



Implementing the national policy for theatre in England

Case studies: 1

By MORI, for Arts Council England

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Executive summary

Introduction

This small, qualitative study of Arts Council England-funded theatres was conducted by Market and Opinion Research International (MORI) on behalf of Arts Council England. It is the second stage of a project establishing a baseline against which the implementation of the national policy for theatre in England can be measured. The first stage of the project, conducted in 2002, was a survey, published by the Arts Council as Research report 33: *Implementing the national policy for theatre in England – baseline findings*. (The report can be ordered or downloaded from the Arts Council website: www.artscouncil.org.uk)

This is a complementary piece of work exploring some of the issues raised in the quantitative study. The qualitative case studies primarily looked at how theatre organisations are implementing two of the national theatre policy's priorities: 'diversity and inclusion' and 'new ways of working'. The theatres have shared with us their views on, and experiences of, the extra funding from the theatre review and the new policy. They have also provided examples of successful initiatives and the challenges they are trying to meet.

Methodology

Sixteen organisations were invited to participate in the study and were selected on the basis of the answers provided in their questionnaire return for the baseline survey. Those chosen were geographically spread (at least one from eight of the Arts Council England regions) and ranged from those with a large number of staff to those with very few, including specialist theatres such as children's theatres. Regional and national touring companies and producing and presenting building-based theatres were included. None of the organisations had negative total reserves at the end of the financial year 2001-02, and all were intending to focus on new ways of working and/or diversity and inclusion.

A researcher spent a day with each organisation, interviewing key members of staff and board members, to draw together a picture of the organisation, its current working practices and aspirations and intentions for the future. Up to six interviews were conducted in each organisation, with a total of 62 interviews taking place. Those interviewed included: board members and chairs (8), artistic directors/producers (13), chief executives and executive directors/producers (10), associate directors (three), education/training and marketing staff (six and 10 respectively), general managers (two) and performers (three).

Main findings

- There is a widespread feeling that recent changes in the theatre industry have been hugely positive. The national policy for theatre in England has provided a formal framework for development and has in many cases reinforced the theatres' objectives and strategies. Many theatres had plans and development programmes that they have been able to implement because of the additional funding made available through the theatre review
- Two of the priorities identified in the policy are 'new ways of working' and 'addressing diversity and inclusion'. Both are seen to be crucial to providing theatre that is meaningful, relevant, inclusive and accessible to everyone. It is evident that the initiatives being run in theatres cover much more than these two areas and there is significant overlap with other priority areas. Although theatres may have identified two or three areas on which they are focussing or intend to focus, they are in fact working in many more and are constantly improving the quality and range of their productions
- Theatres are striving to produce an ever-wider and higher-quality programme. New ways of working, increased investment and the resulting ability to plan over a three-year period have contributed to improved quality and sector development
- Theatres are commissioning more new writing from an increasingly diverse range of writers. This provides new and exciting work that may attract different audiences and may also help to encourage a greater mix of people into working in the industry longer term
- Education continues to be a priority area for theatres and includes work with all ages and abilities. Theatres are increasingly using workshops and teaching resources that look at many aspects of the theatre, including the production itself and the components that go into making it a success. Workshops supporting specific productions provide insight and try to engage audiences more fully
- Marketing and education departments are increasingly working together to formulate strategies and share ideas. Many of the initiatives involve educational components or targeting specific groups. Specialist staff in the theatres we visited generally receive support to realise these goals from all levels within their organisations
- New partnerships are contributing to the changing environment in which theatres are operating. Working alongside commercial and public sector partners is beneficial to both parties and many theatres are increasingly looking for ways in which to develop these relationships
- Projects targeted at previously under-represented groups (both adults and children) are being tried by many theatres. Audience development is a

significant part of this, encouraging new groups to use and enjoy the theatre and to experience a wider range of productions than they might be used to

- Encouraging a more diverse range of professionals into the industry is crucial in tackling diversity and inclusion and for developing the industry profile for the future. Recruitment is an issue at all levels of the industry, including board members and artistic directors. Although theatres are actively trying to broaden the diversity of their staff it is often seen as a struggle to do so: finding the people to fill the positions available is felt to be difficult. Many of the theatres are working towards encouraging more people into the theatre by having open days and demonstrating the variety of job roles that the theatre industry includes

The next steps

Theatres are clear that funding holds the key to their future. They are concerned that the extra funding from the theatre review will prove to be a short-term fix and that the Arts Council will feel it has 'done its bit' for theatre. Many theatres started from a poor financial position and although the money has helped them to stabilise and invest, some consider that it is not sufficient to guarantee their survival. The renaissance in theatre spawned by the theatre review needs continued investment; money holds the key to the successful implementation of the national theatre policy and the sustainable development of theatre in England.

The Arts Council will continue to monitor the impact of the theatre review and the national theatre policy through the repeat collection of data gathered in the baseline survey and further case studies exploring how the national policy is being implemented.

1 Introduction

This small, qualitative study of Arts Council England-funded theatres was conducted by Market and Opinion Research International (MORI) on behalf of Arts Council England. It is the second stage of a project establishing a baseline against which the implementation of the national policy for theatre in England (Appendix 1) can be measured. The first stage of the project, conducted in 2002, was a survey, published by the Arts Council as Research report 33: *Implementing the national policy for theatre in England – baseline findings*. (The report can be ordered or downloaded from the Arts Council website: www.artscouncil.org.uk)

1.1 Background – national policy for theatre in England

In October 2000, a theatre committee was appointed to advise the Arts Council on the implementation of the national policy for theatre in England, and in March 2001, the Arts Council announced the details of the allocation of an extra £25 million for theatre. This £25 million has now been absorbed into the total annual amount available to the English theatre sector.

In 2002, MORI undertook a quantitative study of funded theatres. This study provided a baseline for exploring the implementation of the national policy, which identified eight priorities for theatre in England:

- a better range of high-quality work
- attract more people
- develop new ways of working
- education
- address diversity and inclusion
- develop the artists and creative managers of the future
- an international reputation
- regional distinctiveness

This report is a complementary piece of work exploring some of the issues raised in the quantitative study. The qualitative case studies primarily looked at how theatre organisations have implemented, or have begun to implement, the two areas of 'diversity and inclusion' and 'new ways of working'.

The national policy offers clear statements on the two selected priorities.

On **diversity and inclusion**, the policy states:

‘Theatre must engage with audiences and artists from a broader, more diverse range of backgrounds. It must connect with people who have been excluded, including those living in rural communities.

‘We expect the theatre community to develop work that speaks to the diverse audiences who make up this country today. This work is a priority for us. We want to see an increase in the workforce from the non-white population; a greater percentage of the audience for all theatre coming from a wider range of backgrounds; and a much more diverse artistic programme across England.’

On **new ways of working**:

‘We will invest in organisations that foster a culture of innovation. We want to see greater collaborative partnerships between different theatre organisations [...]. Theatre should also connect more proactively with the other creative industries, seeing them as an opportunity not a threat.

‘We will support theatre initiatives that make imaginative use of existing and new environments. We would like to see work made for a greater range of spaces and places.’

(The policy is reproduced in full in Appendix 1.)

The theatres have shared with us their views on and experiences of the extra funding from the theatre review and the new policy. They have also provided examples of successful initiatives and the challenges they are trying to meet.

1.2 Methodology

Following the survey-based study, sixteen organisations were invited to participate in a short qualitative study focussing on the implementation of the national policy. The organisations were selected for inclusion in the study on the basis of the answers provided in their questionnaire return for the baseline survey. None of the organisations had negative total reserves at the end of the financial year, and all were focussing, or intending to focus, on new ways of working and/or diversity and inclusion.

Those chosen were geographically spread (at least one from eight of the Arts Council England regions), and ranged from those with a large number of staff to those with very few, including specialist theatres such as children’s theatres.

