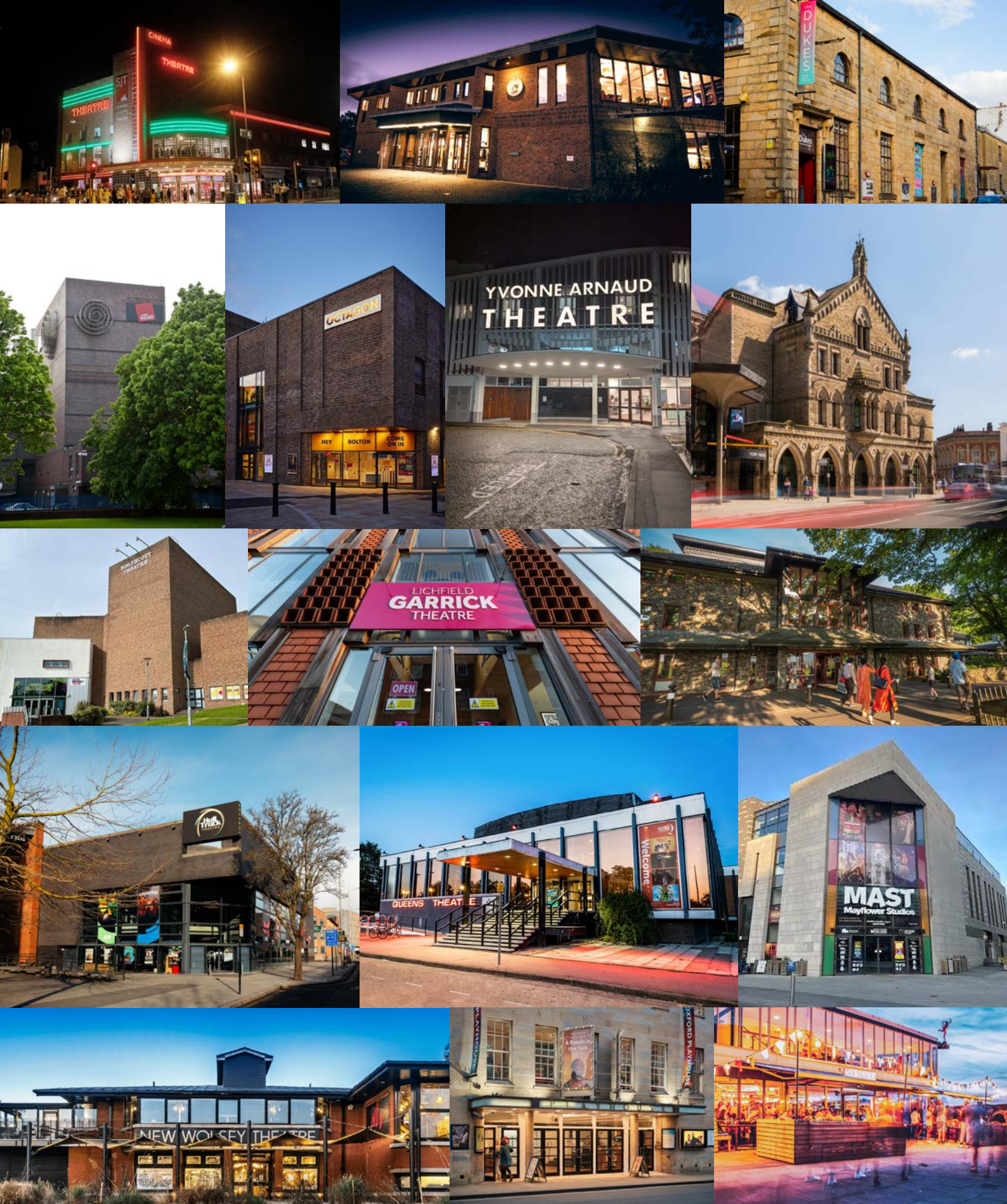




Midscale Theatre Venues

Impact Study 2024

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1. INTRODUCTION

This report summarises the value of mid-scale theatres in England – a cohort who play a distinctive role in the country’s cultural landscape. It highlights the many ways in which mid-scale theatres support and enhance their local communities and economies. It also illustrates their ambition for this work and the entrepreneurial ways they generate inward investment to deliver culture, social change and capital projects.

