



**→ Supporting  
a freelance  
creative  
workforce**

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# introduction

## response to covid19 ↓

In compiling this booklet we are aware that some form of aid needs to be given to theatre in order to survive and rebuild as we come through this pandemic. Right now, at the time of writing no such aid has been agreed. It is essential we continue to fight for the survival of theatres and theatre companies, and most importantly for the workforce who inhabit those companies.

This booklet is the start of a discussion around how we rebuild. It is in part an initial response to 'What Comes Next' as Arts Council England have framed it. In their statement they outlined three phases:

### response phase

(March – September 2020)

### stabilisation phase

(Estimated May 2020 – March 2021.

The beginnings of this phase overlaps with our response work)

### reset phase

(Estimated April 2021 – March 2024)

This booklet is concerned partly with the stabilisation phase and especially with the reset. It is not set out as a long researched study with specific recommendations at the end. Rather it is SDUK pooling the various discussions and ideas our members have been engaged with as the opening of a much wider discussion.



**SDUK is the professional association that represents theatre and opera directors.** We have always worked collaboratively with other associations, with unions, and grassroots organisations that emerge to represent a certain cause or sector. We do not 'own' the ideas in here. They are simply our opening offer to our friends and colleagues. Ideas we wanted to share.

Whilst any of the information in here is relevant to the creative sector as a whole, we write it from the perspective of our own experience as theatre directors. When surveyed we found that 80% of directors that responded were self employed. Even within our sector that figure is high. Because of this, much of the work here is concerned with supporting a freelance workforce. Of those surveyed 90% of directors had seen their work cancelled because of Covid19, and even if theatres found a way of reopening this autumn 64% of directors did not anticipate working again this year.

### **part one**

The first part of this booklet takes the premise that the creative industries are at the centre of national and local economies, and that at the centre of this is a freelance workforce. The ideas here will be well known to many of you, but the facts and figures quoted provide a context.

### **part two**

The second part of the booklet takes three economic models that help support freelance workers. Whilst these are often national schemes, not limited to one sector, it is not hard to see how individual arts councils, how funders, or how theatres and companies could use these historic models themselves when exploring how to engage freelancers moving forward.

**If any of the ideas in here have inspired you or enraged you - then please use them. Please feel free engage with us, and lets look to how we build a better future for theatre, and the workforce that makes theatre.**



# part one

## industry context ↓

Fergus Morgan

### an existential crisis

Theatre in the UK is teetering over an abyss. When the coronavirus pandemic forced the closure of plays and playhouses across the country in mid-March, the industry's primary source of income – people buying tickets – suddenly evaporated. Shows were pulled, tours postponed, festivals were cancelled, and ominous black holes sprung up in balance sheets everywhere from Exeter to Edinburgh. They are only getting bigger the longer the lockdown of public events continues and the revenue stream runs dry.

There have already been casualties. Nuffield Southampton Theatres, only recently redeveloped, went into administration in early May. Edinburgh's Royal Lyceum Theatre is "hibernating" until next Spring, citing lost income of over £700,000. Northampton's Royal and Derngate Theatre, Shakespeare's Globe, and even the National Theatre – which is "haemorrhaging money", according to artistic director Rufus Norris – have also revealed that their continued existence is in doubt. And that is only among flagship institutions; the untold damage done lower down the chain – to smaller buildings, smaller companies, and individual artists – is vast.

The alarm bells are being sounded. Rebecca Kane Burton, chief executive of Lloyd Webber Theatres, told *The Stage* that coronavirus



had turned “a thriving, busy, growing industry” into one with “zero revenue, overnight”. Producer Sonia Freedman, writing in The Telegraph, warned that UK theatre is on the brink of “total collapse”, citing statistics that 70% of performing arts companies would be out of business by 2021 without financial aid. Even Prince Charles, speaking to Classic FM, said that the situation was “desperate”.

Theatre has been hit extremely hard by coronavirus – almost dealt a knock out blow – but it is not the only arts industry facing an existential crisis. Visual art, live music, and cinema are dealing with similar levels of uncertainty.