Table 1: Types of organisation

Type of organisation	Number interviewed
Touring company (national)	3
Touring company (regional)	3
Building-based producing company	6
Building-based producing and presenting company	4
Total	16

Each organisation was initially approached by letter and all 16 agreed to participate in the research when subsequently contacted by telephone. A researcher spent a day with each organisation, interviewing key members of staff and board members, to draw together a picture of the organisation, its current working practices and aspirations and intentions for the future.

Organisations were provided with the list of job titles in table 2 below and were asked to arrange interviews with as many relevant post holders as possible. Up to six interviews were conducted in each organisation. In many cases, a person had several job functions. In table 2 we have used the main post held by each interviewee to categorise the types of interview that took place, thus avoiding double counting.

Table 2: Number of interviews conducted and main post held

Post held	Number of interviews conducted
Associate director	3
Chief executive	1
Executive director/producer	9
Chairman/Board member	8
General manager	2
Artistic director/producer	13
Education/training specialist	6
Marketing specialist	10
Performer	3
Project co-ordinators	2
Other (inc. Musical/Literary Director, Panel Reader, Head of outreach)	5
Total	62

Each interview covered specific areas of the national policy and probed for examples and experiences of implementing it. The interview was not structured, so interviewees were not asked exactly the same questions. The researchers followed a topic guide, asking interviewees about diversity and inclusion, new ways of working and issues around extra funding. Interviews took the form of a discussion and lasted between thirty to sixty minutes.

The interviews were recorded in some instances through taping and notes, in others through notes only, depending upon the situation. Where locations were too noisy or respondents felt uncomfortable being recorded, notes were taken and the interviews were not taped. In the case of recorded interviews, the researcher listened to the tapes and made detailed notes, including verbatim comments from interviewees. All the notes were then analysed, reviewed and the key themes identified before reporting took place.

1.3 Acknowledgements

We would like to thank all the individuals who agreed to be interviewed and staff at Arts Council England for their contribution to the project: Nicola Thorold, Director of Theatre, Karen Dust, Research Officer and Clare Fenn, Research Officer.

2 Summary of findings

2.1 The theatres' overall response to the theatre review

The majority of the theatre organisations saw the theatre review as a positive step for the industry. This is largely due to the additional income it generated, which has provided a much-needed boost to a sector recognised as being under-funded. The money has given the theatres a degree of freedom and security that had previously been absent. For managers this means that department budgets are less tight and that they can review the strategy and programme for the whole organisation. For specific job functions, such as marketing and education, money has been released for developing existing and new projects.

Each of the organisations we visited approached the theatre review and the national policy for theatre in England from a different starting point. It is important to remember this when looking at the different ways in which the policy has been embraced.

At the time of the theatre review, many of the organisations were undergoing refurbishment, restructuring and changes in management, which were independent of the review. For some of these organisations, the changes provided the opportunity to re-evaluate their market position and revisit their objectives. Thus many organisations were already committed to an extended programme of change and development when the national policy for theatre in England was published. With some receiving stabilisation funding, the wheels for change were already moving.

The theatre review and the national policy have provided significant additional funding and have helped to formalise a way forward. In those organisations where fundamental changes were already afoot, these developments were welcome but, more often than not, were not the driving force behind change. However, the national theatre policy has provided a framework for development within which theatres feel able to work and has given a new impetus to a sector which some senior figures feel was becoming complacent or lacking in direction.

‘The industry hugely welcomed the theatre review. The recognition was that the theatre was on its knees – sometimes not even that, the theatre was dying pretty quickly. We were delighted that finally the Arts Council and the government listened to what we’d all been saying.’

All of the organisations that participated in this phase of the research displayed an energy and passion for the programme and objectives they were working towards. For most of the organisations, the national policy has reinforced existing priorities and strategies rather than imposing new areas of work. The additional funding from the theatre review has provided a respite from what directors often described as a 'hand to mouth' existence and has enabled many theatres to undertake initiatives and ventures that they say they would otherwise have been unable or struggled to do.

'Without it (theatre review money) I think we would have closed after two years. You can't run a theatre on the subsidy we had. We survived because of a very high level of earned income and also because we ran on a very small staff.'

'It has stopped us going further into debt.'

The national policy, by formalising a strategy for the industry, has allowed organisations to feel more confident in the work they are doing and about the support they can expect from funding bodies, including Arts Council England. The development of a national policy has not alienated the industry in the way that restructuring the industry priorities may have done, but instead has provided a cohesive and recognised framework within which to work.

'The theatre review has not just meant that we have been able to survive but we've been able to say "right, how do we take it on to the next stage and the next stage after that?" What it has meant is that we're not sailing so close to the wind now.'

Despite the enthusiasm from the theatre organisations, the additional money from the theatre review has given rise to a number of concerns over sustainability. The money is intended to provide theatres with additional funds to develop new initiatives, including creative or sponsorship partnerships and the development of audiences and programmes. Long term, these should allow the theatres to generate more income and become increasingly self-sufficient. However, this has given rise to concerns among senior theatre professionals that Arts Council England will feel that it has 'done its bit' for regional theatres and that the organisations will find themselves in a similarly under-funded position in coming years, but with higher expectations of them. Many specialist staff are concerned that initiatives they are currently running or developing will not be sustainable without additional funding.

2.2 Changes in theatre behaviour

Strategically, organisations believe that both the theatre review and the national theatre policy have encouraged and required them to experiment and plan. This is true for senior theatre professionals with overall responsibility for direction and for individual departments running specific projects – eg education projects. The ability and desire to plan is a result of two key developments: greater financial security and policy directives.

Financially, the money from the theatre review has allowed organisations to plan ahead more. Knowing what their funding will be for three years has enabled theatres to plan on a longer-term basis.

‘We can plan with confidence...we’re not constantly faced with “what are we going to do?” so we can get more strategic.’

‘Effectively we’ve been able to do at least another show a year. It has broken the cycle of decline. We can now plan ahead with confidence.’

‘As a result of more money, you can be more flexible.’

‘We’ve been able to plan ahead for the first time.’

When planning work over three years rather than one, putting on a more artistically challenging or minority interest production no longer appears as risky as it did, and a holistic picture of a year’s programming can be taken. When balanced against other, more ‘safe’ productions or ventures, the overall perceived risk declines.

The national policy itself encourages planning, and both managerial and specialist staff believe that embracing the priorities requires thoughtful strategies and long-term commitment. Although the organisations already had a commitment to widening access and undertaking developmental work, the policy has certainly helped provide sector-wide goals, cementing and endorsing the organisations’ own objectives. The impact is felt at all levels: senior managers are able to develop longer-term strategies, whilst specialist (usually more junior) staff are able to plan ahead for their projects.

‘It has enabled us to put an emphasis on long-term development rather than short-term.’

2.3 Choosing priorities

The policy has given organisations the impetus to prioritise work in two or three key areas. These may be areas that they either want to develop further or that they are keen to explore for the first time. Many organisations have chosen to focus on groups that are currently under-represented in their user profiles, but which would potentially, long term, help to generate more income. In the main, however, initiatives have built on and broadened existing work, rather than developing entirely new ventures.

For all the organisations, the policy priorities of diversity and inclusion and/or developing new ways of working were at the core of their objectives and central to the development of their organisation and its work. (Organisations were chosen to participate on the basis of their prioritisation of one or both of these areas.) These two priorities are being addressed in three ways; through the artistic programme, the audiences, and the board and staff.

Audience development

Encouraging more diverse and larger audiences is central to the success and financial stability of the organisations. The majority of new activity in these priority areas has been generated by new and improved ways of working, rather than simply expanding current initiatives.

Marketing, promotional activities and demonstrating relevance are central to audience development, and the theatre organisations have adopted a variety of ways of approaching these. Examples include performances exclusive to young people and targeted marketing to specific groups and for specific events - eg concessionary prices for performances and events where people are taken 'behind the scenes'.

'I think the cost of tickets puts some people off. We've started doing reduced price previews for some productions.'

Encouraging audiences to see a wider-industry picture - the backstage staff, lighting, production and direction - can encourage more people to work in the industry and also engage audiences more, so that repeat visits are more likely to occur.

