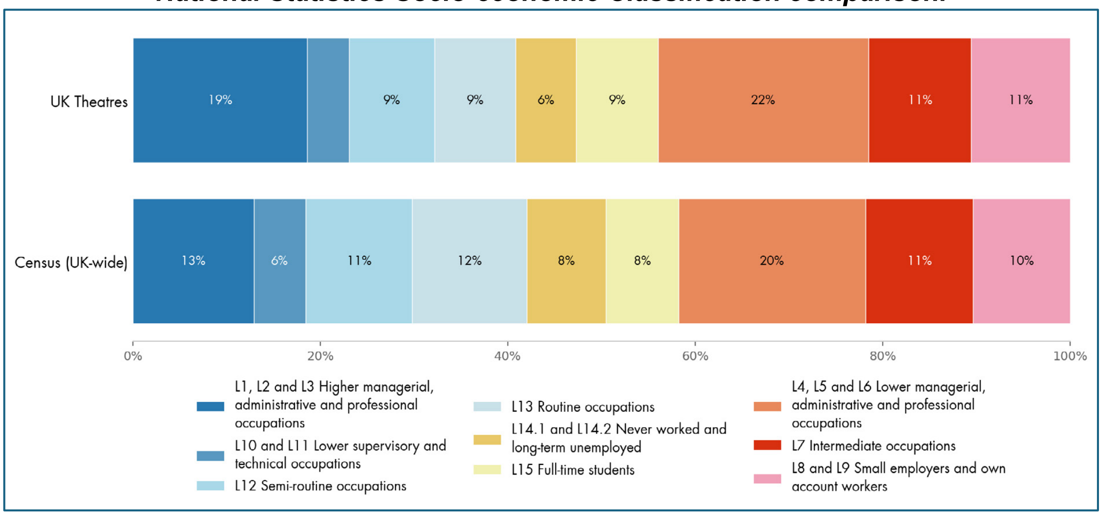
SOLT (West End) Venues



SOLT & UK Theatre Venues

Attendance spans the occupational spectrum and broadly reflects the UK population. Affordable tickets, accessible local venues, and a varied supply of touring work sustain that breadth of participation.

National Statistics Socio-economic Classification comparison.



37m+	Up to **100**	▼ **24%**	▼ **64%**
SOLT & UK Theatre attendances in 2025	**Cast & crew per production**	**Fall in touring events since 2019**	**Fall in touring plays and drama since 2019**
One of the nation's most-attended art forms.	Moved nationwide for a single opera tour.	Fewer productions touring the UK.	The steepest decline of any art form.

Why fiscal action is needed now

Theatre is labour-intensive: every performance depends on skilled artists, technicians, and venue staff. As **ticket prices for touring events have not kept pace with inflation,** the cost of reaching each additional venue is becoming harder to sustain.

The routes reaching the most communities are disappearing fastest: tours visiting 13 or more venues fell by around 30% between 2019 and 2024.[iv]

This is especially acute for ballet and opera, whose scale and complexity restrict them to a limited number of venues, even when demand exists.

Presenting venues face similar pressures. **Average theatre rateable values rose by 28% between 2023 and 2026,** as 40% Retail, Hospitality and Leisure Relief ended.[v] Higher employer National Insurance contributions, wages, and energy costs have added further strain.

Theatres drive growth in every postcode, bringing audiences into high streets and supporting nearby hospitality, retail, and other local businesses. Yet their fixed, place-based model leaves them exposed to rising costs, while **theatres remain excluded from the targeted relief available to pubs and live music venues.** Extending that protection would preserve programming, jobs, investment, and local footfall.

Why fiscal action will work

The reforms target decisions made at the margin: whether a producer adds another venue or week, whether large-scale work reaches more communities, and whether a theatre can continue to programme it.

HMRC's 2026 evaluation found that TTR influences touring decision-making and the scale of activity.[vi] It influenced the decision to tour for 81% of claimants, including 22% for whom it was decisive. It also enabled additional performances for 51% and increased employment for 39%.

Recognising unavoidable touring costs and relieving fixed costs at presenting venues would support both sides of the touring market.