So too are the heritage industry, the publishing industry, and the fashion industry – the entire creative sector. A letter signed by over 400 creative leaders – a varied list featuring Nick Cave,

Jonathan Pryce and Anish Kapoor – in April warned that the UK could become “a cultural wasteland” because of coronavirus.

**“ Theatre has been hit extremely hard by coronavirus – almost dealt a knockout blow**

Some measures have been put in place to avoid immediate catastrophe. Arts Council England relaxed the obligations on institutions within its National Portfolio and made £160 million pounds of emergency funding available to artists and organisations outside it. The government’s furlough scheme and Self-Employed Income Support Scheme have undoubtedly saved thousands of jobs. Grassroots charity work has raised tens of thousands of pounds for individual theatre-makers nationwide. But much-needed though the continued existence of these measures is, they are little more than life support. Palliative care to a punch-drunk industry. A stopgap solution for a fatal affliction.

Of course, other sectors are in deep, deep trouble, too. Coronavirus, and the nationwide lockdown it caused, touched every part of the UK economy, from agriculture to education, from retail to research.



But whereas some areas of the economy can grind back into gear relatively quickly and begin to recover from the setback, the new normal of social distancing and small gatherings means that it will be many months, probably years, until theatre and other creative industries that cannot fully function within those restrictions can join them in rebuilding. As Vicky Featherstone, artistic director of London's Royal Court told BBC Radio 4, theatre has been "disproportionately affected" by coronavirus, and will continue to be.

The entire economy is ailing, then, with the creative sector is staring at an unprecedented existential crisis. The issues facing the government, the devolved administrations, the Arts Council, and other funding bodies – those with the capability of injecting investment into the economy in order to drive it down the road of recovery – can be reduced to a fairly simple one, then: where should the money go? Where will investment have the biggest positive impact? Who can we support that will support others?

They will not be short of answers. Every sector and every industry will argue for its own importance, will lobby for its own share of support. Leaders from across the creative sector need to make their voice is heard loud and clear in that conversation. It is an argument that the arts industries – theatre, film, art, music, and more – have been making almost continually for decades. Now they must make it again. Their survival depends upon it.

## at the heart of the economy

Prior to the coronavirus pandemic, it is no exaggeration to say that the arts industries in this country, and the creative sector as a whole, was the healthiest it has ever been – healthier, and growing faster, than the rest of the economy.

In November 2018, the Department for Culture, Media and Sport released new figures revealing that the combined creative industries were worth over £100 billion – and had grown at twice the rate of



the UK economy since 2010. Earlier that year, the DCMS published statistics showing that the creative sector accounted for nearly 300,000 businesses – one in eight of all UK businesses – and the previous year, 2017, it revealed that the sector employed over 2 million people, almost a tenth of the working population. The sector's extraordinary growth was set to continue. 2018 research by Nesta and the Creative Industries Council estimated that the sector could create 900,000 new jobs by 2030.

That is an extremely vibrant outlook, and yet it is still only part of the picture, only a small slice of what the creative industries do for the UK economy. Their true impact is impossible to measure, for it is felt across sectors. The theatres, cinemas, museums and galleries of Britain generate income not just for themselves, but for each other, and for other industries

**“Ten million inbound visits to the UK involved engagement with the arts and culture**

entirely: tourism, hospitality, retail, and leisure to name four. As the Creative Industries Federation's 2019 report "Public Investment, Public Gain" revealed, for every £1 GVA generated by the arts and culture, a further £1.14 is generated in the wider economy.

There are more statistics to prove this. Take tourism. According to Arts Council England figures, ten million inbound visits to the UK involved engagement with the arts and culture in 2011, accounting for 32% of all visits to the country, and 42% of all in-bound, tourist-related expenditure. According to a 2010 report by VisitBritain, the UK's culture and heritage attracts £4.5 billion of in-bound spending annually, underpinning over 100,000 jobs. Without a thriving creative sector, there would be no thriving tourism industry.