Increasing the variety and quality of work shown is felt to play a significant part in addressing diversity and inclusion in relation to the audience. Encouraging more diverse writing and productions generates the interest of, and attendance by, a wider audience, while the skills of new writers can be developed and improved. This is the perception of senior staff and also of specialist and project-specific staff.

2.4 Defining diversity and inclusion

For almost all of the organisations, the definitions of diversity and the ways in which they are choosing to address the issues involved are extremely varied. The perception is that diversity covers almost everything: audiences, management, actors, production teams, writers and the work presented and commissioned.

It is virtually impossible to separate out diversity and inclusion, and new ways of working, from the other six priorities in the national theatre policy: the priorities overlap. For example, developments in education may be driven by the desire to increase the ethnic diversity of the audience, thus crossing the two priorities of diversity and inclusion, and education. Similarly, developing a website to encourage more visitors falls between the two priorities of new ways of working and attracting more people.

What is possible regarding diversity and inclusion is considered to be heavily dependent upon location. Theatres based in rural communities, for example, are striving to reflect the profile of the community in which they work, which may not match the national profile and will certainly be different from that of other locations.

‘The ethnic minority population here is less than 1% so the issues for us are very different from those theatres in urban centres.’

‘For us it is about the broad definition of culture, not just minority ethnic communities.’

Managers want to encourage programmes which reflect their community profile and to attract the artists and specialist staff needed to succeed. Organisations are striving to achieve a realistic balance between being relevant and accessible to the communities in which they work and reflecting the wider demographic profile of the country.

‘There is a bigger risk of not addressing cultural diversity, there is a risk that we become irrelevant and out of touch if we don’t address it and that’s dangerous.’

‘An accurate reflection of society, certainly regionally. Regional and national can be so different – certainly it is here.’

There is a wide range of initiatives to tackle issues of diversity and inclusion, including educational schemes and new commissions, both of which are discussed in the following sections. Disabled people and other socially excluded groups are included within the broad definition of diversity and inclusion in the national policy, but those working in the theatres do not always understand this.

‘Disabled people aren’t included within that definition and that is always a problem area. For me it is about people who are usually excluded from mainstream culture, and for me that includes disabled people. I would like to see it defined broadly to include disability and sexuality as well as ethnicity and race.’

‘In this next year, once we have got some other things established, we need to look at what’s happening with refugees and the Jewish Community. There is also a sizeable enough Asian community to work with.’

The theatres are dedicated to reaching groups that they feel have been excluded or have not been as well included as they might. This includes disabled people, homeless people, people from the Black and minority ethnic population and those from particular age groups. They are keen to illustrate that diversity does not stop at ethnicity but has a much wider definition, which they are seeking to reflect in the work they produce and the practitioners who are involved in its delivery.

Case study: New Vic Theatre, Newcastle-Under-Lyme Engaging Black and minority ethnic audiences

On the same 'reinstating theatre in the community' theme as the Borderlines project, (discussed under the section on 'creating new partnerships', below) the New Vic Theatre also runs a series of projects to encourage members of the small Black and minority ethnic population in the area to visit the theatre – not just to watch productions (although the theatre did stage a professional production of *East is East* recently) but actually to *make* theatre.

The idea is not just to put on a production that may appeal to members of the Black and minority ethnic population, but for the production to be put on *by* local Black and minority ethnic people, who then invite friends and relatives to watch the production. These productions receive the same level of professional and technical support as professional work. The end result completes the cycle, in that watching family, friends and people from the same cultural background perform is more likely than watching a professional production to encourage audiences to get involved in the theatre, either as a part of the audience or cast. This whole process has been facilitated by a system of reduced entry fees and an integrated casting policy. The New Vic's integrated casting policy does not relate to Black or Asian plays specifically, but covers all plays.

The cost of the top price tickets has been increased and that of concessionary tickets reduced (or made free) in an attempt to attract more working class people and people from Black and minority ethnic groups into the audience. (Note that the overall earnings from a performance tend to remain the same.) Plays are promoted by placing posters in local shops and making leaflet drops to postcode areas where many of the local Asian population live. Time is also spent developing relationships with those who are respected in Asian communities in order to gain their 'buy in' so they are willing to encourage their communities to get involved in the theatre.

Since theatre can still be seen as 'snobby' and elitist, the New Vic thinks carefully about the language, look and tone of its communications. It aims to avoid alienating socially excluded audiences and to change negative perceptions they may have towards theatre, hoping to break down some of the barriers to their involvement. Clearly theatre needs to compete on the larger and more open stage of leisure – competing head to head with the cinema and football, for example – to gain its share of everyday leisure time among ordinary people; this should be reflected in all its communications.

2.5 Positive impacts of the theatre review and the national theatre policy

All the organisations which participated in the research were active in either new ways of working and/or diversity and inclusion. The other priority areas covered by the policy are:

- a better range of high-quality work
- attract more people
- education
- develop the artists and creative managers of the future
- an international reputation
- regional distinctiveness

(The policy is reproduced in Appendix 1.)

A better range of high-quality work

All of the organisations pride themselves on trying to provide high-quality work which will stimulate and interest their current audiences, encouraging them to return, and which will also appeal to new groups of people. Theatres are developing their current programme in three ways:

- improving current work
- introducing new genres of work within the organisation
- commissioning new work

All of the theatres were doing at least one of these; the majority were active in two of the areas. There were many theatres which were developing and producing work that was different to what they have done traditionally.

Improving current work

With the increase in funding, and the new focus provided by the national theatre policy, a number of theatres highlighted their ability to increase rehearsal times and to dedicate more time and staff to the initial stages of research and development. In many cases this was mentioned by the artistic staff, but it was also acknowledged by staff working in other areas of those organisations. In addition, increased salaries (discussed under 'Recruitment and retention' below) mean that a better calibre of artist is attracted to the theatres or, alternatively, that artists are not 'lost' to other theatres that pay more.

'We've been able to invest in the work, so we've been able to commission more writers and extend the rehearsal period, so we've been able to extend the production values of each piece of work.'

Other theatres also commented that the changes they were implementing were resulting in an improvement in the quality of work. They felt that they were able to produce things more professionally than they had been able to do in the past. In some instances this has meant that productions have had longer runs, as they have attracted larger audiences.

‘It [increase in funding] has given us a lot more stability and it has enabled us to do things properly and very professionally instead of doing things quickly. It has given us time to sit back and think how we really deliver quality work. Things like rehearsal periods have been extended, there is increased access and support for our touring company, and it has allowed a new post.’

Introducing new genres

‘We’re not going to go out and buy a Black play, we’ve got to grow it.’

Increasing time for research and development has not only allowed theatres to improve the work they have traditionally undertaken, but has also provided the opportunity to develop work they would not previously have shown or produced. With the luxury of additional time, investment in new work can be increased and time can be spent nurturing the writers, directors and performers of the future. The theatres are introducing a number of ‘new’ genres – things with which they have previously not engaged, rather than *new* genres. Some of this work is Black work, other examples include presenting new work rather than traditional pieces and a co-production with asylum seekers.

‘New funds always allow for lots more development, so that is really good and new partnerships have done that, and we have expanded staff numbers.’

Many of the organisations are particularly enthusiastic about the development of new work and the encouragement of new writers.

Commissioning new work

Delivering on diversity and inclusion includes commissioning work from people in previously under-represented or excluded groups. A number of organisations have set up initiatives to help in this process, such as master classes, mentoring, workshops and competitions. These initiatives span all age ranges and can allow new, less-experienced writers to work alongside established writers.

‘A greater flexibility working with our writers. In the past, the budget was too tight to commission large groups of writers: developing a new play may take two and half years. We now have greater flexibility.’

Theatres are exploring new ways of encouraging writers into the industry. Some theatres are providing mentoring opportunities to new writers, teaming up a more established writer with one who is just embarking upon their career. Others are running competitions between groups of new writers, the theatre performing the winning script. More formal coaching, with theatres providing classroom-style sessions, is also being trialled by some of the theatres. It is clear that new work allows the development of work of and about a greater range of subjects, cultures and experiences.

