

Publicly-funded arts as an R&D lab for the creative industries?

A survey of theatre
careers in the UK



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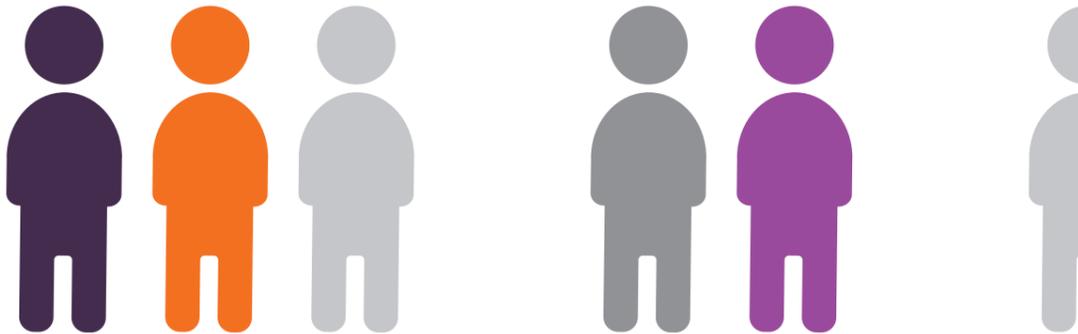
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01 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

It is often asserted that the UK's commercial creative industries are 'fuelled' by the subsidised arts. However, the exact parameters and nature of this relationship are under-explored. Little primary research has been undertaken, and there are no agreed typologies of the interactions between subsidised arts, commercial arts and the wider creative industries. How important are the subsidised arts for the creative industries? Are there positive 'spillovers' which strengthen the case for public subsidy? If so, through what mechanism do they occur?

This research attempts to shed light on these questions, taking the case of the theatre sector in the UK as a starting point to test some of the assumptions about the impact of public subsidy on the commercial creative industries. It explores the relationship between subsidised and commercial theatre through an examination of the careers of those who work in this sector.

Research Questions:

The central research question addressed in this report is whether the subsidised arts and cultural sector has 'spillover' benefits for the commercial creative industries, in terms of providing a development ground for talent which goes on to be of further economic value in the wider commercial creative industries. In other words, does the commercial sector enjoy additional economic benefits from the investment made in individuals within the subsidised arts?

The methodology employed to examine this proposition makes use of the findings of a survey of those currently working in, or who had previously either worked in or sought work in, theatre. 1,129 people completed the survey, with 63% currently working within paid theatre and 37% working outside paid theatre at the time of completing the survey.

Key Findings

Work flow: There is high labour mobility between subsidised and commercial theatre. The flow of work is often not one way, with individuals moving between subsidised and commercial sectors in both directions, potentially more than once, as well as working concurrently in both. In our talent survey, of those who had worked in theatre at some point (paid or on a voluntary basis), by far the majority of respondents had spent some time working in a publicly funded setting (81%), with only 12% having worked only in commercial theatre. Among those who had spent some time working in publicly funded theatre, over half had worked primarily in this setting, with the rest having worked in both settings.

89% of individuals who had previously worked in theatre had also worked in other areas of the economy, primarily in related fields of the creative industries and the arts. A large proportion of these people had worked in the commercial creative industries, with 29% working in TV, 26% working in film and 21% in advertising.

Perceptions of subsidised and commercial theatre: Working in subsidised theatre was perceived by 62% of our survey respondents to be highly important to a successful career in theatre. Respondents were more likely to say that publicly funded theatre gave greater opportunities for 'presenting challenging work', 'presenting new work' and 'providing sufficient time to experiment' than commercial theatre. The subsidised theatre was, however, also characterised as paying lower wages than the commercial sector.

In contrast, the perceived characteristics most associated with commercial theatre included the opportunity to present large-scale work, the availability of high levels of marketing expertise and higher wages than in subsidised theatre.

Wages and earnings within subsidised and commercial theatre: The survey confirms that theatre workers earn on average significantly lower than workers in the rest of the economy. A half of respondents indicated that their average earnings had been below £20,000 per annum over the previous three years. Furthermore, although almost three quarters of the sample (73%) had worked in the 'arts sector' for the majority of their careers to date, only 62% had earned the majority of their income through the arts.

Breakthrough moments: According to our sample the subsidised theatre was the primary area in which respondents had experienced their breakthrough moment in the sector. This is of course to be expected of those that had only spent their careers in subsidised theatre (a majority of the sample); however, it was also the case for those who had worked across both commercial and subsidised fields. This is suggestive that there are strong talent development-related grounds for public subsidy in theatre.

Implications of the research

The report provides some quantitative evidence to support a widely held belief that public subsidy in UK theatre provides an important space for innovative and challenging work to be created. Subsidised theatre also provides key breakthrough moments for talent that goes on to work across the whole sector. Taken together, this suggests that subsidised theatre fuels risk taking and talent development. The benefits of these in some cases stay within the subsidised sphere, and in others branch out to the commercial theatre sector and wider creative industries (and in other cases still, branch back in to subsidised theatre). Public investment in theatre therefore generates additional value in the wider creative economy, but in ways that can be complex to track.

02 INTRODUCTION

“(British) theatre is envied and respected by almost every country worldwide and we are only in this position because of the subsidy we receive... Being trained in the theatre is a necessity.” – Dame Judi Dench¹

The idea that subsidy in the arts contributes to the success of the commercial creative industries has been within public consciousness, and indeed policy rhetoric, for a long time. Conceptually, it has its roots in David Throsby’s (2001) concentric circles model of the creative industries, which posits that the ‘value’ of the creative industries diffuses from a central core of the ‘creative arts’ (literature, music, performing arts, and visual arts) through to a wider set of creative industries such as film, sound recording and fashion.² This model has been widely cited throughout the world and commentators have highlighted how public subsidy in the creative arts therefore also has ‘spillover’ benefits for the commercial creative industries.³ For example, the 2008 Department for Culture, Media and Sport strategy *Creative Britain: New Talents for the New Economy* stated that “public funding for the arts is a powerful stimulus for the creative industries: for example, in developing skills, providing networking spaces, and underwriting risk which the financial market would not accept”.⁴ More recently Sarah Sands, editor of the *Evening Standard* has referred to subsidy as the ‘talent laboratory’ or R&D of the creative industries.⁵



- 1 <http://www.thestage.co.uk/news/2007/02/oscar-contenders-protest-threatened-cuts-to-theatre-funding/>
- 2 Throsby, David (2001), *Economics and Culture*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- 3 For example in KEA (2006), *The Economy of Culture in Europe*, Brussels: KEA European Affairs. <http://www.keanet.eu/ecoculture/studynew.pdf>; and Andari et al. (2007), *Staying Ahead: the economic performance of the UK's creative industries*, London: The Work Foundation / Nesta. <http://www.theworkfoundation.com/Reports/176/Staying-Ahead-The-economic-performance-of-the-UK39s-creative-industries-overview>
- 4 DCMS (2008), *Creative Britain: New Talents for the New Economy*, London: DCMS. The ‘creative industries’ are defined by the DCMS as “those industries which have their origin in individual creativity, skill and talent and which have a potential for wealth and job creation through the generation and exploitation of economic property” (DCMS (1998) *Creative Industries Mapping Document*. London: DCMS. Revised 2001.).
- 5 Policy Exchange, Policy Fight Club: ‘It is right to cut Arts funding in times of Austerity’, 18th March 2013 <http://www.policyexchange.org.uk/modevents/item/policy-fight-club-it-is-right-to-cut-arts-funding-in-times-of-austerity>

One of the richest sources of anecdote in support of the proposition that arts subsidy feeds the commercial creative industries has been in theatre. It is not difficult to find examples of individual people or productions that have moved from the subsidised arts to the commercial sector. Some of the West End’s biggest hits, from *Les Miserables* and *Matilda - the Musical* to *War Horse* and *One Man Two Guvnors* began in subsidised theatre — the first two at the RSC (Royal Shakespeare Company), the second two at the National Theatre; and research on the economic impact of London’s West End theatre has suggested its success is in part due to its symbiotic relationship with non-commercial theatre.⁶ Research into the case of *Jerry Springer: The Opera*⁷ shows how public funding enabled risk taking in developing a product that was ultimately transformed into a commercial success.