National statistics like these are reflected at a local level, too, over and over again, everywhere from Kent to Cumbria. In 2013, the Local Governments Association identified five key ways investment in arts



and culture benefited local economies – through attracting visitors, through creating jobs, through attracting businesses, through revitalising places, and through developing talent – and supported its findings with a range of collated case studies.

The Hepworth Wakefield, which opened in 2011, contributed an estimated £10 million to the local economy in its first year. The Yorkshire Sculpture Park, nearby, adds £5 million every year. The AV Festival – a contemporary biennial in the North East – adds £1.9 million to the local economy, and across the Pennines, Cumbria's Lakes Alive festival benefited the Cumbrian economy by between £2 million and £3 million every year it took place.

Further south, it is a similar story. The Whitstable Biennale in Kent added an estimated £1.3 million to the local economy in 2010. A 2012 evaluation of the first year of Turner Contemporary Gallery in nearby Margate measured its economic contribution to the area to be £13.9 million, and linked its opening to 35 new businesses in the town. A 2010 report into the impact of Liverpool's experience as European Capital of Culture estimated that the year-long programme had attracted 9.7 million visitors to the city and generated a staggering additional economic impact of £753.8 million.

**“ Theatre, it should be noted, pulls its weight**

Theatre, it should be noted, pulls its weight. A seminal 2004 ACE publication by Dominic Shellard made an in-depth study of the economic impact of UK theatre, and found that it contributed £2.6 billion to the UK economy annually – and that was 2004. But perhaps most astonishing is the annual impact of the Edinburgh Festival Fringe, the world's foremost arts festival. The London Centre for Economics and Business Research reported last year that the month-long event was worth over £1 billion to the Scottish economy – £500 million in direct spend, and £500 million more in additional expenditure in Edinburgh and the surrounding area.



Theatres across the country are closed at the moment. The Edinburgh Festivals will not take place this summer, for the first time in 73 years. The Turner Contemporary Gallery is currently closed, its exhibitions postponed. Margate will be millions of pounds worse off. Edinburgh, and Scotland, will be hundreds of millions of pounds poorer. The engines of their economy are on standby, and the future of the hundreds of businesses and thousands of jobs that rely upon them are in jeopardy.

The creative industries are more than just part of the UK economy – they are a cornerstone of it. Their health – and, right now, their very survival, is crucial to that of the country, at both a national and a local level. When it comes to stimulating the UK's post-coronavirus recovery, they must be a priority.

## **freelancers: the backbone of the creative industries**

What exactly makes up the creative industries? Who exactly makes up the creative industries, the employed or the self-employed? If the sector is to be a priority for post-coronavirus investment in the coming months, then the answers to these two questions are of paramount importance. They will dictate where that investment should go in order to have the biggest impact. They will dictate whether economies, both local and national, thrive or fail.

The answer to the first is simple, but broad. Although slightly complicated by varying definitions – the DCMS makes overlapping distinctions between the “creative industries” and the “cultural sector”, where others do not – it is generally agreed that the creative industries does not just involve what we collectively know as the arts – theatre, film, music, live art, museums and their siblings and sub-genres. It is more than that. It is advertising, architecture, craft, design, fashion, software development, publishing, and lots, lots more. As the 2018 DCMS statistics above state, it is 300,000



businesses, and two million jobs – one in eight businesses, and nearly one in ten workers.

The answer to the second question – the percentages of employed and self-employed workers within the creative sector – is more complex and again clouded by conflicting definitions. DCMS estimates from 2017 suggest that the self-employed make up 22.8% of the workforce across all industries the department covers, but this statistic rises to 34.5% in the “creative industries” and 47.6% in the “cultural sector”. Research by the

CIF from the same year chimed with the second figure, finding that 47% of “creative workers” are self-employed. The 2015 Creative Skillset Employment Census suggested that the self-employed made up an average of 43% of the workforce across

the creative industries it surveyed. Whatever definitions are used, and whatever methodology is used to survey, it seems possible to conclude that the fraction of self-employed people working in creative industries is large – probably as much as one third, possibly closer to one half – and that the sector heavily relies upon them.