‘We’re looking at the diversity of the incoming programme. Lots of companies say “can we come and play at your theatre?”, and when you look at their target audience, it’s Black teenagers. There’s absolutely no audience of Black teenagers here, so what we’re looking at is a programme of performances that will develop the cultural awareness of audiences living within our catchment area.’

Attracting more people

Increasingly, theatre organisations are trying to appeal to a more diverse audience; for many, the ultimate goal is for their audience profile to reflect the demographic profile of the area in which they work, although this can be a difficult and long-term objective. One of the ways in which theatres are trying to tackle this is to put on work that is relevant to the different cultures within their communities.

‘It has meant that our focus has changed – we need to be working with new people and getting into new communities. We want to involve the community more, giving them access, getting a new audience and new participants.’

All staff believe that involving local communities in their theatre is crucial to its success. This is achieved in part through education work with local schools and through other youth work. Schools, according to many specialist education staff, provide a ‘captive audience’ and working with them enables theatres to cut across class and race divisions. It is hoped that bringing children and young people into the theatre for designated schools’ performances will encourage them to return with their families to see other things, establishing a theatre-going habit.

‘We have an obligation and a desire to introduce people to theatre at some point in their lives.’

Many of the theatre organisations have either expanded their existing youth work as a result of their additional funding, or have initiated projects targeting particular groups of young people. Such work is not always successful and part of the development process is discovering what does and what does not work, and why.

‘Some communities don’t recognise theatres as part of their world. There is always a barrier going into tightly knit communities. For example the youth theatre for Asian girls didn’t go anywhere.’

As well as focussing their efforts on children, theatres are working with previously excluded groups such as homeless people or offenders in prison.

‘We give discounts to unemployed people and have “pay what you can” nights.’

Concessionary tickets, special events such as discount nights and ‘young people only’ performances are all ways in which organisations are trying to appeal to non-traditional theatre-goers. In some instances these initiatives have been overwhelmingly successful and have surprised the theatre involved. One theatre arranged for one of their performances to be for young people only and succeeded in attracting huge numbers.

‘For our festival, we gave 60 free tickets to people who had never been to the theatre before.’

Theatres are improving access for people with disabilities, introducing, for example, text-projected performances, on-stage signers and the provision of scripts in advance of performances. Other examples include touch tours and sensory workshops, which are opening up the theatre experience to more people. ‘Before’ and ‘after’ performance sessions provide additional support for both disabled people and carers. For example, taking a group of people who are blind round the theatre and backstage before a performance provides an opportunity to experience the set, props and costumes spatially and through touch. People with learning difficulties can have the play explained to them before the production begins and can handle props, costumes and so on which stimulate and involve a range of senses. This type of extra help would be impossible to provide throughout the course of a normal performance.

'We have audio versions of the play, sign and touch tours and talking books.'

'We work from primary expressions – feel, light, touch – juggling with those to create centres of meaning.'

Workshops involving children or adults with different types of disability can also provide an opportunity for greater understanding and tolerance between groups. For example, one theatre is mixing deaf children with hearing children in a workshop environment, enabling them to work alongside each other. For younger visitors, 'watch with baby' performances, provided at one theatre we visited, allow children to be introduced to the theatre at a very early age and encourage parents and carers who may otherwise be unable to attend.

New technologies are playing an important part in helping theatres to reach a more diverse audience, particularly children. Websites allow up-to-date marketing, can be used to educate those visiting the site and also attract visitors to the theatre.

New technology

Case study: The Polka Theatre, Wimbledon – using new technology

The Polka Theatre in Wimbledon, a specialist children's theatre, is developing new and exciting ways of interacting with its audiences through the use of technology. Chiefly for children of primary school age, Polka is beginning to move increasingly into work with secondary school pupils – reaching new audiences or keeping the current ones for longer as they move from one phase of education to another.

As a children's theatre, it is often difficult to separate 'child turnover' – young people who grow out of the age range the theatre is aiming for – from those who simply choose not to make repeat visits. The marketing and educational teams are working together to help nurture long-term relationships. They are keen to encourage visits to the theatre that are with family and friends rather than through organised school visits, which is how most children currently experience Polka. The theatre is also in touch with similarly-minded theatres so that they can begin to 'share' audiences in a way they have not done previously.

The theatre has an extensive portfolio of educational activities and resources, including workshops and support material for teachers. Educational packs follow the life of the production, with activities suggested for key points in its development. Alongside these educational materials, Polka is harnessing new technology to reach and engage an ever-wider audience. *Polka Interactive*, a dedicated section of the Polka website, provides children with an opportunity to interact with people from the theatre, actors and writers, and with young people from overseas.

Polka Interactive grew out of *WebPlay*, another internet-based project. In *Polka Interactive*, a group of schoolchildren in the United Kingdom and a group in Los Angeles work alongside the Polka team through the life of a specially-developed production. The groups work through complementary activities associated with the production and participate in discussions over the internet. The final production is performed to the UK children and then to the LA children who the Polka team travel to see.

Production team diaries record the production as it unfolds and provide an opportunity for the young people involved to share opinions and comment on the play and related activities.

By following each stage of a production, the young people are able to experience all sides of the industry, including the 'behind the scenes' aspects.

'Writer, actors, sound and lighting all contribute to the magical still'.

'In each "room" [on the website] a member of staff will set them a creative task, like choosing a costume for a specific character or writing the next line of a story.'

Currently *Polka Interactive* can only work with a limited number of young people. There is a clear desire to expand it and allow more young people and schools into the programme.

More generally, Polka is working to improve the diversity of its audiences and is striving to be more inclusive. By targeting schools where there are high levels of low income or Black and minority ethnic families, the theatre is hoping to attract previously under-represented groups. It is also increasingly working with groups of children with special educational needs. One example, *Arts Access*, provides additional teacher support for special schools.

'For the price of tickets, a special school will get a pre-show visit from a workshop leader. They might talk to the young people about what a theatre is or what the play is about. That workshop leader will run a multi-sensory workshop after the children have seen the show. Having met the young people, the workshop leader will be able to develop a workshop specifically designed for their needs. In addition to all the other things we would normally do for school groups at performances, they also have a designated usher and a quiet area for before and after the performance.'

Improving the quality of the work it produces is an ongoing goal for Polka. There is a feeling that European counterparts take children's theatre much more seriously than those in the UK, and Polka is keen to produce work which it feels is of a similarly high quality. In part, this is about producing work which helps children to deal with 'life' situations that are difficult to manage, such as death, family break-up etc. Polka understands that this may 'frighten' parents, but feel that it is crucial to challenge them and provide meaningful theatre which speaks directly to young people.

Other initiatives which have proved particularly successful for Polka include story times, book launches, inviting authors to attend the theatre where their work is to be performed and inviting famous people or dignitaries to see plays which are relevant to their work or interests. For example, the Japanese

Ambassador was invited to a Japanese production; he attended and thoroughly enjoyed the performance.

‘We have a free story time event for the community every month called ‘World of stories’. Each month we focus on a different area of the world. The majority of the audience is still white, but it is a start and that kind of thing will tie into going into community centres and doing work there.’

Providing scripts in advance allows teachers to work with the children before a performance so that they have a greater understanding of the production. Posting quizzes and downloadable certificates on the website further engages their visitors with the theatre.

For Polka, a new Artistic Director has helped drive forward these changes, and the money from the theatre review provides a ‘cushion’ that is allowing it to respond to the challenges embodied in the national policy. One new initiative, a writing programme with secondary school pupils, would perhaps have been considered too risky without the theatre review money.

Employment

Creative managers

One of the toughest barriers to developing the creative managers of the future is encouraging more people to be interested in the theatre as a career. Many organisations are now working with young adults to encourage them into the industry, through work experience schemes and graduate programmes.

‘I think we are uniquely placed to promote the work of new writers – it’s just having the money available to take those risks.’