High-profile figures within theatre have highlighted the links between subsidised and commercial theatre. Patrick Marber stated that without an opportunity to develop his own writing at the National Theatre Studio it would have been unlikely that he would now be writing films,⁸ while commercial theatre producer Sonia Friedman has claimed: “I don’t get subsidy. I don’t need it. But I do need the subsidised sector. That is where the talent finds its training. The best and most exciting writers, actors, designers and directors all cut their teeth in that environment and these are the same writers, actors, designers and directors who go on to routinely work in the West End and on Broadway.”⁹

Although this view of the commercial creative industries as fuelled by the subsidised arts is widely asserted, the parameters and nature of this relationship are under-explored; it is not a field rich in data. There are no agreed typologies of the interactions between subsidised arts, commercial arts and the wider commercial creative industries¹⁰ and establishing causality is difficult. This research sheds quantitative light on some aspects of these relationships, taking the case of theatre in the UK as a natural starting point to test some of the assumptions about the impact the subsidised sector has on the commercial creative industries. We explore the relationship between subsidised and commercial theatre through the lens of the careers of those who work in theatre.



- 6 <http://blogs.thestage.co.uk/shenton/2012/06/west-end-with-an-artistic-policy/> and Travers, T. (1998), *The Wyndham report: the economic impact of London's West End theatre*, London: The Society of London Theatre.
- 7 Dempster, A. (2006), ‘Managing Uncertainty in Creative Industries: Lessons from Jerry Springer the Opera’ *Creativity and Innovation Management*, Vol 15. Number 3.
- 8 <http://www.thestage.co.uk/news/2007/02/oscar-contenders-protest-threatened-cuts-to-theatre-funding/>
- 9 Kennedy, F & Campbell Pickford, H. (2013), *In Battalions: A snapshot of new play development in England at the start of 2013*, London: Fin Kennedy. <http://www.finkennedy.co.uk/In-Battalions>
- 10 Holden, J. (2007), *Publicly Funded Culture and the Creative Industries*, London: Arts Council England.

a) RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The core proposition addressed in this report is that the subsidised arts and cultural sector has ‘spillover’ benefits for the commercial creative industries, in terms of providing a development ground for talent which goes on to be of economic value in the wider commercial creative industries.¹¹ We examine this using the example of theatre, and undertake a survey of individuals involved in this sector to explore how public funding affects career development. In our survey design we recognise that the relationship between the subsidised and commercial theatre sectors is likely to be two-way, with individuals making (possibly multiple) moves between these during their careers, or working in both simultaneously. We therefore seek to examine the following research questions:

- Is it possible to determine a typical career pattern or flow of work across subsidised and commercial theatre? Can the nature of the relationship between the two sectors in terms of talent flows be more clearly demarcated?
- What difference, if any, do the funding arrangements (commercial or public subsidy) have on career development? For example, are individuals more likely to have had opportunities to develop their skills in subsidised or commercial theatre?
- Do individuals say they have ‘breakthrough’ moments in their careers and where do they say these take place?
- What do individuals perceive as the career-related benefits and disadvantages of working in subsidised theatre?

The report is broken down into three separate sections. Section 3 describes the survey used to gather data from talent in the theatre world, along with a discussion of the methodology used and the make-up of the respondents. Section 4 examines in detail the findings of the talent survey. Finally, Section 5 presents the report’s conclusions, and suggests a number of possible next steps for research in this area.



¹¹ Technically, the linkage is a ‘spillover’ because investors in talent development in the subsidised sector do not appropriate all the benefits of that investment enjoyed in the commercial sector.

03 A TALENT SURVEY OF THEATRE CAREERS

Talent surveys have been used to examine working patterns within the creative industries on previous occasions. Throsby and Zednik’s 2010 talent survey of Australian artists¹² suggests that in order to appreciate and understand the spillovers between the publicly funded arts and commercial creative industries, it is vital to understand the nature of professional artistic practice, the flow of talent between these two sectors, and to understand how artists develop their careers. Building on this insight, we use a talent survey to gather information about professional practice in subsidised and commercial theatre. The survey includes questions on patterns of work (both paid and voluntary) in theatre and in other commercial creative industries, roles held, perceptions of factors which had supported career development, pay, perceptions of the characteristics of subsidised and commercial theatre, training and qualifications, and whether or not people felt they could identify ‘breakthrough’ moments in their careers.

In any open online survey, there is a risk that we are more likely to get responses from those who have had successful careers in theatre. To at least partly address this ‘self-selection bias’ we took a number of steps, described in Appendix 1, to gather responses from those whose careers had not necessarily (or at least not yet) been successful.

a) Methodology

The methodological approach was based on a two-stage process. First, in-depth interviews were conducted with practitioners in a range of roles within theatre. These explored the survey methodology, and in particular whether survey respondents would identify with the terminology we proposed to use, and in particular in reference to whether the commercial/subsidised split would be recognised.

The second stage of the process was to conduct the online survey itself. In the event this elicited 1,129 responses, of which 63% currently worked in paid theatre and 37% did not.¹³

b) Sample profile

71% of respondents in our sample currently worked in theatre – 63% in paid roles, 8% as volunteers. Of the remainder, 21% had either worked or volunteered in theatre at some point, and 8% had not (Figure 1).

¹² Throsby, D. & Zednik, A. (2010), *Do you really expect to get paid? An economic study of professional artists in Australia*, Sydney: Australia Council for the Arts.

¹³ See Appendix 1 for a full methodology and description of the survey process.



In the remaining sections of this report, we focus our analysis on those respondents who had had at least some experience of working in theatre, either paid or as volunteers. We therefore exclude the 8% of respondents who aspired to work in theatre but had not yet had any experience of doing so. This gives us 1,042 useable responses.

In the UK there is unfortunately no comparable set of theatre workforce statistics with which to examine the representativeness of this sample. However, Creative & Cultural Skills does collect occupational data on the performing arts sector, which is shown in Table 1 below.¹⁴

Table 1:
Creative & Cultural Skills Performing Arts employment footprint 2012/13¹⁵

Segment	Emp 12/13
Actors/Entertainers	38,790
Arts Facilities	8,960
Arts Officers, Producers, Directors	67,680
Backstage	4,040
Dancers/Choreographer	14,320
Other Entertainment Activities	31,210
Performing Arts Education	14,280

This footprint is not directly comparable with our survey, but it does give a broad indication of the similarities and differences between respondents to the talent survey and the overall performing arts workforce.

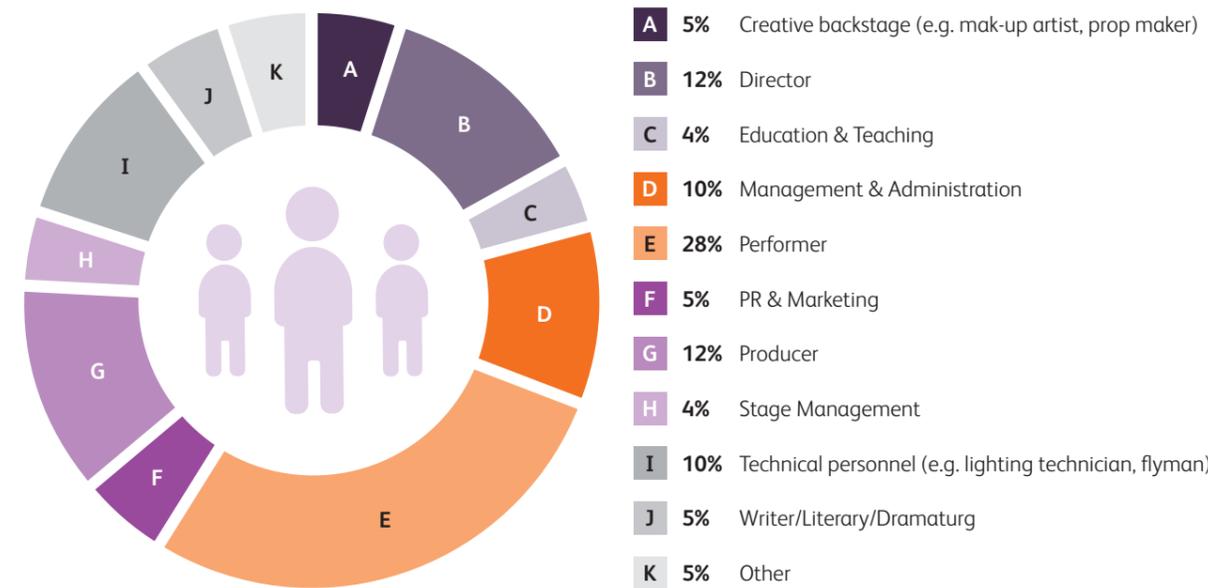
¹⁴ The performing arts sector is derived from an analysis of the Office for National Statistics' Annual Population Survey using Standard Industrial and Occupational Classifications. A full methodology is available from Creative & Cultural Skills.