The Autumn Budget should deliver three targeted reforms:

1. Make touring-specific operating costs eligible for Theatre Tax Relief.

TTR was designed to support UK theatre, with particular emphasis on touring. Yet it excludes the unavoidable cost of moving a production between venues. These costs often determine whether a tour reaches another town or proceeds at all.

The relief supports creating a production, but not the continuing cost of touring it.

Arts Council England's *Cultural Tax Reliefs Impact Review* finds that existing relief does not sufficiently cover the true cost of touring.

As Baroness Hodge recommended, Government should make directly attributable transfer costs, including freight, company travel and accommodation, and transfer labour, eligible for relief.[vii] This would ensure that the higher touring rate reflects the real cost of touring and help producers extend tours to communities that are currently unviable.[viii]

2. Correct the inequity facing national touring opera and ballet

The TTR touring tests do not reflect how large-scale opera and ballet tour. Although these productions qualify for TTR, they can fail to secure the touring rate because few venues can accommodate their stages, orchestras, and technical requirements, and their runs are necessarily short.

Most cannot claim Orchestra Tax Relief, even though it recognises some of those same touring costs. **A single production may tour with up to 100 cast and crew**, so these companies face some of the highest touring costs yet receive the least support.

Government should reduce the minimum TTR performance threshold for touring opera and ballet from 14 performances to seven, and from six premises to three. This would better reflect the practical limits of touring large-scale work and help sustain its public value and contribution to local economies.

3. Extend business rates relief to live performance venues

Theatres are anchor institutions in cities and towns, drawing audiences to high streets, supporting jobs, and generating visitor spend. Yet they are explicitly excluded from the Pubs and Live Music Venues Relief available in England, the Government's stated aim of supporting venues that bring communities together and keep town centres active.

Government should extend the relief to theatres and other live performance venues. Delivered through the existing business-rates system, this straightforward change would help venues sustain programming, maintain historic buildings, and deliver community activities, while giving touring productions more places to play.

Delivering growth in every community

These measures target the decisions that determine the scale and reach of live theatre: whether a tour can add another town or week; whether large-scale opera and ballet can sustain a national route; and whether theatres can continue to programme ambitious work, invest in their buildings, and employ skilled people.

A practical route to implementation

Government can deliver the reforms through established mechanisms. Parliament can amend the Theatre Tax Relief rules in the Finance Bill, with HMRC guidance setting clear, proportionate parameters for eligible touring costs. It can extend business-rates relief to theatres and live performance venues through the existing relief framework.

What success would look like

Success would mean additional performances, longer tours, and more communities reached. Producers could retain dates and venues that would otherwise be cut, while opera and ballet companies could add performances currently excluded from touring relief. This would support skilled employment, local spend, and access to live performance closer to home.

This Budget is an opportunity to turn strong public demand into wider economic and cultural benefit: more work, in more places, for more people.

Who we are

The Society of London Theatre & UK Theatre are the membership organisations for the leading theatre producers, managers, owners, and operators in London and across the UK. This includes commercial organisations, subsidised organisations, and not-for-profit independent charities.

Our vision and mission

Our Vision, and the world we want to see, is a dynamic, sustainable and world class theatre sector. Our Mission is to champion theatre and support our members to thrive.

For more information or to discuss further, please contact us at publicaffairs@soltukt.co.uk

[i] https://uktheatre.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2024/01/Economic-Impact-Assessment-of-UK-Theatre-Sector.pdf
[ii] https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/the-state-of-touring-research
[iii] https://uktheatre.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2026/03/Theatre-In-The-UK-2026-Report.pdf
[iv] https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/the-state-of-touring-research
[v] https://uktheatre.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2026/03/Theatre-In-The-UK-2026-Report.pdf
[vi] https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/hmrc-cultural-tax-relief-evaluation
[vii] https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/arts-council-england-an-independent-review-by-baroness-margaret-hodge/arts-council-england-an-independent-review-by-baroness-margaret-hodge
[viii] https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/arts-council-england-an-independent-review-by-baroness-margaret-hodge