Despite this demonstrable impact and value for money, the mid-scale theatre sector is fragile. The last five years have been volatile for theatres, and for charities and small businesses at large. Brexit, the Covid-19 Pandemic, and high inflation and interest rates have each caused disruption and economic pressure. Theatres have had to respond to a series of external events that has seen business costs escalate and consumer spending fall. Local government funding for culture has decreased by 48% per person in real terms between 2009 – 2023, whilst Arts Council England core funding per person fell by 18% in real terms. The UK now has one of the lowest levels of public investment in culture in the European area.

There are however characteristics of mid-scale theatres that significantly exacerbate these economic challenges:

- Mid-scale theatres are defined by their auditorium size (300 – 700 seats), so self-evidently have less earning capacity than large-scale theatres (size upwards). Earning capacity includes ticket income from seat sales, donations and ancillary trading such as food and beverages.
- The Arts Council’s 2016 Theatre Analysis describes the polarisation of the theatre sector into “winners and losers”, with medium and smaller theatres having disproportionately less earned income in a sector that is ‘marketised’ (i.e. driven by supply, demand and price).
- Many mid-scale theatres operate in areas of relative deprivation, with a lower wage economy and less disposable income. This creates a ‘double whammy’ effect of having fewer seats than larger theatres and greater price sensitivity. There is also less access to major philanthropists and large corporations, reducing the potential for fundraised income.
- In recent years, Universities have been major supporters of several mid-scale theatres but the recently well-reported crisis in Higher Education finance has led to pressure on this income stream

In order to sustain their missions and impacts, regional mid-scale theatres are drawing on their cash reserves at an unsustainable rate, resulting in a decline in the sector’s financial capacity. If their financial capacity isn’t secured, mid-scale theatres may not be able to continue to deliver the multitude of cultural, economic and social impacts outlined in this report.

This report presents evidence from sixteen theatres across England to demonstrate these impacts. We recognise that there is a wider cohort of mid-scale theatres who contribute to the cultural ecology and assume that the report’s findings broadly represent their impacts. This wider cohort includes other producing theatres that make new productions, presenting theatres that present touring and other productions, and regional arts centres, who all contribute to ensuring local audiences have the highest quality arts experiences.

This cohort of theatres are typically the only Arts Council funded performing arts venue in a town or smaller city, and often the only theatre that regularly produces new work in a district or county. In that regard, they are critical in reflecting local culture and employing creative talent in the regions.

These theatres act as hubs for theatre production and talent development, whilst presenting a wide range of artforms (music, dance, film and more) to audiences, and extensively engaging with their communities, generating creative and social outcomes. They are place-makers, with their institutions contributing to civic pride and renewal, as well as stimulating economic growth. As creative engines, in terms of creative output and talent development, their work contributes to the UK theatre's global success.