¹⁵ Creative & Cultural Skills (2012), *Impact and Footprint 2012/13*, London: Creative and Cultural Skills.

In key respects the profile of the respondents aligns with that of the performing arts workforce overall: both the age profile and the main working location of respondents are roughly similar.¹⁶ The gender profile differs somewhat, with 60% female respondents and 40% male whereas in the performing arts sector overall the balance is 44% female and 56% male.

Figure 2 gives a breakdown of the sample by primary role. It is worth noting that some of the role groupings are particularly large, for example, the management and administration group, as this includes those in management positions as well as those undertaking box office and front of house roles. Similarly, the 'other' category includes casting directors, agents, designers, music directors and choreographers: the sample sizes for these groups were unfortunately too small to report on individually.

Figure 2:
Proportion of survey respondents across theatre roles



¹⁶ Appendix 2 contains a more detailed breakdown of the sample profile and a comparison with the wider performing arts workforce.

04 SURVEY FINDINGS

This section reports the key results of the survey, drawing on the qualitative interviews and on the findings of previous studies where they add additional depth to the survey results.

a. The flow of work between subsidised and commercial theatre

By the 'flow' of work we mean the movement (or lack of) into, out of, or between commercial or subsidised work, throughout an individual's career.¹⁷ In order to examine the flow of work within theatre, respondents were asked to choose from among a set of statements the one that 'best describes your interaction with commercial and subsidised theatre'. We assigned respondents to six different work flow types based on their responses as follows:

Stick – Subsidised: this group includes those respondents who selected 'I began my career in subsidised theatre and primarily stayed in this field.'

Stick – Commercial: this group includes those respondents who selected 'I began my career in commercial theatre and primarily stayed in this field.'

Switch – from subsidised to commercial: this includes those respondents who selected 'I began my career in subsidised theatre and moved into primarily commercial theatre.'

Switch – from commercial to subsidised: this includes those respondents who selected 'I began my career in commercial theatre and moved into primarily subsidised theatre.'

Nomad: this includes those respondents who selected 'I have moved back and forth between subsidised and commercial theatre a number of times', or 'I have tended to work simultaneously across both.'

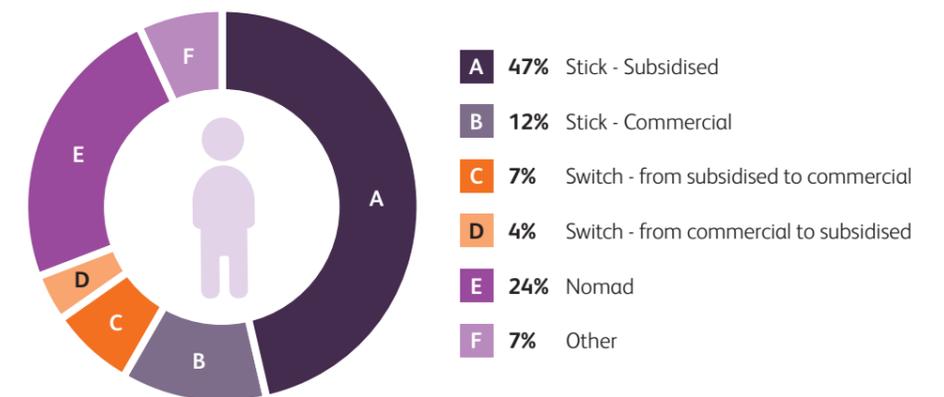
Other: this includes those respondents who selected 'I have not yet worked in either setting'. This group appear to feel unable to describe their work patterns in terms of the categories of subsidised and commercial settings. This does not, however, include the 8% of respondents who had never worked in either setting.



¹⁷ Note that the analysis of work flows looks only at those respondents who have spent at least some time working (paid or unpaid) in the theatre sector; it excludes the 149 (8%) of respondents who had not yet worked in either. N=1042.

In our talent survey, of those who had worked in theatre at some point (paid or on a voluntary basis, n=1042), by far the majority of respondents had spent some time working in a publicly funded setting (81%), with only 12% having worked only in commercial theatre. Among those who had spent some time working in publicly funded theatre, over half had worked primarily in this setting, with the rest having worked in both settings (Figure 3). 59% of respondents had stuck to one specific area of work – either subsidised or commercial.

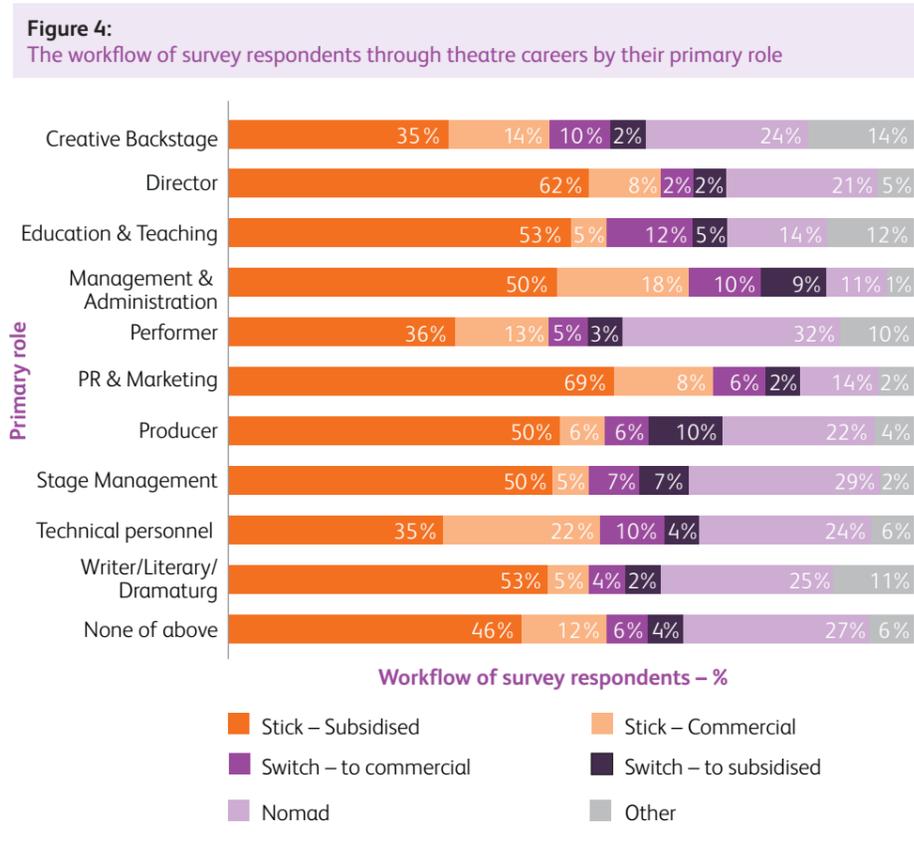
Figure 3:
Proportion of survey respondents by statement of work flow type in theatre



Flow of work by role:

Figure 4 on the following page shows the flow of work in theatre by role. Performers, Creative Backstage and Stage Managers were the most mobile in the sample, with only around half of these groups sticking to either subsidised or commercial work compared with 76% of individuals working in PR and Marketing and 68% in Management & Administration roles. Possible explanations for this difference might be if Performing, Creative Backstage and Stage Management skills are more transferable across subsidised and commercial theatre or if proportionately larger numbers work on a freelance basis.