That the creative industries rely upon self-employed workers far more than other parts of the economy is similarly demonstrable – the Office of National Statistics revealed in April that 15% of the total UK workforce was self-employed, a significant disparity with the numbers quoted above. Of course, the fraction of self-employed workers also varies within the creative sector, industry by industry.

In design, for example, 14.7% of the total workforce is self-employed, according to 2015 statistics from the Design Council. In film production, it far, far higher – Creative Skillset’s 2015 survey found that 89% of those working in the film production sector are

**“ Creative industries rely upon self-employed workers far more than other parts of the economy ”**



freelancers. That is more than just the part of an industry, more even than the backbone of an industry: that is the industry. The same is true of the performing arts. According to the Society of London Theatre's 2019 Workforce Review, nearly half of all people working within theatre are self-employed.

As an example, consider the National Theatre – the country's leading theatre. The 2017 CIF report featured the NT as a case study, revealing that while the institution employed a permanent staff of around 600 workers, it used 2,900 freelancers over a 12-month period, as actors and directors and designers, but also as construction technicians, as decorators, and as chaperones. Lisa Burger, executive director of the theatre, told CIF that “freelancers are the lifeblood of our creative output at the NT” and that “the relationship between creative freelancers and creative organisations needs to be supported for the UK's world-leading creative industries to continue to thrive”.

The reasons given by the NT for its heavy reliance on self-employed workers – that it enables the theatre to work with a wide range of people, that it enables them to employ people with project-specific skills, and that it enables the scaling up and down of its workforce to suit each project – are reflected across other industries. As the same CIF survey states, the average creative company employs just 3.3 people – without the temporary addition of freelancers and the specific skills they bring on a project-by-project basis, most of these companies, including the NT, simply could not operate.

## **creative freelancers - a case for investment**

Both of these observations – that the creative industries are central to the UK economy, and that they rely heavily on a self-employed workforce – are regularly made, and regularly overlooked.

As the range of statistics quoted above evidence, investing in the creative sector not only support jobs and livelihoods within its



industries, but across the UK economy. Betting on the arts is a good bet. And yet, as anyone working within them will attest, whether they are the chief executive of an NPO, or the artistic director of a fringe theatre company, a huge part of the job is arguing for, angling after, and scrapping around for funding – there is never enough of it, and there never will be.

And, as CIF's 2015 report argued, the role that the self-employed play within the creative sector has been consistently overlooked. The way we work has changed dramatically in recent years – the number of self-employed people has jumped from 3.3 million in 2001, to 4.8 million in 2017, according to the ONS – and public and political perceptions of the importance of freelancers has yet to catch up. "It is comparatively recently that politicians have begun to acknowledge the creative industries in the same breadth as other parts of the British economy so it is not surprising that the role of the creative freelance has been overlooked," the report stated. "Now is the time for that to change. Our fast-growing sector depends on its freelancers."

**“Much has been done to support the creative industries throughout the coronavirus pandemic, but more support is needed**

Much has been done to support the creative industries throughout the coronavirus pandemic, but more support is needed. There are several steps that can be taken immediately, within the theatre industry: the suggestions jointly made by the SOLT and UK Theatre, for example – that the government's furlough scheme be extended, and that modifications can be made to the theatre tax relief scheme to avoid exacerbating the extreme financial pressure faced by theatres and theatre companies.



But for the entire creative sector to return to work, to continue growing, to continue supporting other industries and to continue to drive the UK economy as a whole, much more money is needed, and decisions need to be taken about where that money should go. When it comes to those decisions, two facts cannot be ignored: firstly, that the creative industries are a cornerstone of the UK economy, and secondly, that the self-employed are an essential component of the creative industries' workforce.