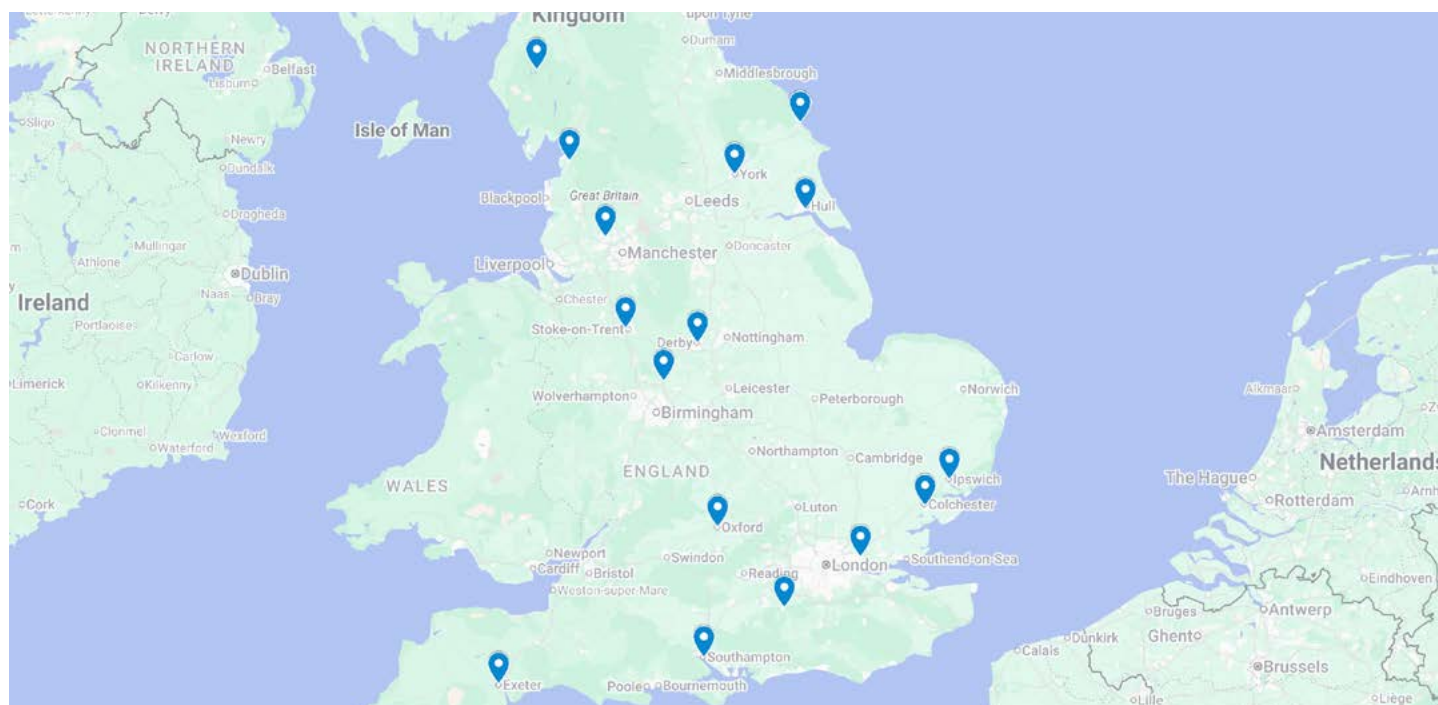
Theatre is an important part of the UK's creativity industries, one of the fastest growing parts of the country's economy and a priority within the Government's Industrial Strategy. A 2023 study on behalf of SOLT and UK Theatre suggests that the total theatre sector generates £2.39bn in GVA, supports over 200,000 workers and has a total turnover of £4.44bn. For every £1 spent on a theatre ticket an additional £1.40 is spent in the local economy, adding up to £1.94bn per year of extra value added by theatre audiences.

Our thanks to Researcher Gregory Nash and Associate Consultants Caroline Meaby & Mark Mallabone.

THE RESEARCH

The research was conducted across June and July 2024 with the following sixteen mid-scale theatre organisations, representing national coverage:

Octagon Theatre Bolton	New Vic Theatre Newcastle-under-Lyme
Derby Theatre	New Wolsey Ipswich
Dukes Theatre Lancaster	Oxford Playhouse
Exeter Northcott Theatre	Queens Theatre Hornchurch
Hull Truck	Stephen Joseph Theatre Scarborough
Lichfield Garrick	Theatre by the Lake Keswick
Mayflower Studios Southampton	York Theatre Royal
Mercury Theatre Colchester	Yvonne Arnaud Theatre Guildford



Methodology

Data was collected using a mixed methodology approach, including three quantitative surveys, qualitative interviews, case study collection and desk research.

Some of the participating theatres don't currently capture all of the data used within this report. Given that, there are instances where it has not been possible to base cited data on the total sample of sixteen theatres. For clarity, this is highlighted within the report, where relevant, and averages are given as indications.

Project Team

The research was led by Gregory Nash, alongside associate consultants, Caroline Meaby and Mark Mallabone.

Definitions

When timeframes are cited within the report, they indicate the relevant financial year, unless otherwise stated.

To establish a consistent understanding of 'local', the participating theatres used their average audience drive-time, which was 38 minutes.

2. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Mid-scale theatres have established a reputation for providing invaluable culture and entertainment. This research has demonstrated that they perform a much more dynamic and multi-faceted function within their geographies.

The study demonstrates the significant amounts of direct and indirect revenue they generate for their local economies. It is important to consider that the indirect revenue generated may not be spent within local economies if these theatres weren't attracting people into towns and city centres through their productions and other cultural offerings. In addition, this research indicates that around one in every five pounds of that indirect revenue generation comes from outside their immediate localities, further evidencing how local economies are likely to benefit by having mid-scale cultural venues within them.