In all roles other than Education & Teaching and Management & Administration, the percentage of those that had engaged in a nomadic workflow was higher than those that had switched just once in their careers between commercial and subsidised theatre. Of these, performers were easily the most likely (32%) to have moved nomadically back and forth between subsidised and commercial theatre.



The flow of theatre workers across the wider creative industries and whole economy

The survey provides evidence that the vast majority of theatre professionals had worked outside the theatre sector at some point in their careers. Specifically, 89% of individuals who had previously worked in theatre had also worked in other areas of the economy, primarily in the related fields of the creative industries and the arts. A large proportion of these people had worked in the commercial creative industries, with 29% working in TV, 26% working in film and 21% in advertising.

Findings from the *BAFTA Career Pathways Survey* also point to the close relationship between careers in the theatre and wider creative industries.¹⁸ Specifically, the survey looked at routes into film, television and video games, revealing some interesting linkages with the arts. 50% of the 191 BAFTA members surveyed stated that they had worked in another industry before entering into careers based on the moving image. The most commonly cited area that they had transferred from was theatre, and this was followed by teaching. Clearly, the theatre is an important supply line for careers related to the moving image, which our research further validates.

¹⁸ BAFTA (2012), *The BAFTA Career Pathways Survey: Career Pathways in Film, Television and Games*, London: BAFTA.

Table 2:
Paid experience outside of theatre over the past three years grouped by workflow¹⁹

Sectors outside theatre	Stick – subsidised		Stick – commercial		Switch – to commercial		Switch – to subsidised		Nomad		Other		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Music & other live events	140	29	43	35	32	46	15	33	102	41	14	20	346	33
Film	106	22	34	27	16	23	2	4	97	39	15	22	270	26
TV (inc. non-advert voiceovers)	117	24	37	30	21	30	9	20	117	47	6	9	307	29
Advertising/Commercials (inc. voiceovers)	75	15	23	19	17	25	9	20	89	36	9	13	222	21
Radio	78	16	12	10	9	13	7	15	52	21	2	3	160	15
Writing/journalism	112	23	15	12	11	16	10	22	66	27	11	16	225	22
Education	291	60	44	35	32	46	22	48	142	57	32	46	563	54
Other – within the arts	137	28	30	24	10	14	7	15	56	22	12	17	252	24
Other – outside the arts	133	27	34	27	20	29	9	20	61	24	20	29	277	27
Total	485	100	124	100	69	100	46	100	249	100	69	100	1042	100

Table 2 shows that the most common area where theatre professionals had found additional work was in education, where as many as 54% of respondents had done some work. This was lowest amongst those who had remained in commercial theatre though, where only 35% had worked in education. This should not be surprising given the naturally lower amount of education work that is undertaken by commercial theatre compared with subsidised.

In our study, the nomad group, which works across commercial and subsidised theatre, is also the most likely to have had paid experience in the commercial creative industries (excluding theatre). Specifically, Table 2 shows that 39% of nomads in our sample had worked in film, and 47% of them had worked in TV. Rates of involvement with music and live performance were also high, with 33% of respondents having worked in these areas.



¹⁹ It is important to note that for this question, respondents were able to select more than one additional sector that they might have worked in, outside of the theatre.

These findings are corroborated by other studies of creative industries workers. Oakley et al's 2008 research for Nesta, *The Art of Innovation*, found that approximately 40% of fine art graduate respondents to its talent survey held second jobs alongside their role in the creative and cultural industries, and that this work had primarily taken place in education, healthcare and in other service sectors.²⁰ Whilst this last study looked at the visual arts, which has considerably different working environments and career structures to theatre, it is nonetheless interesting to note the ways in which individuals go about building creative careers and having second or indeed multiple jobs.

Similarly other research suggests that there is a high degree of multiple-job holding in the creative arts, with many people simultaneously undertaking multiple roles. For example, Ball et al.'s study, *Creative Graduates Creative Futures*,²¹ is a major longitudinal study of the early career patterns of graduates in art, design, crafts and media subjects. The study highlights the resourceful behaviour of creative graduates in the face of the complexities and challenges of finding work and earning a living, with high levels of self-employment and engagement in work of a creative nature. The implication is that talent often need to supplement their income from the arts with income earned outside of the arts to meet their needs.

Ann Markusen's 2006 work on how visual artists build careers across commercial, non-profit and community work in America is also consistent with these findings.²² For Markusen, the different sectors in which artists work (commercial, non-profit and community) lead to different types of artistic development, and artists often cross-subsidise work earned in the non-profit sector with that earned in the more lucrative commercial sector, something which we discuss in more depth in Section c.



²⁰ Oakley, K. et al. (2008), *The Art of Innovation: How fine arts graduates contribute to innovation*, London: Nesta.

²¹ Ball, L. et al. (2010), *Creative Graduates Creative Futures*, Brighton: Institute of Employment Studies.

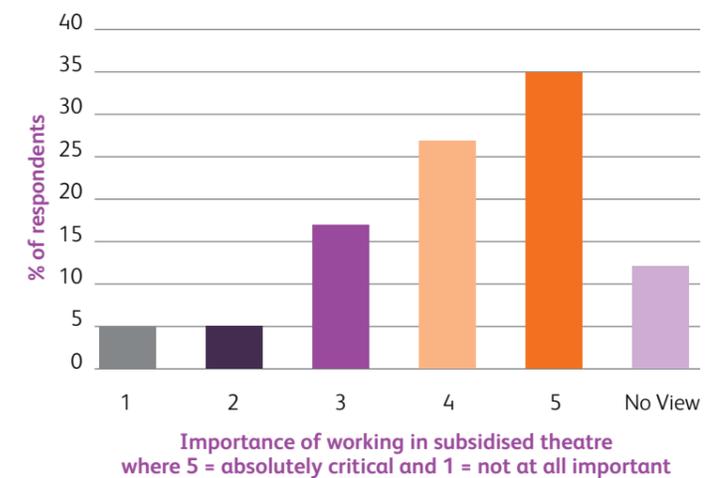
²² Markusen, A. (2006) *Crossover: How Artists build careers across Commercial, Nonprofit and Community Work*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota.

b) The perceptions of individuals working in subsidised and commercial theatre

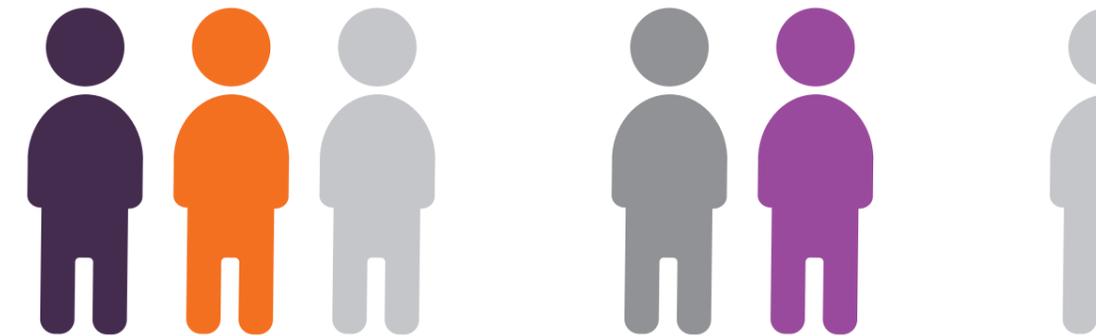
A key aim of the research was to investigate the significance of working in subsidised and commercial theatre to career development and progression. Respondents were asked how important they thought experience of working in subsidised theatre was to a successful career in theatre (rated on a scale of 1-5, where 1 is not at all important and 5 is absolutely critical). (Figure 5).