Providing positive role models for young people entering, or thinking of entering, the industry is also important, but a longer-term goal. Working particularly with previously under-represented groups helps encourage the development of a more diverse and balanced industry.

To encourage people into the industry more generally, theatres are increasingly providing work experience placements and shadowing opportunities. These cover a host of different job roles associated with working within the theatres. As noted in the Sheffield example below, opportunities such as these enable a significant number of people to become involved over the course of a year.

Recruitment and retention

On a practical level, the theatre review and resulting national policy have enabled many organisations to revisit their employment policies, providing extra money and a clear strategy for development. Organisations across the country have been able to strengthen their workforce. This includes giving existing employees more security and better salaries, and offering permanent or full-time jobs rather than temporary contracts or part-time work.

‘One of the things that the money has allowed us to do is to review salaries and working conditions and improve both of those within the organisation, for permanent staff and for performers. For permanent staff that has been really important to help with recruitment and retention.’

‘It has allowed us to operate more strategically and to work with more specialists and fewer generalists, so we are developing our expertise and getting better at what we do, as well as diversifying what we do.’

More theatre organisations have been in a position to employ additional people, for example in specialist education or marketing roles. These new appointments have tended to fill positions in areas which have previously been understaffed.

Additional funding has also meant that organisations can encourage a more diverse range of board members: people are more easily attracted to a successful and financially sound organisation.

Diversity and inclusion in recruitment

In all the organisations, employees spoke of being committed to a diverse and representative board in terms of ethnicity and gender. The pool of potential board members is, however, perceived to be limited at the present time. Solving this shortage requires a long-term commitment from the theatres and the wider theatre community to attract a larger and more diverse group of people into the industry.

Casting is also an important area for development. Anecdotal examples from theatres suggest that it is often difficult to cast the right mix of people for productions. Regional theatres in particular feel that they are unfairly passed over by performers who prefer to work in cities such as London.

'In casting, [cultural diversity] is always up there at the top of your priority list. Trying to get a cast that's reflective of the local community where the show will be put on. You can approach agents but the main way is word of mouth, going round and seeing people.'

'Most people stumble into theatre – and if you've never been there – why work there? If there is no family history or understanding, why would you bother? As an industry we're not great for attracting an ethnically diverse workforce but we really are working on this, it will take time.'

It is recognised by senior management that ethnic minorities and women are currently under-represented in management and board positions in the industry. Data from the baseline report (quantitative study) provides figures on this and shows that around 92% of board members are white.

'It's a process of involving more people, altering perceptions, letting them see that they can get involved.'

'Theatre is still white, middle class, male, it absolutely is. There must be some barriers such as the perception of theatre, training, buildings, technology.'

'We could spend more on recruitment so we could afford targeted recruitment adverts in things like 'The Voice' and the other specialist magazines and publications.'

Education

All of the theatres' work and the initiatives that they are involved in - the artistic product as well as specific educational activities - are seen as being educational in the way that they develop audience members' knowledge and understanding both in and through the arts. Practitioners on all levels feel a responsibility for education, and it is clear in theatres that it is not just the education specialists who are committed to, and contributing to, the educational programmes.

'We have a responsibility not only to entertain but to challenge and stimulate and to educate.'

Specialist support for teachers and schools is one of the more traditional education approaches. Early exposure to the theatre for local children and young people will, theatres hope, encourage them to think about working in

the industry and help to create the habit of regular attendance at arts events. It is hoped that by 'starting young', they will be able to act as 'ambassadors' for the theatre, encouraging their families and communities to become involved. A hugely diverse group of people can be reached through work with schools, both directly through the participants themselves and indirectly through those they tell about their experiences.

Visiting schools, providing dedicated school sessions, performances and support material are all common examples of education activity. Working with schools before and after performances, and supplying packs of information for teachers to use, are other ways in which the experience of theatre is being brought to children and young people.

'We'll be giving young people the opportunity to do their own creative work. There'll also be some training in performance and production and other craft skills that for some young people will lead to employment or vocational training, but for others will be social and life skills. This is an opportunity for young people to work together creatively in a way that isn't competitive.'

Increasingly, new technology is playing a part in engaging children through the use of the internet (see the Polka Theatre example, above). Many theatres have websites and interactive initiatives such as online question and answer sessions with performers. Some theatres are developing sites where children can interact with other schools in this country and abroad. All the schools involved in these sites share the fact that they are linked with a specific theatre.

With the development of new technology, there are more opportunities for reaching children in different places, and increasing the numbers involved in theatre is a real possibility. Ultimately those organisations particularly focussing on work for and with children and young people are keen to provide a 'magical experience' for as many as possible. Performers and those in theatres dedicated to children and young people are particularly committed to this.

Case study: educational and work experience initiatives – Sheffield Theatres

The education programme of Sheffield Theatres takes place in schools, colleges, community settings and at the Crucible and Lyceum Theatres. It reaches children as young as three years, children in primary and secondary schools, students, parents, teachers and members of the public, with targeted

activities for each group. The programme is inspired by or leads to performance and provides activities which support creative and personal development and encourage participants' long-term involvement and association with theatre. All members of staff at the theatre are encouraged to think of themselves as being part of the Education Programme offered by Sheffield Theatres.

'Sheffield Theatres has always demonstrated a strong commitment to education, in progressing the work further; it's about building on what is already there, shaking it up and moving it forward with clear strategies.'

In line with this approach, Sheffield Theatres works closely with three partner secondary schools throughout the city. These relationships provide a base for the research and development of new models of working and for the creation of new projects which can be accessed by a wider audience.

'We also take on special creative projects in schools and provide opportunities for the results of this work to be shared with other young people at the theatre.'

The partner schools, and their wider communities in turn, receive additional support throughout the year from the staff at Sheffield Theatres. New projects arising from this initiative have included: 'science in theatre' experiences; careers workshops; staff nights at the theatre; workshops on staging musical theatre; community performances of theatre-in-education productions; and playwriting development opportunities for staff and pupils. The schools have also created marketing sites for Sheffield Theatres' productions and have significantly increased the number of theatre visits.

'We ran a really successful 'science in theatre' project, which was developed with science teachers and theatre staff with a range of skills and experience. This project made physics very accessible and exciting for young people who wouldn't have seen themselves as theatregoers. It's helped develop a really healthy relationship with teachers from across the curriculum.'

Sheffield Theatres has an ongoing series of educational events in its *Join in, find out* programme, including pre-show talks, 'page to stage' events and 'talk-backs'. The theatre also has its own education website which contains easily-accessed resource material for most of its productions. Teachers and students are now not limited to the productions currently running at the theatre and can follow productions through the season from initial concept to performance.

‘We had been running these initiatives for a while but we were still getting requests for work covered by this programme. So we realised we needed to let more people know what these events actually were – we had relied too much on jargon. We started to include a description in our brochure, to describe what these activities were. We tried to make the language clearer- more open, more accessible.’

The Crucible Youth Theatre is an important part of the education programme. It involves around 180 young people working on new projects each term and provides the opportunity for young people from different social and ethnic backgrounds to interact and express themselves through drama. With a long waiting list, it is evident that there is room for expansion should the opportunity, resources and funding be made available. Piloting of a new outreach youth theatre group resulting from the partner schools initiative is currently under way, extending Crucible Youth Theatre’s potential to engage different groups in its activities.

‘The north of Sheffield is an area from which children find it very difficult to travel to the theatre. The new outreach Youth Theatre at Chaucer School is in a part of the city which is very disadvantaged in many ways. The project has been very successful and we are trying to work with the group to establish a management team to secure the project’s long-term future.’

There is a theatre-in-education programme each year which tours into schools and community venues in South Yorkshire. Schools are encouraged to invite parents into the performances. The pieces are created from work with playwrights in local schools and is a vital part of Sheffield Theatres’ overall programme of creating access to the highest-quality artistic work.