## key statistics

- **The creative sector accounts for 300,000 businesses – one in eight UK businesses – and employs 2 million people**<sup>1</sup>
- **For every £1 generated by the arts and culture, a further £1.14 is generated in the wider economy**<sup>2</sup>
- **47% of creative workers are self-employed**<sup>3</sup>



<sup>1</sup> [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/681528/DCMS\\_Sectors\\_Economic\\_Estimates\\_2016\\_Business\\_Demographics.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/681528/DCMS_Sectors_Economic_Estimates_2016_Business_Demographics.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.creativeindustriesfederation.com/publications/public-investment-public-gain>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.creativeindustriesfederation.com/sites/default/files/2017-07/Creative%20Freelancers%201.0.pdf>

## part two

# economic models that support a freelance workforce

## universal basic income for freelancers ↓

Phil Teer

Marshall McLuhan called art a distant early warning system that told the old culture what is beginning to happen to it. Creative people are among the first to see the future coming and to work out what to do about it. Right now, the old system needs your ability to see around corners more than ever. Which makes this a perfect time for the system to invest in your talent and what better way, than through a universal basic income?

A universal basic income (UBI) is a regular payment made to all adults, regardless of means. It is guaranteed income for life. Set at a level appropriate to the cost of living in a particular country, UBI will eradicate financial insecurity in one fell swoop.

The keyword is *insecurity*. Study after study of basic income in action, demonstrates one thing above all: people change their behaviour when they feel financially secure.



From India and Africa, to Canada, the US and Finland, basic income tests show that when financial insecurity is taken away, people pay off debts, retrain, set up businesses, the young stay on at school and the poor make less demands on health and welfare systems. Everyone who receives UBI ends up contributing to economic growth, either through their own entrepreneurialism or through increased consumer spending.

In short, UBI should be seen as a stimulus that encourages creativity and entrepreneurialism by removing financial insecurity.

If you are a freelancer, the benefits of UBI are clear. It would provide you a steady income to tide you over between jobs and to support you when sick or on holiday.

If you currently have a day job to pay the bills, UBI means you have the choice to leave the day job and create the headspace you need to develop other projects.

If you are unemployed, and many more will be as we emerge from Covid into a recession, then UBI is so much smarter than means-tested benefits. This has been proven by a recent test of UBI among long-term unemployed in Finland.

In the 2017 UBI experiment in Finland, a group of long-term unemployed people were given a basic income. Because it wasn't means-tested they were free to take any work that came their way without losing benefits. Their response was compared to a control group, also unemployed.

There were two hugely important findings from the Finland test: basic income did not make people any less likely to seek work than those on benefits. However, UBI recipients were significantly less stressed and anxious and had a greater sense of wellbeing.

**“ In short, universal basic income should be seen as a stimulus that encourages creativity and entrepreneurialism**



That second point is critical. When we are stressed and anxious, we are not at our best.

Financial security gives us the self-confidence needed to make our own choices about how we spend our working life. UBI provides us with a bridge from a life that is precarious to one in which we can do better.

Which is perhaps why Universal Basic Income (UBI) is beginning to sound to many people like a sensible idea rather than a utopian fantasy. If the future continues to be precarious, we need guaranteed financial support, or we could be in real danger. Right now, we need that bridge more than ever.

So how do we pay for UBI? There are several different funding models, from wealth taxes to redistributing public spending. Each model shows us that UBI is affordable, if we want it to be. But maybe we should look at UBI a different way. Rather than a cost, we should consider it is a state investment in mass creativity and entrepreneurialism.

Through the 1960s and 70s, it was not unusual for the state to invest in and support innovation. The benefits of that period of state entrepreneurialism are still being seen today. Look at Apple. In its early days Apple benefited from state investment and from tax policies designed to support businesses like theirs. Furthermore, its R&D was built on the shoulders of giant leaps forward in technology that were funded by the taxpayer.

As Marianna Mazzucato points out in *The Entrepreneurial State*

*"Every technology that makes the iPhone smart and not stupid owes its funding to both basic and applied research funded by the state. This of course does not mean that Steve Jobs and his team were not crucial to Apple's success, but that ignoring the 'public' side of that story will prevent future Apples from being born."*



Those technologies include the internet, the touchscreen and GPS systems. All of which started life as weird outlier projects that private sector money wouldn't touch.

There are a couple of big insights here:

Firstly, companies like Apple and also Google and Tesla and all the rest who benefited from taxpayer-funded innovation, grants and tax breaks on their way up, should be made to pay it back, rather than being allowed to avoid tax.