Figure 5:

Perceptions of the importance of working in subsidised theatre to a successful theatre career.

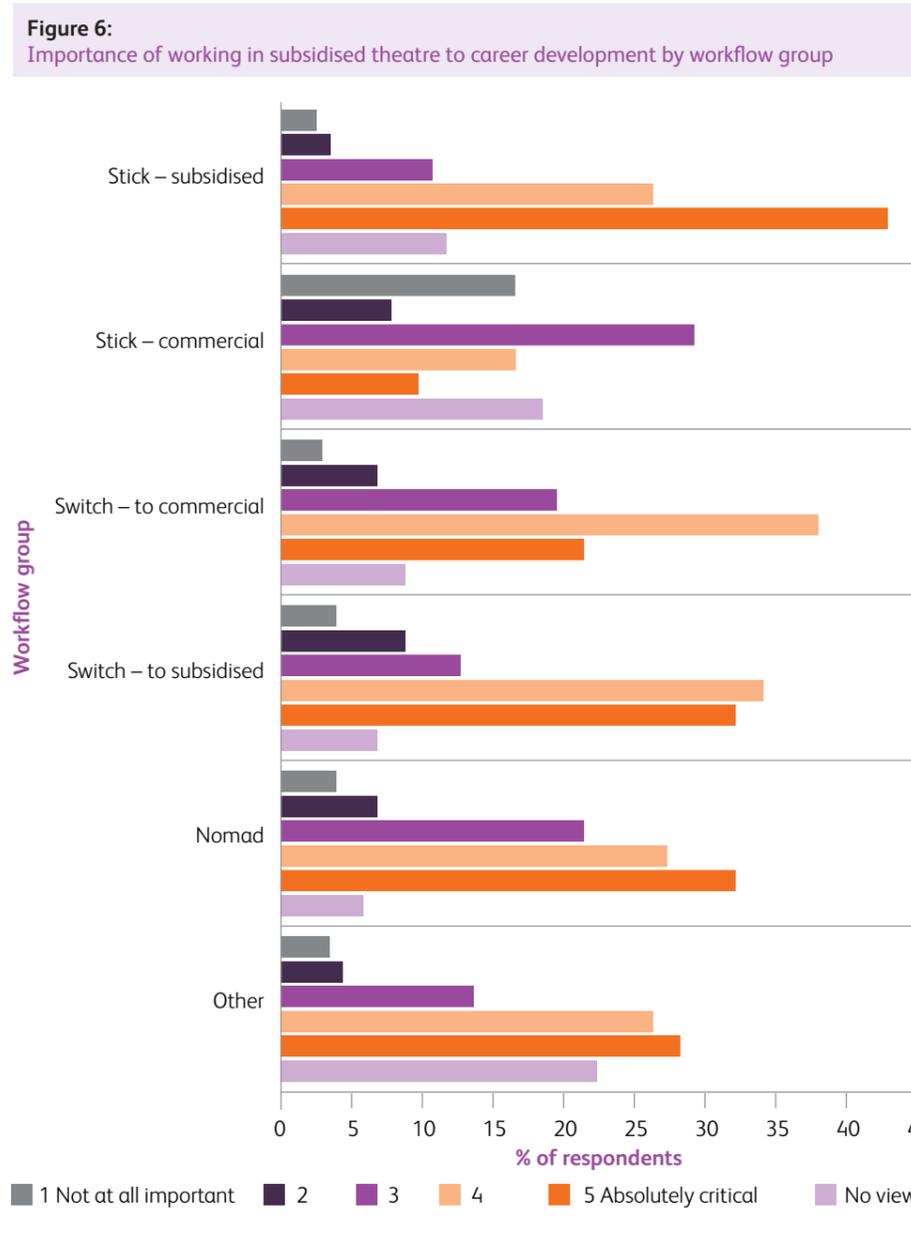


Importance of working in subsidised theatre where 5 = absolutely critical and 1 = not at all important



The results suggest that working in subsidised theatre was perceived by our survey respondents as highly important to a successful career in theatre: 62% of respondents consider this to be very important, rating it as either a 4 or a 5, with the overall average (mean) score for the whole cohort of respondents standing at 3.93. The percentage is higher for professionals who had spent most or all of their careers in subsidised theatre and lowest for those who to date had worked in a commercial setting throughout their career (Figure 6).

Importantly, the nomad group, which had had experience of working across both areas, concurred on the importance of subsidised theatre, with 61% of the group scoring the importance either 4 or 5.



Respondents were also asked to identify specific characteristics of working in subsidised and commercial theatre (Table 3). Arguably, we should place higher weight on the responses of nomads and switchers since these respondents are likely to have had the most informed view of subsidised and commercial work, having worked across both.

Table 3:
Characteristics associated with subsidised or commercial theatre by workflow* **

Characteristics	Workflow grouped						
	Stick – subsidised	Stick – commercial	Switch – to commercial	Switch – to subsidised	Nomad	Other	Total
	Mean	Mean	Mean	Mean	Mean	Mean	Mean
Providing a supportive working environment	2.58	3.05	2.94	2.52	2.70	3.17	2.72
Presenting challenging work	2.00	2.65	2.62	2.15	2.34	2.55	2.23
Building a reputation with the public	3.14	3.29	3.34	3.10	3.17	3.36	3.19
Building a reputation with industry decision-makers	3.16	3.33	3.64	2.58	3.18	3.48	3.21
Promoting new talent	2.37	2.83	2.85	2.48	2.53	2.64	2.52
Presenting new work	2.08	2.50	2.49	2.07	2.34	2.47	2.24
Providing sufficient rehearsal time to experiment	2.38	2.59	2.51	2.34	2.43	2.76	2.44
Presenting large-scale work	3.51	3.83	3.76	3.05	3.53	3.64	3.56
Paying a secure wage	3.33	3.28	3.40	3.02	3.31	3.51	3.32
Paying a low wage	2.25	2.63	2.41	2.52	2.54	2.50	2.40
Effective cost control	3.03	3.48	3.55	3.02	3.37	3.47	3.22
Marketing expertise	3.43	3.57	3.80	3.41	3.59	3.90	3.54
Working with inspiring colleagues	2.64	3.12	3.34	2.52	2.92	3.05	2.83
Enabling you to build a strong network	2.88	3.30	3.32	2.67	3.02	3.12	3.00
Providing the opportunity to work with high profile/talented peers (or colleagues)	3.16	3.65	3.55	3.00	3.31	3.53	3.30
Working collaboratively to develop and deliver something	2.31	2.78	2.71	2.38	2.55	2.67	2.48
Paying a high wage	4.03	3.46	3.67	3.71	3.78	3.88	3.85

* Respondents were asked to rate characteristics on a scale of 1 to 5 where 1 denotes the aspect/feature is almost exclusive to subsidised theatre, and 5 denotes the aspect/feature is almost exclusive to commercial theatre. 3 denotes no difference i.e. that this aspect/feature is found in both sectors.

** Those figures in bold and highlighted in purple are significantly different from 3 at the 95% confidence level



The anecdotal evidence put forward by many within the sector suggests that public funding enables particular types of work to be produced that are not possible within the commercial sector. This is largely centred on work which is brand new, seen as challenging or involves taking risks. Table 3 goes some way to quantifying the perceptions of those within the sector in relation to these and other areas.

The findings confirm that there are statistically significant differences in perception between working in subsidised and commercial theatre. Respondents were more likely to say that publicly funded theatre gave more opportunities for ‘presenting challenging work’ along with ‘presenting new work’ and ‘providing sufficient time to experiment’ than commercial theatre. The subsidised theatre was also however characterised as paying lower wages than the commercial sector.

In contrast, the perceived characteristics most associated with commercial theatre included the opportunity to present large-scale work, high levels of marketing expertise and higher wages than in subsidised theatre.