‘Our aspiration is to have a national and international reputation which will enable Sheffield Theatres to attract the very best actors and artists, and other practitioners, able to contribute to the Artistic and the Education Programme’.

Sheffield Theatres provides an ongoing programme of training events for teachers and education workers. These include regular meetings to share practice, masterclasses and teachers’ in-service training days to inspire and encourage best practice. This work also enables Sheffield Theatres to respond to the needs of schools and to continue an active dialogue with teachers in all phases of education.

‘With our partnerships and collaborations, the opportunities now exist to work together to make a real difference through our education programme.’

The education programme aims to cover the whole spectrum of work in theatres. For students wishing to develop their understanding of work in a professional context, there is a range of student placements and training opportunities in production, education and theatre management. Sheffield Theatres operates a volunteer scheme with the marketing department: people are able to go in to a theatre for a morning or an afternoon each week and work alongside experienced staff. For the theatre, the placements provide additional practical help and encourage new people into the industry. Over the last twelve months, Sheffield Theatres has also provided twenty-five work experience placements for 14–18 year olds. These young people get a broad experience of the different work opportunities offered in a professional theatre. A proportion of these placements are provided as part of Sheffield Theatres’ commitment to its partner schools initiative.

‘It’s about seeing the connections and the opportunities. Always seeing education as part of what we do.’

Creating new partnerships

Greater competition for sponsorship, and growing consumer power, mean that organisations have to create ever more imaginative ways of securing funds. They also have to compete against the growing number of leisure activities trying to attract visitors.

Long-term success and survival for the theatres is becoming increasingly centred on their ability to find and secure funding. Part of the drive to create new partnerships is to achieve this security in funding, while part of it is to expand creativity and develop innovative partnerships. New partnerships with local restaurants, museums and other non-theatre venues can provide opportunities for reciprocal advertising and many organisations are now developing this to increase awareness of their work and to generate some additional funding. New partnerships can also provide opportunities to perform in new or non-traditional venues.

‘We have been given a great opportunity to decide where to position ourselves. We are creating new partnerships, for example by presenting work in nightclubs and department stores. That’s a wonderful example of town and theatre together.’

Whilst collaborations with local cultural and non-cultural organisations provide opportunities for mutual advertising, they also provide a pool of potential performers and behind the scenes staff who are keen to get involved in workshops and amateur productions.

Organising gala events is one way in which current and future sponsors are bought together, rewarding and encouraging their involvement in the theatre. There are many examples of new creative partnerships, whereby theatres link with other theatres and theatre professionals to create new work.

There are other partnerships which involve collaboration with organisations in different sectors and aim to support work with specific groups in the community. The aim of the work is usually to involve, stimulate and interest people traditionally excluded from the mainstream.

‘We’ve gone into partnership with a college of further education that involves youth theatre activity and other work with young people, especially those who have been excluded from other activity.’

‘Working with new partners, touring, reaching different parts of the community we couldn’t have done that without the theatre money.’

Case study: New Vic Theatre, Newcastle-under-Lyme - Alternative funding, theatre in the community and relationship with stakeholder groups

The *Borderlines* initiative at the New Vic Theatre in Newcastle-under-Lyme is redefining the theatre in the community and brings theatre into social contexts. Working with some of Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent’s most disadvantaged communities, mainly with young offenders or children in care, it uses theatre to help people find new and positive ways of thinking about and understanding themselves, their communities and their responsibilities. Many of these young people are on the ‘borders’ of society; their anti-social behaviour excludes them from their communities.

Through the aptly-named *Borderlines* outreach programme, the theatre works with groups to challenge disruptive and anti-social behaviour, build self-awareness and self-worth and develop positive attitudes. The idea behind using theatre to challenge negative behaviour patterns is to give the young people an opportunity to perceive themselves differently.

The theatre funds the *Borderlines* initiative by working in partnership with various groups or stakeholders. Rather than a passive reliance on grants or ‘handouts’, the theatre has shifted the balance to one of mutually beneficial,

two-way partnerships. The theatre has service level agreements with various partners, such as the police or a health authority, and is paid for offering a valued 'service' which, for example, helps to reduce crime. The stakeholders buy into the service the theatre provides, so they don't just feel they give money. By offering and charging for these services, the New Vic theatre is increasingly becoming financially independent, less vulnerable to funding cuts and hence more in control of its own destiny.

'We now have a range of activities and skills we never thought possible.'

Projects are undertaken in partnership with a range of agencies such as youth offending teams, the police or health authorities.

Typically, participants devise a piece of theatre about issues directly relevant to their lives - car-crime, bullying and drug-taking are just some recent examples.

Through the use of theatre, young people are able to understand the reasons for their actions and the consequences for themselves, their families and their communities. Through performance they are able to see themselves, and be seen by audiences, in a different way. This allows them to recognise and understand better the complex nature of their own experiences and their relationship with the outside world.

All *Borderlines* productions receive the same level of professional and technical support as professional work. The young performers usually perform their work in public, sometimes at the New Vic, sometimes touring into schools and youth centres. Over the last four years, the *Borderlines* team has worked with more than 70,000 young people. The theatre has received the British Community Safety Award for achievements in helping to reduce crime, and the *Borderlines* team is regularly asked to speak at national and international conferences. The New Vic was the first theatre company to be invited to present a piece of work in the House of Commons for an audience of MPs, Ministers and policy-makers.

The team at the New Vic Theatre is very keen to share the knowledge and expertise gained through its five years of working on the *Borderlines* project, and would like its experience to be a resource for other theatres.

2.6 Limitations and frustrations related to the changes

The theatres we spoke to had many positive stories and achievements, which they see as being a direct result of the theatre review and the introduction of the national policy. However, some organisations have experienced difficulties resulting from the review and the new policy. For example, there is concern that other funding bodies, such as local councils, may either stop or peg funding as a result of the increased funding received from Arts Council England.

The encouraging of all organisations to develop work in areas that were previously the specialism of some, has also raised concerns. Although it has meant that greater thought is being given to their own programmes, there is an element of fear among some specialist companies that the national theatre policy will make it difficult for them to retain their unique position as specialists in, for example, new writing or children and young people. However, practitioners recognise that striving to maintain a reputation as a leader in a specific field, should ensure that the quality of work is continually improving.

‘It certainly made us stop and think. If other people are going to be doing what we are doing then where does that leave us? It’s caused internal reflection to be more focussed on what it is we do and in more detail.’

‘We realised that the injection of money into other theatres was going to enable them to do more of this [the work they do] which we felt threatened by, but we also thought it was a good thing. It was good because it focussed us again and enabled us to say ‘what are we doing?’ What we realised was we had an expertise and depth of experience that other theatres would take a very long time to build up.’

2.7 Constraints beyond the control of the theatre review and the national theatre policy

It should be acknowledged that despite the best intentions of theatres and funding bodies there are some considerations and constraints outside of the control of the industry which will impact upon the future of the theatres. Difficult market conditions make it increasingly hard for organisations to secure funding from other sources. There is an ever-growing number of leisure pursuits against which the theatres must compete for audiences. As previously discussed it is felt that the pool of suitable and qualified practitioners is not currently sufficient to meet the needs of the industry.

The theatres which participated in this study are united in their desire to encourage a diverse and sustainable workforce into the theatre industry. They recognise that there needs to be a long-term commitment from the whole industry, not just from individual organisations. In particular, encouraging a greater ethnic mix in senior and artistic positions is considered to be quite difficult because of recruitment issues. Many organisations speak about their desire for a greater mix but their frustration at not being able to find suitable professionals to fill the roles.

‘We have had black actors playing in the building, perhaps not as many as we would like. Good black actors get snapped up very quickly nowadays into television and London theatre.’

2.8 Collection of data and measurement

Few organisations formally collect much demographic information about their audiences, making accurate measurement of change difficult. Organisations are, however, measuring the success of initiatives to some extent. Postcode analysis is used by many that do collect data to identify the types of people visiting the theatre, although this only provides information about those who bought the tickets and not about who actually visited. The information is used to inform decisions about concessions and the development of work with and for communities that are less engaged.