Second, they are living proof of the massive benefit of a state investing in creative people.

Big world-changing ideas tend to start life as the obsession of isolated individuals, tinkering in their garages. That's how Steve Jobs started. These innovators are outliers who latch onto something new, before anyone else and way, way before the venture capitalists.

The inventors of tomorrow's Apple, Google or Tesla are tinkering away right now. But what chance of those individuals ever being discovered in a world that sees state entrepreneurialism as market-meddling?

**“ Big world-changing ideas tend to start life as the obsession of isolated individuals**

It was state investment in infrastructure projects in the post-war years that pulled economies out of recession and stagnation. Those projects were about mass employment in industrial societies.

We need that kind of investment again, this time tailored to a networked world and targeted at individuals. That means all you freelancers, side-hustlers, self-employed and small business owners who are tinkering away in their garages or garden offices, laying the groundwork for the markets of tomorrow.



By eradicating financial insecurity, and opening up the game of innovation and entrepreneurialism to many more people than those who can afford to play at the moment, UBI is just the sort of investment we need to spark the next big waves of creativity.



**Phil Teer** has just published *The Coming Age of Imagination: how a universal basic income will lead to an explosion of creativity*. Unbound. 2020

# enterprise allowance scheme ↓

Thomas Hescott

The Enterprise Allowance Scheme was a scheme set up in the UK in the early 1980s. It paid a guaranteed income to the unemployed to set up their own business.

Whilst this scheme was not aimed specifically at the creative industries, it did help many creative companies get off the ground, including Creation Records, Superdry, Viz Magazine and Tracey Emin. We have also heard from various SDUK members who were helped by the scheme – either directly, or indirectly as employees of theatre companies set up by people claiming the allowance.

UK theatre has already (slightly unconsciously) led the way in creating a gig economy. As I stated in the [career development report](#)<sup>1</sup>, it has been noted by numerous directors that the old employment models no longer exist.

In the report I spoke about how new models of producing which saw theatres creating emerging artist festivals and schemes that had replaced the old employment model.

<sup>1</sup> The Director's Voice – A study of theatre director training and career development  
<https://stagedirectorsuk.com/the-directors-voice-study-published/>



To take part on an emerging artist scheme or festival, it is usually the case that a venue will give the individual or company in-kind support, which amounts to approximately £15,000. This is usually a combination of space, technical resources, and marketing support. The emerging company is then expected to raise the additional budget needed from other sources, most commonly a £15,000 funding application to ACE. This model is slightly different in Scotland, and in Wales where the arts councils have slightly different funding requirements, although the principle remains the same. When well run, this model of supporting emerging artists works. It acknowledges that the majority of artists are probably going to self-produce initially (as this research has proven happens for the majority of directors), and it allows artists to lead on the work they want to create, rather than being a hired hand to create someone else's vision.

If we imagine that employment plummets even further post-covid, and that theatres look to producing models that enlarge a gig economy, then a scheme that increases support for creative entrepreneurs becomes valuable.

**“When well run, this model of supporting emerging artists works**

Whilst the scheme had some success, it is also not without its critics. Between 1983 and 1988 The Enterprise Allowance Scheme helped 325,000 individuals become self-employed. But it has also been reported that one in six entrepreneurs assisted by the Enterprise Allowance Scheme fell by the wayside within a year.

It is also worth highlighting that a variation of the scheme was launched more recently and is still in operation, and is open if you or your partner get Universal Credit, Jobseeker's Allowance or Employment and Support Allowance. The scheme's financial assistance is not so significant that it would support a freelance worker for long, although the business mentoring may well be valuable.



It is telling that so many entrepreneurs fell by the wayside. Just like many schemes for emerging practitioners in theatre, it supports the initial burst of energy needed to start a business, but without the long-term support needed to sustain that.

In a post-covid world where employment may be scarcer, but buildings and performance spaces more open to collaboration, then there is no doubt that a scheme that provides both the financial support and mentoring to allow creative freelancers to plan and forge their own careers could be vital. Any such scheme would need to be ready to commit to the long term – short-term commitment for a matter of months will make little impact.