These results are consistent with the more general view that public subsidy enables artists to be bolder and less risk-averse in their work than in the commercial sector. Sir Brian McMaster’s review of excellence in the arts recommended that in the future, “innovation and risk-taking [should] be at the centre of the funding and assessment framework for every (subsidised) organisation, large or small.”²³

A challenge for funders, as noted by Bakhshi and Throsby (2010)²⁴, is that there is a lack of clarity as to the precise nature of innovation and the processes by which it comes about. Adopting conventions from other innovation domains, Castañer and Campos (2002) propose that artistic innovation is the programming of a work that is ‘new to the field’. They also import from innovation studies the distinction between innovation and adoption of an innovation (they describe this as ‘internal’ versus ‘external’ innovation), though recognising that even when arts organisations adopt an innovative work from elsewhere they are still taking the risk that their audience may not like it. In theatre, this gives rise to a process of experimentation, in which ‘successes’ in the subsidised sector are taken to scale, but ‘failures’ may never come into the wider public consciousness.²⁵

Clearly then, in the minds of theatre workers themselves, there are key differences in the characteristics of commercial and subsidised theatre. People tend to believe that it is in the subsidised theatre sector where more innovative, challenging work gets done.

23 McMaster, B. (2008) *McMaster Review: Supporting excellence in the arts - from measurement to judgement*, London: DCMS.

24 Bakhshi and Throsby (2010), *Culture of Innovation: An Economic Analysis of Innovation in Arts and Cultural Organisations*, London: Nesta.

25 See also Bakhshi, H., Desai, R. and Freeman, A. (2010), *Not Rocket Science: A Roadmap for Arts and Cultural R&D*, London: Mission, Models, Money.

c) The wages and earnings of individuals within subsidised and commercial theatre

Table 4 shows that around half of the respondents indicated that their average earnings over the past three years had been low (0-£20,000 p/a).²⁶ This compares with the average earnings of the UK employed workforce, which in 2012 was £26,500 according to the ONS Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings.²⁷ There is some suggestion from the survey that proportionately greater numbers of those who had stayed in commercial theatre throughout their careers or had switched to commercial theatre were high earners – 29% of respondents in both cases compared with 20% of respondents as a whole – though some of this difference may be explained by socio-demographic differences, such as age and gender, between the different groups in our sample.

Table 4:
Average yearly earnings for survey respondents by workflow through theatre

Average earnings p/a	All (%)	Stick – subs (%)	Stick – comm (%)	Switch – to comm (%)	Switch – to subs (%)	Nomad (%)
£0-10,000	23	18	25	19	11	20
£10,001-£20,000	27	26	21	29	30	33
£20,001-£35,000	31	36	25	23	39	29
£35,001-£60,000	14	15	21	19	13	12
£60,000+	6	6	8	10	7	6

Looking at the sectors where respondents said they had spent the majority of their paid working time, around three-quarters had done so in the arts. However, fewer respondents said this sector contributed the majority of their income, consistent with the view that wages in the arts are on average lower than in other sectors.

Employment in the education sector clearly provides one route for theatre workers to supplement their income. While only 12% of respondents spent the majority of their working time in this area, it contributed to the majority of income for 17% of respondents (Table 5).

In our qualitative interviews, several interlocutors mentioned consciously pursuing a strategy of taking projects in other settings or sectors that would enable them to take more artistically interesting work in subsidised theatre. The implication is that the flow of talent and money between subsidised theatre and the wider economy (including commercial theatre) needs to be considered as bi-directional, consistent with the findings from previous research, including the 2006 study by Ann Markusen cited earlier.²⁸

26 Differences in the distribution of earnings by workflow patterns were only weakly significant (i.e. at the 10% level).

27 ONS (2012), *2012 Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings*, London: ONS This survey does not cover self-employed workers.

28 Markusen, A. (2006) *Crossover: How Artists build careers across Commercial, Nonprofit and Community Work*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota.

Table 5:
Sectors where respondents had spent working time in relation to income earned in these areas

Sectors where have had paid work	Majority of working time (%)	Majority of income (%)	Difference (%)
Arts sector ²⁹	73	62	-11
Other creative industries ³⁰	4	8	4
Education sector	12	17	5
Other	11	13	2

While there appears to be little in the way of published research on wages in theatre specifically, researchers have previously analysed the wages of artists more generally. It is important to treat such work as only partially contextual though, as our survey does not just include the performance aspects of theatre, but the administrative, managerial and backstage staff too.

Of particular relevance here, these previous studies find that artists' career paths tend to be erratic and that lifetime incomes do not necessarily rise with age. They also suggest that the innate ability of talent has a particularly strong impact in determining wages in sectors as wide ranging as professional sports and theatre. Sherwin Rosen's model³¹ of the 'superstar phenomenon' predicts that there is a skewed distribution of earnings in these markets, with a long tail of low earners alongside a very limited number of people earning astronomically high wages. It is also interesting to note in this context Elizabeth Currid's research which suggests that it is crucial moments rather than long hours that catapult a talented person to star status.³²



²⁹ 'Arts sector' includes all those who indicated they had had paid jobs, commissions or assignments in: 'theatre/dance/ opera', 'music & other live events', 'writing/journalism', and 'other – within the arts'.

³⁰ Other creative industries' include all those who indicated they had had paid jobs, commissions or assignments in: 'film', 'TV (inc. non-advert voiceovers)', 'advertising/commercials (inc. voiceovers)', and 'radio'.

³¹ Arts sector' includes all those who indicated they had had paid jobs, commissions or assignments in: 'theatre/dance/ opera', 'music & other live events', 'writing/journalism', and 'other – within the arts'.

³² Currid, E. (2010) *Starstruck: the business of celebrity*. London: Faber and Faber.

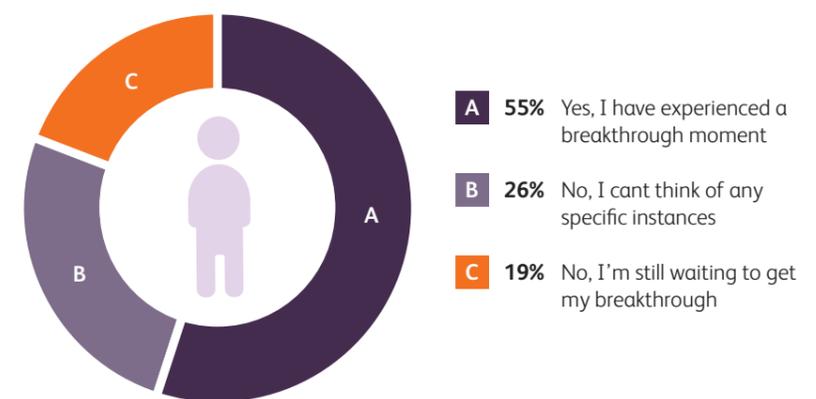
d) Career breakthrough moments

Our talent survey also focused on whether respondents had experienced a 'breakthrough' moment in their careers – the idea that if one critical breakthrough or crucial moment³³ can be had (either in the subsidised theatre or elsewhere) then a successful career can be forged in theatre. Intuitively, such a breakthrough moment might reflect a discrete improvement in understanding in the minds of individuals or simply good fortune, from which point on circumstances for that individual change for the better.

Previous research has looked at this possibility within the context of the wider arts. Throsby and Hollister's (2003) study³⁴ examines whether artists had had a 'big break' in their careers and, if so, when this had occurred. It concluded that the break for many artists was often seen to be the first solo show or publication, rather than the completion of their studies, for example. This is consistent with our findings for theatre too.

Throsby and Hollister (2003) sought to examine artists' working lives alongside broad trends in the political, social, and cultural environments. Their study is also of interest for the way it selected artists: 'practising professional artists' were self-defined and had to have been artistically active in the previous three-to-five year period. They were not required to have earned any income from this practice (as was also the case in our survey).