‘We have had some disagreement over collecting profile data from the box office. We are reluctant to ask about people’s ethnicity when they book tickets. However, Marketing are sending out self-completion questionnaires and we will do some research via focus groups and post code analysis.’

2.9 The future of the policy and theatres

Undeniably the theatre review has revitalised and invigorated the industry, giving organisations a new impetus to develop and succeed. New and exciting initiatives are happening all over the country as a result of the increased funding given to theatres. However, it has not meant massive strategic change in individual organisations. Established policies, mission statements and objectives have remained constant for the majority of theatres and although behaviour in terms of planning and investment has changed, the spirit of what they are striving to achieve has not. This is shown by the development, enhancement and expansion of existing projects, initiatives and priorities rather than by a departure to something entirely new.

In defining the focus of the industry as a whole, the national theatre policy has set the framework for coming years. However, to deliver change and to achieve success, there are a number of important considerations that need to be addressed.

Staff at all levels within theatres identify funding as the crux of what the future will hold. Practitioners feel that the policy and momentum is certainly sustainable if the necessary funding is provided. Theatres are concerned that the three years of investment will prove to be a short-term fix. Many started from a poor financial position and although the money has helped them to stabilise and invest, it is not sufficient to guarantee their survival.

There is concern among senior figures that Arts Council England will feel that it has 'done its bit for regional theatre' and that theatres will subsequently be left out in the cold. Specialist and more junior staff tend to be concerned about maintaining current projects and financial backing.

'I think the danger with the theatre review and the theatre review money is "Well, theatres are now sorted". There's a danger things could stagnate unless there is further strategic investment so that theatres can look at major initiatives with some confidence that the arts funding system will continue investing. Otherwise theatres will not be a source of innovative activity in the future.'

Organisations are also concerned that the investment will have a negative impact on their chances of finding and securing or maintaining funding from other sources, such as local authorities, which have a vital role to play in theatre funding. Their support is important to the sector and the continued development and delivery of the national policy is partially dependent on them.

Artistically, the greatest fear is that the work that has been developed will be unsustainable. Expectations will have increased with the growing quality and range of work being provided and there is concern that if the funding stops or remains static there will be no alternative but to stop the developmental work as well. There is an element of concern among some theatres that they will have no choice but to 'play safe' in their work and take fewer artistic risks in order that they can safeguard their financial position.

'I would like more money to invest more boldly in a theatre that has risk at its centre.'

‘We have now had our funding kind of pegged at that level. So we are rigidly stuck at one funding level just doing these projects, so we’ve lost a lot of flexibility.’

‘It’s an artistic and a financial rollercoaster all the time.’

On the positive side, there is significant reason for optimism. The eight priority areas provide a framework and guidance for organisations to work within, while the focus on diversity and inclusion and new ways of working are opening up the theatre to greater numbers. Theatres are increasingly providing high-quality work that is relevant to a variety of cultures. The priorities of diversity and inclusion and new ways of working are helping to focus theatres’ strategies for attracting more people into theatre both as visitors and as those who may potentially make their career in the theatre industry. There is a strong desire among theatres to continue to improve, and the passion for success is clear.

‘We’re more stable now. But the more stable you get, the more you see how you can improve.’

3 Conclusions

- There is widespread feeling that recent changes in the theatre industry have been hugely positive. The national policy for theatre in England has provided a formal framework for development and has in many cases reinforced the theatres' objectives and strategies. Many theatres had plans and development programmes that they have been able to implement because of the additional funding made available through the theatre review
- The national policy does not appear to have shaken the industry up; rather, it has reinforced the already existing intentions and priorities that theatres had themselves identified. This is extremely positive as there was already an existing commitment to the priority areas identified in the policy
- Two of the priorities identified in the policy are 'new ways of working' and 'addressing diversity and inclusion'. Both are seen to be crucial to providing theatre that is meaningful, relevant, inclusive and accessible to everyone. It is evident that the initiatives being run in theatres cover much more than these two areas and there is significant overlap with other priority areas. Although theatres may have identified two or three areas in which they intend to focus, they are in fact working in many more and are constantly improving the quality and range of the productions
- Marketing and education departments are increasingly working together to formulate strategies and share ideas. Many of the initiatives involve educational components or targeting specific groups. Specialist staff in the theatres we visited generally receive support to realise these goals from all levels within their organisations
- New ways of working, such as using new technology and developing new partnerships, are contributing to the changing environment in which theatres are operating. Working alongside commercial and public sector partners is beneficial to both parties and many theatres are increasingly looking for ways in which to develop these relationships
- Projects targeted at previously under-represented groups (both adults and children) are being tried by many theatres. Audience development is a big part of this, encouraging new groups to use and enjoy the theatre and to experience a wider range of productions than they might be used to
- Theatres are striving to produce an ever-wider and higher-quality programme. Whilst some theatres are incorporating new genres of work

into their programme, others are moving towards commissioning entirely new pieces. As part of their efforts to address diversity and inclusion several theatres are working to encourage new writing from a more diverse range of writers. Initiatives such as mentoring, Asian writers' week and writing competitions are some of the initiatives being adopted. These benefit the theatre at the time, providing new and exciting work that may attract different audiences and also work to encourage a greater mix of people into working in the industry longer term

- Education continues to be a priority area for theatres and we learned of work with all ages and abilities. Theatres are increasingly using workshops and teaching resources that look at many aspects of the theatre, the production itself and the components that go into making it a success. Workshops supporting specific productions provide insight and try to engage audiences more fully
- Encouraging a more diverse range of professionals into the industry is crucial in tackling diversity and inclusion and for developing the industry profile for the future. Recruitment is an issue at all levels of the industry, including board members and artistic directors. Although theatres are actively trying to broaden the diversity of their staff it is often seen as a struggle to do so: finding the people to fill the positions available is felt to be difficult. Many of the theatres are working towards encouraging more people into the theatre by having open days and demonstrating the variety of job roles that the theatre industry includes

3.1 The next steps

Theatres are clear that funding holds the key to their future. They are concerned that the extra funding from the theatre review will prove to be a short-term fix and that the Arts Council will feel it has done its bit for theatre. Many theatres started from a poor financial position and although the money has helped them to stabilise and invest, it is not sufficient to guarantee their survival. The renaissance in theatre spawned by the theatre review needs continued investment; money holds the key to the successful implementation of the national theatre policy and the sustainable development of theatre in England.

The Arts Council will continue to monitor the impact of the theatre review and the national theatre policy through the repeat collection of data gathered in the baseline survey and further case studies exploring how the national policy is being implemented.

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Appendix 1: The national policy for theatre in England (July 2000)

1 The context

Theatre has been a living force in this country for over 500 years, shaping our cultural heritage. It challenges us, it tells us stories about our changing lives and the values that shape them. In a digital age, theatre still has a power that comes from creating a live, shared experience which, at its best, can move, surprise and engage us in a way that is unique.

The national policy for theatre in England is written at a time when our theatre is still regarded by many as the best in the world, and yet this is an artform in crisis. The Boyden Report and the Arts Council's own document 'The Next Stage' showed that theatre has been inadequately funded since the mid-80s. The result has been a concentration of resources on buildings and institutions rather than people and art. Many organisations have become inward looking and territorial and there has been a drain on talent and resources resulting in an environment in which it is much harder for artists and managers to take creative risks. Large parts of our theatre have been caught in a downward spiral with less exceptional work being produced. Not surprisingly audiences for some kinds of theatre are falling. In many parts of the country theatre has failed to engage with a broad audience. It has certainly failed to engage adequately with young people and with multi-cultural Britain.

Arts Council England believes that theatre should be one of England's most vital artforms. We want to see theatre develop and use its unique power and energy to reach a wider range of contemporary audiences. We want it to have the confidence to make full use of the resources that are now on offer in terms of new talent, new partnerships, and new technology. We want it to be celebrated for its regional distinctiveness alongside its international excellence.