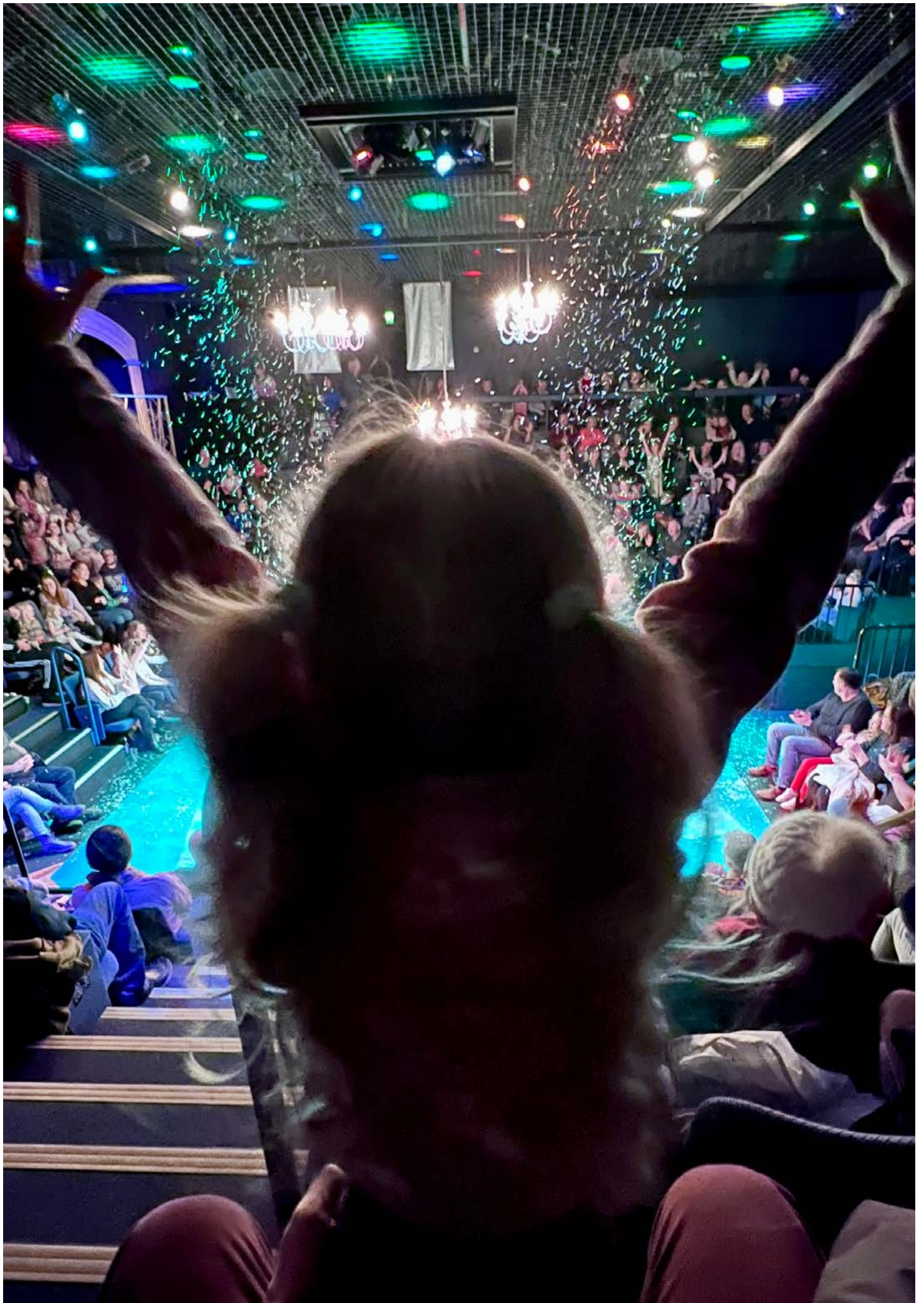
The mid-scale theatres in the study cohort are dynamic organisations that leverage notable inward investment into their localities for capital development and social regeneration projects, benefiting placemaking, community well-being and the local construction sector. Their staff proactively take on strategic leadership roles in relation to local business development, environmental sustainability and social change. Indeed, some of the participating theatres are actively involved in the development and evaluation of social prescription models, that could impact on the shape of future health provision.