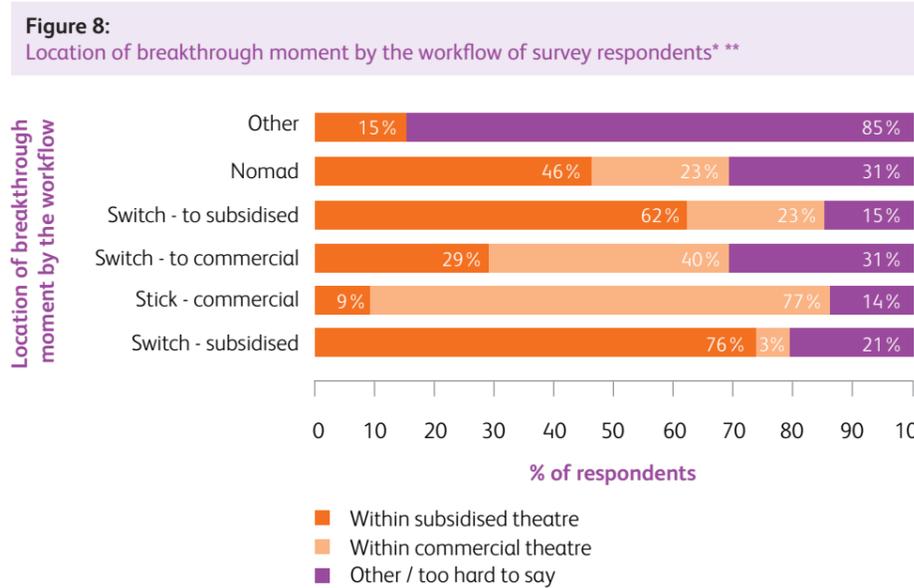
Figure 7:
Identification of breakthrough moments amongst survey respondents



³³ Currid, E. (2010) *Starstruck: the business of celebrity*. London: Faber and Faber.

³⁴ Throsby, D. & Hollister, V (2003) *Don't give up your day job: An economic Study of Professional Artists in Australia*. Sydney: Australia Council for the Arts.

Of the 1042 respondents who had worked in theatre at some point in their careers (paid or as a volunteer), 98% answered a question about whether they could identify a particular breakthrough moment. 55% of these said that they could indeed identify such a breakthrough (Figure 7). 26% said that they could not think of any specific instances and 19% stated that they were still waiting to have their breakthrough moment.



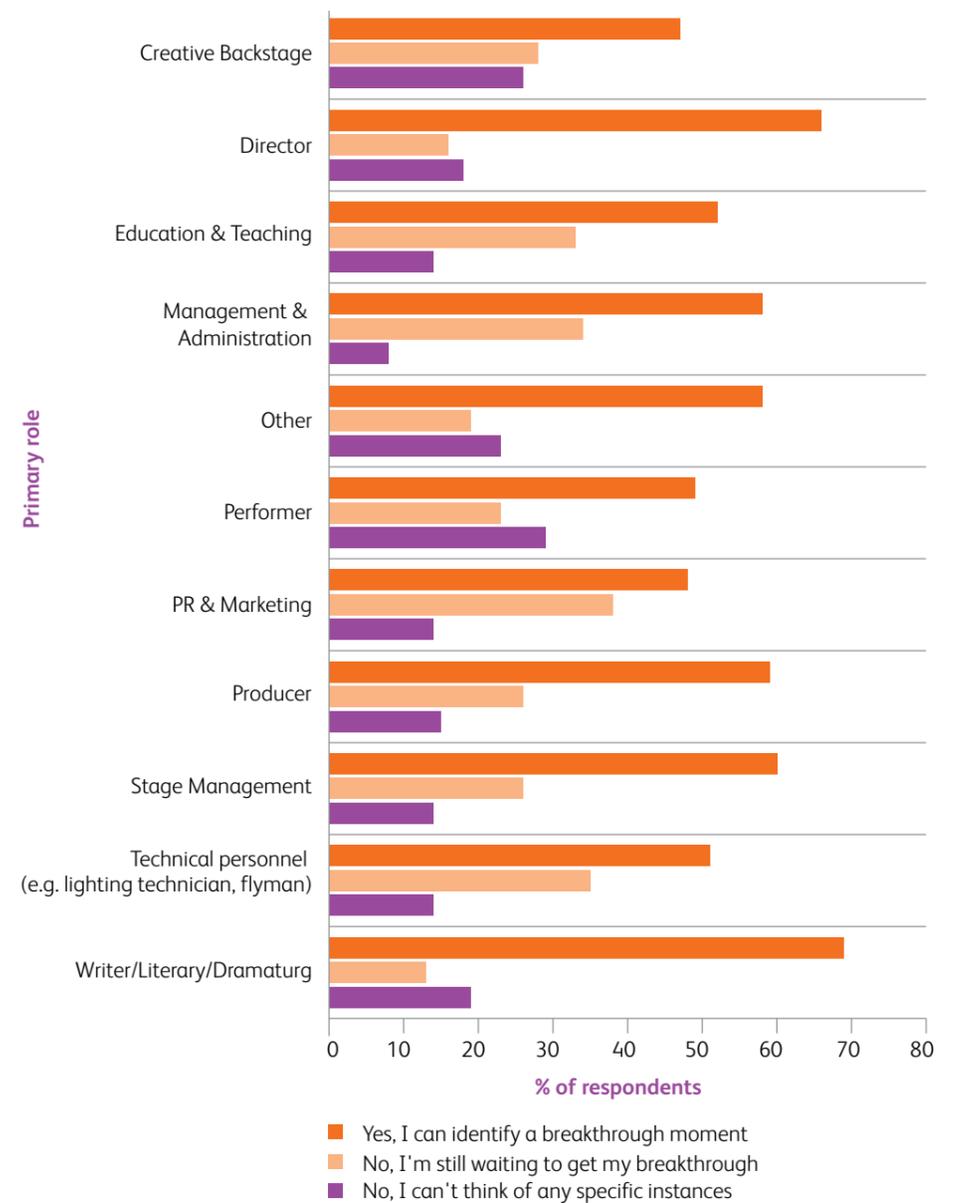
*The pattern of difference across the groups is statistically significant.
** Within the two 'stick' groupings, some respondents were able to locate their breakthrough moment in the sector in which they had not stuck. This is because of the way in which the question which categorises them into the stick/switch/nomad groups is phrased. It asks them whether they 'primarily stayed in this field'.

Looking at where breakthroughs happen, there seem to be some interesting differences by work flow. Figure 8 shows that the majority of respondents described their breakthrough moment as having happened in the subsidised sector. But this is unsurprising given that the clear majority of the sample had spent their careers primarily in the subsidised sector. When we attempt to partly control for this by looking at the responses from only the switch and nomad groups, we again find that breakthroughs were more likely to have occurred in subsidised theatre: 44% of these groups had experienced their career breakthrough in subsidised theatre and 27% had experienced it in commercial theatre (29% were either unable to specify or said that their breakthrough moment had taken place in another setting such as film, TV, other arts, or during education).³⁵

We also examined whether the likelihood of having a breakthrough varied by occupation (Figure 9).

³⁵ This is only a partial control because we cannot rule out the possibility that switchers and nomads had proportionately spent more of their career in subsidised theatre.

Figure 9:
The identification of breakthrough moments amongst survey respondents by primary role*



*There are significant differences between role groupings, chi-square 55.941 with p<0.001, 95% level

Respondents most likely to have reported having had a breakthrough moment were those whose primary role was as a writer/literary/dramaturg (69%), closely followed by those whose primary role was as a director (66%). Those whose primary role was in stage management were the third most likely group to have had a breakthrough (60%) with producers at 59%.

The qualitative interviews provided a number of examples of breakthrough moments in the careers of talent – for example, securing a job at one of the leading publicly-funded institutions (e.g. the RSC or the Royal Court), or having had a first authored play staged in a recognised (subsidised) theatre. But the interviewees also pointed to the importance of other factors in achieving a career breakthrough, in particular personal contacts and networks, a good agent, the meeting of a key collaborator from another sector, or a financier, and so on. One survey respondent elaborated that:

“Building contacts to a point I took my first role as a general manager of a small RFO (Regularly Funded Organisation) (ACE). These two years set me off in skill set, confidence and contacts.”

Another respondent claimed that:

“Making close connections with the right people enhanced my name in this very competitive industry.”