### case study

The Enterprise Allowance Scheme – Metro Theatre Company  
Sheffield 1985 *Tony Bell*

**“The last 50 years forms a perfect arc. The first twenty five were devoted to the struggle of artists getting their hands on the means of production – the second were spent watching the managerial and executive classes clawing it back”** *Mike Bradwell*

Mike argues that the election of a free market Tory government in 1979 was a defining moment, when artists were replaced by bureaucrats, and our eco-system wilfully dismantled. Perhaps we are watching history repeat itself. If so, then it may serve to revisit the “backs to the wall” response from those emerging during Thatcher’s Britain. Many of today’s theatre veterans began their careers on *The Enterprise Allowance Scheme*, designed to fiddle rising unemployment figures caused by the decimation of manufacturing. Miners and steelworkers were encouraged to take £41 a week for 12 months and sign off the dole to start small businesses like taxi firms and hairdressers. I don’t think it was Thatcher’s intention, but the scheme also gave birth to hundreds of small theatre companies who established roots in the local community, touring on a shoe-string.



I was in one of these companies, *Metro Theatre*, directed by Stephen Daldry, formed in 1985 by eleven graduates. This isn't a story of funding applications and policy documents but of a messy hands-on collective, ducking and diving, striking deals with commercial venues, living off trade union hospitality. Here's Neil Gore:

*You could only have ten on the scheme in one company so I volunteered to stay on the dole as I signed on by post which meant I could tour without having to get back to the job centre. The plan was to take the scheme for 12 months then get Arts Council funding but we were turned down so we all signed on, got housing benefit, and hoped for a good box office. "Ragged Trousered Philanthropists" was the classic socialist novel, everyone knew it, so we packed 800 seaters like Wolverhampton Grand. It was hard work, six hours drive, two hour fit up then on, go back to an ex-miners house, have a chat and a beer, then up the next day for another six hour drive. We started with the Sheffield Street Show, a big participatory event, then split into a schools company (TIE) and a touring one. Once we were off the scheme we had to keep coming back off the road to sign on, and brought new actors in via the Stage and paid them £80 a week. I think we were on £6:50 a show as well as dole and housing. We became a Limited Company which was lucky because we had debts, and all had to pay £3,000 to settle the books, it could have been a lot more, but we did well to last 6 years, especially if you look at the value those people have put back into the economy. Stephen at the Royal Court, Brendan in Downton, everyone's still active in the industry. You could tour a 7 person play on no funding then, with cheap petrol, hospitality, and housing benefit. I toured that same play ten years ago with two people, you can tour with one or two now, but you need funding.*



# federal theatre project – 1935-1939 ↓

Jennifer Lunn

The Federal Theatre Project was part of the Works Progress Administration in the United States after the Great Depression. It ran for 4 years led by theatre director Hallie Flanagan under the following principles:

- 1 That the re-employment of theatre people now on relief rolls is the primary aim.
- 2 That this re-employment shall be in theatre enterprises offering dramatic entertainment either free or at low cost.
- 3 That whenever possible regional theatres developing native plays and original methods of production shall be encouraged.
- 4 That the W.P.A will pay:
  - i) *Labor costs* of unemployed people enrolled on the project at the wage stated by the local W.P.A administration.
  - ii) *Superintendence cost*, on an average of one person not on relief rolls to twenty who are, at a small wage.
  - iii) A *small percentage* (not to exceed 10%) of labor costs for *production costs*, depending on the nature of the project.
- 5 That if the sponsoring organisation is a public enterprise, or a non-profit making co-operative, or can be incorporated as such, any funds made by admissions may accrue to the project. <sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Theatre Project for Works Progress Administration – Hallie Flanagan 1935



The FTP was managed by 12 regional directors across 22 states. Projects were proposed by sponsoring organisations (usually venues) who submitted detailed proposals and budgets (in sextuplicate) and then took on the running of the projects if chosen. Decisions were made by the FTP administration team in liaison with the WPA and were always based on maximum employment of workers.

