**OUR NATIONAL PORTFOLIO, 2018-22:**   
**Theatre Narrative**

The 2015-18 theatre portfolio comprises 172 organisations and an investment of £100.1 million per annum (27 per cent of the total portfolio spend), and the proposed 2018-22 portfolio is £104.3m and 190 organisations (25 per cent of the total spend). This increase of 18 organisations represents a 10.5 per cent increase to the theatre portfolio. Theatre now makes up 23 per cent of the overall portfolio, compared to 25 per cent in 2015-18.

For the Arts Council, theatre represents around a quarter of the National Portfolio investment, reflecting the fact that it is historically one of the country’s most significant and popular artforms, both with audiences and participants. Almost twice as many people visit the theatre every year in London alone as buy tickets to watch Premier League football.

With a backdrop of increasing attendance and artistic enterprise, there is much to celebrate about English theatre. The industry comprises independent, commercial, publically funded and not-for-profit organisations. It functions effectively and is able to help innovative work find routes to the public stage where it can find the largest possible audience.

Theatre contributes significantly to the artistic and financial strength of the wider creative industries, with new technology – especially around live broadcasting – and a more demanding audience base driving change within the industry.

Nonetheless, as shown by the independent analysis of the industry we commissioned last year, audiences and workforce still lack genuine diversity, tickets sales can be concentrated in a number of ‘hit’ shows, and there are areas of the country that would benefit from a reinvigorated touring offer.

The Arts Council evaluation of strategic touring has led to a better supply of midscale touring while the success of the Theatre Tax Credit showed how important these kinds of incentives can be financially. Meanwhile our initiatives with the BBC, Live from Television Centre and Performance Live, are helping companies think and train for other platforms.

The new portfolio enhances the current ecology of buildings, performance spaces and producing companies across the country, with additional investment to ensure the industry remains as frictionless and as connected as possible.

There is significant new investment in new independent/artist led touring companies (1927, Action Hero, Chris Goode and Common Wealth), providing artists and companies with opportunities to further establish their work; there are 15 new companies joining the portfolio adding some much needed support to this part of the ecology.

There is further support for midscale touring theatre, another area where we know there is demand for more work, with increases in grants for existing National Portfolio Organisations (Kneehigh Theatre, Talawa and Rifco) and the new addition of Wise Children – a midscale touring and artists development initiative led by Emma Rice. In addition producers China Plate, based in the West Midlands, join the portfolio with a specific focus on developing small scale companies for the midscale.

Where possible, areas of low engagement have been considered, particularly in the South West – with additions of Strike a Light (Gloucester), Doorstep Arts (Torbay) and Theatre Orchard (Somerset).

Artist development runs throughout the portfolio and will be strengthened by the addition of the Regional Theatre Young Directors Scheme (an initiative that nurtures early career theatre directors to train as artistic leaders of our theatres in the future) as a Sector Support Organisation, and the addition of the Yard Theatre in Hackney.

Finally, there is a strong diversity story with an increase in grants to those widening audience access to the arts (Stagetext and Vocaleyes), organisations working with deaf and disabled artists (Access All Areas, Deafinitely and Mind the Gap), and Black and minority ethnic organisations and companies, particularly at the midscale (Eclipse, The Tricycle Theatre and Talawa), as well as increases for talent development initiatives (the Bush Theatre, Theatre in the Mill and Yellow Earth).

Financially in the theatre industry our investment is quite small compared to other (largely commercial) investment, but it is highly effective. This National Portfolio Organisation investment seeks to ensure that our money continues to have the maximum possible impact on the whole industry.

**More information artscouncil.org.uk/NPO**

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