A number of respondents also mentioned gaining a place on a specific educational course, or being successful in their training/education as constituting their breakthrough moment. For example, one person explained that they had:

“Received a bursary to be based in a theatre as a Resident Trainee Director for 12 months. It gave me the contacts, experience and confidence it would have otherwise taken me years to build up. I don’t know if I would have been able to build up a directing career without it.”

Several considered their decision to undertake a university/training course, or to re-invest money made in theatre back into their professional development as being of key importance. Some had also gained a promotion, or extra responsibilities which had formed their breakthrough. Others mentioned factors such as having been involved with Youth Theatre:

“At the National Youth Theatre, working with Kneehigh and a director that made us feel like the future of British theatre. It was inspiring.”

When looking at the fields in which interviewees considered their breakthrough moments to have occurred, there was a clear trend for those who had had their breakthrough moment in subsidised theatre to consider attaining funding, working with a prestigious name or an educational success to have been part of their breakthrough moment. Factors such as landing a first role, achieving recognition for a project/work and gaining promotion showed less of a clear pattern and were mentioned equally by those who had had their breakthrough in commercial, subsidised and in other forms.

05 CONCLUSIONS

The survey findings suggest that career development in the subsidised theatre needs to be seen in the context of labour markets in the wider creative economy. 89% of respondents indicated that they had worked in areas outside the theatre sector at some point during their careers, with large proportions having worked in either the wider creative industries or the arts beyond theatre.

The findings also highlight that while there is high labour mobility across subsidised and commercial theatre, the relationship is often not uni-directional. The ‘typical’ pattern may not necessarily be for an individual to gain experience in the subsidised sector before moving onto commercial theatre as is often assumed in simplistic accounts of ‘spillovers’.

The research provides some quantification, for our sample at least, of a number of commonly held beliefs about theatre that have until now been supported only by anecdote. In particular, our survey respondents have highlighted that subsidised theatre is important for artistic risk-taking, forming a hotbed of ideas for commercial theatre and other creative industries to exploit. This emphasis on the ‘research and development’ aspect of subsidised theatre is particularly significant given the importance of innovation within the wider creative sector.

According to our sample, the subsidised theatre is also seen as the primary area in which respondents may have experienced their breakthrough moment in the sector. This is of course to be expected of those that had only spent their careers in subsidised theatre (a majority of the sample); however, it was also the case for those who had worked across both commercial and subsidised fields. This suggests that there are strong talent development-related grounds for public subsidy in theatre.

The study has also provided quantitative evidence of the low wages that many professionals in theatre earn, echoing similar findings for performing arts more generally.³⁶

A thread running through the report is that the relationship between the publicly subsidised and commercial theatre is more complex than a simplistic treatment of spillovers would imply. This is an area, however, where further research is needed.³⁷



³⁶ See for example Higgs, Cunningham and Bakhshi (2008), *Beyond the Creative Industries: Mapping the Creative Economy in the UK*. London: Nesta.

³⁷ See for example: CEBR (2013) *The Contribution of the Arts and Culture to the National Economy*. London: Arts Council England.

NEXT STEPS

While this research has provided some statistical evidence on the relationships between subsidised and commercial theatre at the level of individuals moving through their careers, future work should explore a number of areas in more detail, related to career development and talent flows.

1. Breakthrough moments

Further research is needed to better understand the nature of breakthrough moments in theatre careers, in order to understand how public subsidy enables these. It would, for example, be of interest to find out how these breakthrough moments relate to measurable career outcomes and over what horizon (such as wages earned).

2. The transferability of skills across the theatre sector and beyond

A more detailed understanding of the nature and transferability of skills across the subsidised and commercial theatre, and into the creative media sector could inform workforce skills development, either in terms of qualifications and CPD or more informal types of learning and development.

3. Understanding risk-taking

Perhaps the most striking finding of the survey is what it says about artistic risk-taking, and its suggestion that the subsidised theatre is a breeding ground for experimentation, and research and development. Further research is needed to better understand the nature of this risk-taking, and how reputations and careers build up as a consequence in subsidised and commercial theatre.

Ideally this would involve require looking back over longitudinal data on careers, though such data appear not to exist. Standard longitudinal data sets that we considered as part of this research such as the British Household Panel Survey³⁸ and the Labour Force Survey³⁹ turned out to be inadequate due to a lack of granularity and small sample size.

It would also be interesting to consider variations in the funding balance between subsidised and commercial theatre across different countries and explore what this means for talent development.

³⁸ <https://www.iser.essex.ac.uk/bhps/>

³⁹ <http://www.esds.ac.uk/government/lfs/>

06 APPENDIX 1 – METHODOLOGY

The research discussed in this report followed an initial examination of existing available datasets⁴⁰, and took part in two phases, namely a series of in-depth qualitative interviews and then a talent survey with the theatre sector.

In-depth interviews

In-depth interviews were conducted with leading practitioners in a number of roles within the theatre sector. The interviews were used to ascertain whether the proposed survey approach was appropriate and to inform the drafting of the questions. The interviews were also used to explore other issues such as interviewees' ability to recall their career experience, as well as whether this experience was in a subsidised or commercial setting.

Talent Survey

The survey was administered through open online promotion to the theatre workforce at large. The survey remained open between 1st April and 1st June 2012 and elicited 1,129 full (and therefore useable) responses. 57% of those who started the survey went on to complete it. The questions were drafted to derive quantitative results, although some qualitative material was also gathered in the form of responses to open text boxes.

A limitation of the study is that as an open online questionnaire the responses cannot be taken to be representative of the UK's population of theatre talent. We were particularly concerned with the potential for self-selection biases, whereby only those who had to date succeeded in their careers would feel inclined to respond. A number of steps were taken to mitigate this:

- The survey targeted respondents who worked, had previously worked, or would like to have worked in theatre.
- The survey targeted specific university alumni groups in order to raise awareness of the survey amongst different schools and graduates.
- The survey targeted voluntary arts and theatre groups to try to capture aspiring theatre workers.
- The survey was sent to cross-creative and cultural industries networks in the hope of reaching a wider cohort of practitioners interested in theatre careers.
- The survey was promoted on websites not specifically aimed at theatre workers.

These efforts proved in the event to have had some impact, in that 37% of survey respondents were not currently working within paid theatre at the time of completion.

For the purpose of this research, we defined subsidised theatre as that which was in receipt of public funding, and commercial theatre as that which was not.

⁴⁰ Phase 1 of the research looked at the British Household Panel Survey and the Labour Force Survey to explore whether typical career patterns or work flows could be determined from existing datasets.

07 APPENDIX 2 – SAMPLE PROFILE

The sample was made up entirely of self-selected respondents who chose to participate in an online survey.

Table 6:
Age of respondents

Age of respondents	Count	Percentage	Comparison to the performing arts workforce profile
19 and under	29	3%	2%
20-29	327	30%	23%
30-39	299	27%	27%
40-49	225	21%	24%
50-59	142	13%	13%
60-69	62	6%	11%*
70 and over	5	0%	n/a
Total	1,089	100%	n/a

Source: Theatre Talent Survey 2012 and Creative & Cultural Skills Footprint 12/13 (TBR Ref: W03/S1.2)
*Footprint data covers age range at 60+ and is not broken down in to 60-69/70 and over.

Table 7:
Region of respondents

Region	Main region		Comparison of main region to the performing arts workforce profile
	Count	Percentage	
London	466	43%	33.0%
North West England	84	8%	8.0%
South East England	78	7%	16.9%
Scotland	60	6%	7.6%
East of England	51	5%	7.4%
North East England	55	5%	2.0%
South West England	55	5%	7.1%
West Midlands	59	5%	3.5%
Yorkshire and The Humber	50	5%	4.6%
East Midlands	47	4%	4.1%
Wales	23	2%	4.0%
Northern Ireland	7	1%	1.7%
Outside the UK	54	5%	
Sub-total known region(s) of work	1089	100%	100%
No Response	40		
Total	1,129		

Source: Theatre Talent Survey 2012 and Creative & Cultural Skills Footprint 12/13 (TBR Ref: W02/S47)

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