There is an array of evidence that demonstrates their creative participation programmes positively impact on the health and wellbeing of local residents, most notably by increasing social confidence and social skills, reducing isolation and aiding language development. The work they do in this area is targeted at, and benefits, some of the most marginalised and disadvantaged people within their local communities, and is often done in conjunction with statutory and third sector partner organisations, by whom they are highly valued.

As well as being economic and social contributors, the theatres enhance the local and national creative economy, through talent pipeline and development opportunities aimed at creative freelancers and local SMEs. In that regard, this study found that they fulfil a number of the functions of a key 'creative hub' in their localities, and notes that policy agencies around the world are currently promoting creative hubs as the way to support the creative economy (Pratt, 2021)².

The following four sections outline the evidence and give further detail about the positive impacts these organisations have, both locally and nationally.

Additional case studies that strengthen this evidence and demonstrate the breadth of these impacts, are included within the report's appendix.





ECONOMIC AND FINANCIAL IMPACT

3. ECONOMIC AND FINANCIAL IMPACT

The research further evidences that midscale theatres are a significant source of revenue generation for their local economies, through direct and indirect revenue generation, and cross-sector spending. They make a notable contribution to their regional labour market, and also generate significant capital spending investment for their localities.

◆ Direct revenue generation:

- In 2023/24, the combined turnover of fifteen of the theatres was £58,615,846 for all productions, an average of £3,907,723
- Thirteen theatres reported a further combined gross income of £494,390 for fees for participatory events (classes, workshops, talks etc.), an average of £38,030

◆ Indirect revenue generation

- UK Theatre report that for every £1 spent in a theatre, an additional £1.40 is spent elsewhere within a local economy, due to spend on hospitality and transportation as part of an evening out
- Using this figure as a guide, we estimate that those fifteen theatres helped to generate around £82,062,184 in additional indirect revenue generation for their local economies
- Given 22% of audiences came from outside the theatres' drive-times, we estimate that around £1 in every £5 of that revenue was generated from outside their immediate locality

◆ Contribution to the labour market

- Total workforce spend in the last financial year was £20,968,845, an average spend of £1,747,403 per theatre (12 theatres)
- This spend increased by 9% compared to the previous year
- The average number of people employed per locality was 238
- Just under 2/3 (62%) of core staff live within the town/city the theatre is located within, and 9 out of 10 (92%) live within its drive-time
- 85% of casual staff live within the theatres' drive-time

◆ Capital spending generation

- Between 2020 and 2024, ten theatres spent a combined £9,305,552 on capital improvements, helping to improve the town/city centres and localities they reside within

◆ Contribution to the local economy

- Mid-scale theatres spend significant amounts of money across different sectors within their local economies (see illustration 1.1)
- That spend is increasing, although these cost increases are putting extra financial pressure on them



Illustration 1.1

	Production	Capital/ Construction	Goods/ Supplies	Services
£ Spent	7,260,083 (2023-2024)	9,305,552 (2020-2024)	4,910,489 (2023-2024)	2,718,496 (2023-2024)
Average £ per theatre	518,577	930,555	409,207	226,541
Increase on previous year	+7%	-	+14%	+18%
% spent within theatres drive-time	Data not available	56%	77%	43%
Number of theatres (base)	14	10	12	12



SOCIAL IMPACT

4. SOCIAL IMPACT

Mid-scale theatres are invaluable spaces for culture and entertainment, but this research evidences how they are also vital civic and social hubs within their communities.

Their work positively impacts on the health and wellbeing of local residents, including some of the most marginalised and disadvantaged, through creative participation programmes that support social prescription models. These social benefits include:

- Increasing social confidence
- Reducing social isolation
- Increasing life and social skills
- Providing an emotional and psychological outlet for participants (and their carers)

Mid-scale theatres are also valued partners to schools, colleges, universities and third sector agencies, amplifying the social impact of their partners' work, supporting their sustainability and offering CPD opportunities to their partners' employees.