And we are prepared to act – as this national theatre policy makes clear – to create the right climate for artists, producers, writers and audiences to thrive. Substantial change will be required to create an environment in which theatre will flourish in this new century. Of course we must invest in and support what we do well, but we must also acknowledge and address existing weaknesses. The funding system needs to engage with a greater range of artists and practitioners.

The roles and functions of some theatre buildings and organisations may need to change to enable them to take on new partnerships and reach new audiences. We believe that the theatre community and the arts funding bodies are ready to respond to this challenge and work with us to ensure a vital future for theatre in this country.

2 The Arts Council's role

The Arts Council's role is to set national objectives, to maintain an overview of national provision, to act as an advocate and to argue the national case for the funds necessary to achieve those objectives.

The Arts Council's national policy for theatre in England will transform and sustain theatre in this country ensuring that a wide range of audiences has access to bold, relevant and exciting work. That transformation requires many players to work together including the theatre community itself; the voluntary sector; the Regional Arts Boards; local authorities; the education sector; and the commercial sector.

The Policy must embrace the theatre sector as a whole and involve a wide range of venues and sources of production, including producing theatres, regional presenting venues, arts centres and other spaces, non building-based subsidised production and touring, other subsidised theatre in London, and the West End and commercial production. It will be supported by the further development of the Arts Council's national touring policy.

The Arts Council has led, and will continue to lead, the process of implementing the National Policy for Theatre in England. It has set out a clear process and timetable for that implementation. A commitment to transparency, clarity, continuity and consistency will drive the process and there is a protocol setting out the roles and responsibilities of the different parts of the integrated funding system and the relationship between the policy and its regional implementation.

Working with a Theatre Committee it will respond to the creative proposals put forward by the Regional Arts Boards. These proposals will involve the theatre community, practitioners and other funding partners and must show that both the funding system and those working in theatre have a willingness to change and engage with live theatre in its diverse forms, at all scales. Within the objectives of the national theatre policy it is for the Regional Arts Boards (working in association with local authorities) and the theatre community itself to determine how these objectives will be met in different parts of the country in the light of regional circumstances.

The proposals brought to the Arts Council by the Regional Arts Boards must instil a new confidence and excitement in theatre and ensure its place at the heart of our culture. There will be responsibilities for all of us: the Arts Council, Regional Arts Boards and those working in theatre. The theatre community as a whole must show ambitious thinking and new ways of working which ensure that their work is available to as wide a constituency as possible. The funding system must encourage that creative thinking and support the needs of those artists who are committed to delivering it. It must trust those it funds and be clear about why it funds them. The Arts Council is committed to reducing bureaucracy. It will make bold decisions and be prepared to prioritise, committing or withdrawing funds in response to the levels of ambitious and fresh thinking and the quality of artistic work.

Together we can develop a more flexible theatre network that can sustain and develop the best of the past and encourage the writers, artists and productions of tomorrow.

3 The national policy for theatre in England

The aim of the Arts Council's national policy for theatre in England is to enable all those involved in theatre to produce high quality work that touches the hearts and engages the minds of a greater number and a wider range of people than is currently the case.

This policy must stand the test of time. It is not about change for change's sake: but it is about cultural change which will require several years to take effect. This policy is not just about doing more better, it is also about doing things differently. It is not just about investing more money in theatre. Money alone never produced great art. It is about spending whatever investment we have in new ways.

This national theatre policy is designed to enable theatre to fulfil its potential and create a theatre network that is confident and outward looking, able to collaborate both across the performing arts sector and with the wider creative industries. This will involve building on existing achievements, forming new partnerships, in many cases developing new ways of working and new forms of distribution. This is challenging stuff but if the theatre community, Regional Arts Boards and the Arts Council, in partnership with local authorities, can rise to the challenge, then together we can create an environment that enables theatre to find new audiences and create new work, thriving on quality and innovation.

The Arts Council's national policy for theatre in England is informed by the Council's over-arching strategic priorities:

- new work, experimentation and the individual artist
- new artforms and collaborative ways of working, particularly with new technology
- diversity and inclusion, particularly in relation to race, disability and economic class
- children, young people, lifelong learning
- touring and distribution, including through broadcasting, recording and electronic publishing

4 Eight priorities

The national policy for theatre in England is built on eight key priorities. We expect all funded organisations to deliver the first two priorities. The remaining six priorities should inform the thinking of everyone involved in subsidised theatre. However, we do not expect everyone to give them equal priority or delivery. The Arts Council will be looking to the theatre sector as a whole to deliver:

1 *A better range of high quality work*

Together we must deliver a greater range of high quality live theatre across the country. This work must be across all scales and sectors. We acknowledge that work will be performed in very different contexts but the quality of the work is key, as is its relevance to its audience.

We will invest in artists and arts organisations that show a real commitment to creativity and innovation. Those working in theatre are actively encouraged to develop new talent and respond to new ideas and emerging artistic practice.

2 *Attract more people*

If we are to achieve a sustainable increase in the numbers of people engaging with theatre as audiences and as participants then theatre has to offer them an experience that is stimulating and engaging.

We expect funded theatre to have audience development at its heart. The interaction between art and audiences and participants has to be central. The theatre community should continue to build on its work to engage with people who have felt excluded from theatre. Access must be a key priority. Young people are a particular priority. We need to grow and encourage the next generation of audiences and practitioners.

More organisations and buildings should be able to respond to the way people live their lives now, offering an environment that is as attractive as other leisure-related buildings. Theatre buildings need to be clear about their focus and their identity. Where appropriate, they should make people of all ages, social groups and ethnic communities feel at home in them throughout the day.

3 *Develop new ways of working*

We will invest in organisations that foster a culture of innovation. We want to see greater collaborative partnerships between different theatre organisations and less territorialism within the theatre community.

Practitioners must embrace a culture of innovation and a wider range of forms and traditions. Theatre needs to engage with a wider range of artists and other partners. Theatre should also connect more proactively with the other creative industries, seeing them as an opportunity not a threat.

We will support theatre initiatives that make imaginative use of existing and new environments. We would like to see work made for a greater range of spaces and places. The Arts Council will do its part to create stronger links between producing venues, presenting houses, and touring companies to enable greater exploitation of good work and to enable circuits of promoters to receive a more flexible and varied range of theatre.

4 *Education*

We expect most forms of funded theatre to place education at the heart of their work. Involving young people in theatre is key.

The Arts Council recognises the importance of working with the education sector: with schools, colleges and higher education. We will work with the education sector to influence the role of drama in the curriculum, seeking to maximise teachers' appreciation of the value of theatre as an educational resource and to fund more theatre in educational contexts.

5 *Address diversity and inclusion*

Theatre must engage with audiences and artists from a broader, more diverse range of backgrounds. It must connect with people who have been excluded, including those living in rural communities.

We expect the theatre community to develop work that speaks to the diverse audiences who make up this country today. This work is a priority for us. We want to see an increase in the workforce from the non-white population; a greater percentage of the audience for all theatre coming from a wider range of backgrounds; and a much more diverse artistic programme across England.

6 *Develop the artists and creative managers of the future*

Theatre must give talented people flexible and appropriate career opportunities. It must create conditions that ensure talent is nurtured. It must improve the working environment, sustaining creative teams and providing better pay and conditions for artists, technicians and managers.

It must embrace the culture of lifelong learning, ensuring that individuals working in theatre are skilled and motivated. We must acknowledge and exploit the synergies between the subsidised and commercial sectors and between London and the regions. In particular we must work with other key partners to make it more possible for talented people to work outside London. The Arts Council will support the profession in making the changes necessary for this to happen.

7 *An international reputation*

We expect the theatre community as a whole to develop work of international quality and bring the best world theatre to England. We will encourage more international collaborations and projects that enhance the international reputation of English theatre.

8 *Regional distinctiveness*

We will also encourage the unique local voice of theatre that combines quality with the edge that comes from making work in, and for, a particular community. Theatre companies and agencies should provide a meaningful contribution to the life of the community in which they exist.

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