Unlike current Arts Council arrangements, FTP payments could only be made directly by the WPA. No grants were paid out to the companies or even to the FTP administration. Workers were added to a national payroll

and supplies had to be obtained via the Treasury dept, procurement division. However, sponsoring organisations could also contribute financially to production costs, and ticket income could also be used.

**“Orson Welles and Arthur Miller were drawn to the project by the huge impact it was having**

From 1935-1939 the FTP employed an average of 10,000 theatre workers each year. In order to qualify for FTP employment, workers had to prove previous employment in theatre and be currently on relief. Those few non-relief staff brought on board (often directors) were paid a minimal fee much below their usual fees. These big names included Orson Welles and Arthur Miller who were drawn to the project by the huge impact it was having.

The FTP produced 63,728 performances of over 1200 productions at over 200 theatres to over 30,000,000 audience members. The overall cost of the project was \$46,207,779 which averaged out at \$1.50 a head per attendee.

It's scope and reach were incredibly broad, with units established that included Shakespeare, new plays, religious work, children's work, vaudeville, companies performing in Yiddish and Spanish, puppet theatre and radio plays. It was responsible for the famous



nation-wide project of the anti-fascist play *It Can't Happen Here* which opened in 21 theatres across the US on the same night in 1936, and the creation of *The Living Newspaper* – theatrical interpretations of news and current events.

Whilst being fundamentally a relief plan for artists it was also a national audience development programme. And in the hands of Hallie Flanagan, who came not from commercial theatre but from the Vassar Experimental Theatre, it was also a re-imagining of theatre for times not dissimilar to our own.

“In an age of terrific implications as to wealth and poverty, as to the function of government, as to peace and war, as to the relation of the artist to all these forces, the theatre must grow up. The theatre must become conscious of the implications of the changing social order, or the changing social order will ignore, and rightly, the implications of the theatre”<sup>2</sup>

## “ The FTP championed African- American artists and work

The FTP championed African-American artists and work, specifically forging relationships with the African-American creative communities. Flanagan went beyond ordering FTP staff to follow WPA policy against racial prejudice and demanded that there be racial representation in all national planning and decision making. She waived the requirement of previous professional employment in one instance to establish a platform for 40 jobless young black playwrights and dismissed several members of units for prejudicial behaviour. By the project's conclusion 22 cities had served as headquarters for black theatre units which included such units as the African-American Dance Unit which featured Nigerian artists displaced by the Ethiopian Crisis. Whilst there were no doubt issues around some of this work in terms of white leadership and reinforced stereotypes, an ethos was there to raise up black voices as an integral part of the FTP.

<sup>2</sup> Arena, Hallie Flanagan, 1940



Despite being dubbed a “Free, adult, uncensored theatre”, the FTP was eventually beset by accusations of Communism and after lengthy hearings by the House of Un-American Activities, it was closed in 1939 but not without leaving an extraordinary legacy behind.



## **what might this model look like in the UK post covid19?**

- Existing financial models of grant delivery could be easily facilitated by Arts Councils and CS. Venues/companies could act as project heads supporting with their own funds/in kind support as appropriate. Unemployed workers would register through DWP and be assigned to local area units which might also slow the talent drain from nations and regions.
- Large scale work could be made with large companies potentially working together over extended periods – not dissimilar to rep systems. Everyone would receive an agreed industry wage with a small number of ineligible staff being paid a nominal but small fee to join projects.
- There could be additional funding supplied to projects to tour to partner venues with equivalent spaces, taking work beyond its hometown.
- A national network of the projects would allow for a database of kit/resources that could be shared and with production costs only allowed to equal an equivalent of a small percentage of wage costs, projects would be encouraged to reuse and share resources creating much better levels of sustainability within the industry.



- A national ethos and framework would guarantee best practice in terms of representation and access, raising standards and also providing training and experience for all those who participated.
- Free/affordable tickets and specific work for audience development teams might help bring theatre to many for whom theatre has been previously unaffordable. This highly subsidised model with large company numbers would also allow the development of new large-scale works that few venues/ companies have been able to afford.





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