◆ Invaluable social hubs for culture and entertainment

- Total audience attendance across fifteen of the theatres in the last financial year was 1,447,143, an average of 96,476 per theatre
- From the data available, we estimate that the average audience drive time was 37.5 minutes
- Audience ratings demonstrate that the theatres deliver on a high-quality social experience (see illustration 1.2)

Illustration 1.2

Audience star rating for productions and/or theatre (rating out of 5)			
	Rating out of 5		% giving 4 or 5 stars (*)
Octagon Theatre Bolton	4.8	Mercury Theatre Colchester	85% give venue 5*s
Hull Truck	4.6	Stephen Joseph Theatre Scarborough	4 or 5*s In-house productions = 97% Visiting shows = 92%
Lichfield Garrick	4.7	York Theatre Royal	% giving 4 or 5 stars Productions = 88% Venue = 93%
Mayflower Studios Southampton	4.6		

- The average cost of a performance/event ticket in 2023–24 was £39.68, demonstrating value for money compared to other high-quality social experiences
- In combination, this data illustrates how theatres offer a unique and affordable social experience for many people within their catchment

- ◆ Creative participation programmes that positively impact the health and wellbeing of local communities
 - The sixteen venues ran a total of 748 creative participation programmes in their local communities over the last financial year, which equates to 9,614 creative participation sessions
 - Total attendance at participatory events in the last financial year was 154,611, an average of 11,893 per theatre (13 theatres)
 - The average fee paid for a participatory event was £3.19, indicating their accessibility in terms of financial means
 - The theatres are doing this work with some of the people most marginalized and disadvantaged groups within their local communities (see illustration 1.3)

Target groups for the 748 creative participation programmes	
Children/Young People (54%)	Refugees/asylum seekers (3%)
Lower socioeconomic (8%)	Dementia (2%)
Families/Intergenerational (6%)	Community Productions (2%)
Learning difficulties/disabilities (6%)	LGBTQ+ (1%)
Older people (4%)	Mental Health (1%)
Carers/young carers (3%)	Other (9%)

- The following case study demonstrates how this work improves mental well-being and reduces social isolation, and also evidences how these programmes offer a positive social return on investment



Case Study: Mercury Theatre (Colchester) and Essex University

Mercury Theatre run Taking Part, a creative participation programme, that:

- includes 34,127 participants across 3,831 participation sessions a year
- is targeted at different ages and demographic groups within their local community – children, young people and adults – and at some of the most marginalised people in their local community – within their programme for children and young people, 1 in 4 participants have a neurodiversity, access need or disability, 12% are from the global majority and 6% are Looked After Children.

They evaluated the social impact of this work with Essex University. That research found that:

- 92% of participants reported improved mental health and wellbeing (Warwick/Edinburgh Mental Well-being scale)
- Low levels of wellbeing amongst participants more than halved
- 90% of participants felt less isolated and lonely as a result of taking part

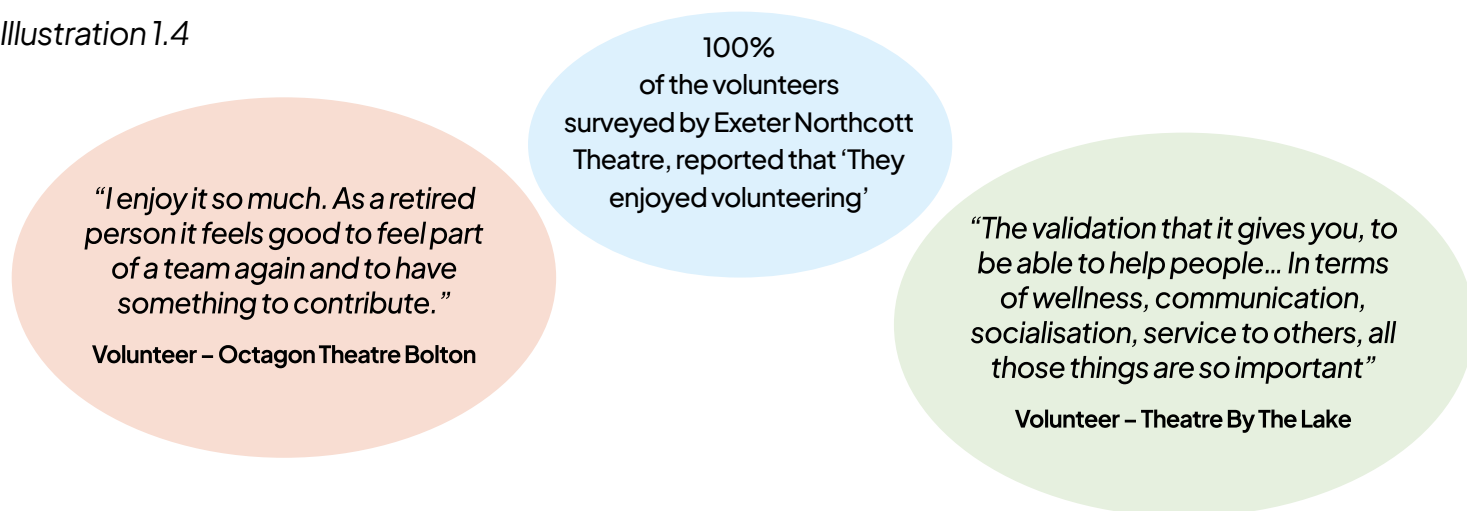
A social return on investment assessment, conducted by Essex University, demonstrated that there was a social impact of £6.59 for every £1 invested in the programme.

Other case studies evidence this work has additional positive impacts on participants and communities by: increasing social confidence; increasing life and social skills and; providing an emotional and psychological outlet for participants (and their carers). (See appendix)

◆ The social benefit of their work with volunteers

- All but one of the theatres offer volunteer opportunities
- 1,084 volunteers work in some capacity across those fifteen theatres, equating to a total of 75,227 hours of volunteering over the last financial year
- Around 97% of those volunteers come from within the theatre's drive-time
 - (62% from the town/city the theatre is located within and 35% outside of the town/city but within its drive-time)
- Data and testimony indicate that this work benefits the volunteers' well-being by reducing social isolation, giving them a sense of purpose and by providing skills that help their professional and/or personal development (see Illustration 1.4)

Illustration 1.4



- ◆ Valued partners to schools, colleges, universities and third sector agencies
 - All of the participating theatres work with local partners and, in total, they support the work of 738 other local organisations/agencies
 - These partnerships are mainly in the education (schools 59%, sixth form/further education colleges 6% and universities 3%) and voluntary/charitable (31%) sectors
 - The following case study illustrates how these partnerships strengthen and amplify the work of other local statutory and third sector agencies

Case Study: Hull Truck Theatre and the RSC Associate School Programme

Hull Truck Theatre collaborates with the Royal Shakespeare Company (RSC) as an Associate Regional Theatre to deliver the RSC Associate Schools Programme.

The programme involves theatre practitioners from both the RSC and Hull Truck Theatre delivering high-quality CPD for classroom teachers, introducing rehearsal room-style approaches to Shakespeare and broader literacy.

This initiative supports the language, social, and emotional development of children and young people, while also fostering a love of theatre and Shakespeare's work.

Randomised control trials (RCTs) across 45 state-maintained primary schools indicate that the theatre-led initiative improved children's language development and self-confidence (Time To Act, 2023).

This year, 11 primary schools participated in the programme, resulting in:

- 13 teachers taking part in CPD training
- 80% of teachers using the activities in the classroom
- 319 students benefiting from the programme, participating in sessions and staging a section of *The Tempest*, performed in Hull Truck Theatre's Main House
- 405 audience members attending three performances, with 77.5% being first-time bookers to the theatre





LOCAL LEADERSHIP AND PLACEMAKING

5. LOCAL LEADERSHIP AND PLACEMAKING

Mid-scale theatres are also local leaders and agents of change, generating significant investment for social change in their communities, in relation to local social issues, social regeneration and environmental sustainability.

Many of the theatres play local leadership roles in terms of local cultural strategies and strategic education partnerships. They are also active in local business leadership structures such as BIDs.

The following case studies highlight some of the work that they are doing in these areas.

- ◆ Agents of social change and regeneration
 - All sixteen theatres were working in this area

Case Study: Queen's Theatre, Hornchurch

Havering Changing is a consortium of eight organisations, led by Queen's Theatre Hornchurch.

The project supports local people, living and working, in Harold Hill, Orchard Village, Rainham and Romford, three disadvantaged and culturally underserved areas.

In 2019, Havering Changing joined Arts Council England's [Creative People and Places programme](#), generating a significant investment to help regenerate the lives of the people living within this underserved area. Since then, they have been trialling radical new ideas that engage local residents in arts and culture in a variety of new ways, to promote belonging, social connection and ambition as programme outcomes.

The theatre is also involved in Creative Health Havering, a network of local grassroots community organisations, third sector services and medical professionals exploring opportunities around social prescribing and the benefit of arts activity for health and wellbeing to address many of the health and social inequalities of an outer-London borough. The initiative aims to help tackle these inequalities through moving away from an exclusively medical model of care towards a more community-based, person-centred approach, which brings together the expertise and experience from all parts of the cultural community and health care system.

The partnership is currently developing a three-year programme of activity in response to research, which will build on the early success of its pilot year.

- ◆ Working with BIDs to help regenerate towns and city centres
 - Just under half (44%) of theatres reported their leadership teams play significant roles on local and regional business improvement and development initiatives

Case Study: The Stephen Joseph Theatre

The Stephen Joseph Theatre sit on the Town Centre Team – a small group of individuals all with businesses in the town centre focused on the regeneration of the High Street in Scarborough. Alongside active lobbying around anti-social behaviour, street cleaning and drinking in public spaces they have: created a Town Centre Charter for businesses to sign up to; funded local artists to create vinyls to make disused shop fronts more attractive; purchased and installed new planters and benches; raised funding for free activities in the high street over half-term to increase footfall and business spend; contributed significantly to the creation and subsequent roll-out of the 'This is Scarborough' Brand; and are currently commissioning a data study to be used to increase inward investment.

◆ Championing environmental sustainability

- All Arts Council England funded organisations are expected to evaluate and improve their environmental sustainability, but just under a third (31%) of the theatres also described local leadership initiatives in this area

Case Study: The Mercury Theatre

The Mercury are founder members of the Colchester City Sustainability Board and have committed to:

- support the ambitions of the landmark Paris Agreement of December 2015
- work in partnership with Colchester City Council to implement their Climate Emergency Action Plan (January 2020).

To action those commitments, they have undertaken a capital building project, which has achieved 'Very Good' BREEAM certification, making it the most sustainable building in Colchester and in the top 25% of non-domestic/public buildings in the UK. This certification recognises the Mercury as a model of best practice nationally and they seek to be sector leaders in communication around climate change, with a view to influencing practice among industry peers, partners, staff, audiences, participants, practitioners and their supply chain. Of the £11.3 million spent on the building, £10 million was spent in the local economy, with local suppliers.

◆ Leading local cultural strategies

- Many of the network have played roles in their town/ city's cultural delivery and strategy, with several also working at a district/ regional level





Case Study: New Wolsey Theatre – Start East

StartEast began as a £1.2 million project funded by the European Regional Development Fund and the Arts Council England Creative Local Growth Fund. It was developed by the New Anglia Culture Board as part of its strategic ambition to make Norfolk and Suffolk places where enterprising, creative people can start up and build sustainable cultural enterprises.

The StartEast programme was managed by Norfolk County Council, in partnership with Suffolk County Council, and delivered by the New Wolsey Theatre in Ipswich. StartEast provided targeted, specialist business support to cultural and creative SMEs and potential entrepreneurs in Norfolk and Suffolk over a two-and-half year period.

Other leadership examples can be found in the appendix.



6. CULTURAL AND CREATIVE ECONOMY

The theatres demonstrate high standards of creative impact and strengthen the creative freelance sector and local SMEs through professional development initiatives and talent pipeline opportunities. It is important to note that some of these initiatives are cross-sector and focused on business development.

In addition to their local impact, case studies demonstrate the role they play in the national creative economy, in terms of cultural impact, revenue generation and talent pipeline.

◆ Support for creative freelancers

- The total spend on freelance creatives in the last financial year was £4,674,987, an average spend of £359,614 per theatre (13 theatres)
- This spend increased by 13% compared to the previous financial year
- A third of the spend was within the theatres' drive-time and two-thirds outside, suggesting that mid-scales theatres are creative hubs for freelancers across their region
- When freelancers were brought in from outside the local area, many theatres used the opportunity to enrich their local creative economy through creative learning and CPD opportunities

◆ Spaces enabling creative collaboration

- A quarter of the venues reported that Individual creatives and micro-SMEs regularly use their venue as an ad hoc space to conduct meetings and discuss projects
- Dukes Theatre Lancaster and York Theatre Royal estimated that 30–60 and 70 creative professionals used their spaces for meetings, respectively, over the last financial years

◆ Talent pipeline

- Nearly all of the theatres offered training and development sessions for local creatives professionals and people/young people interested in working in the arts, equating to over 3086 opportunities in total, an average of 280 opportunities per theatre (based on the 11 theatres who record this information)
- 69 (2%) of those opportunities were run digitally to promote breadth of reach and accessibility
- These initiatives included business development skills, as well as professional creative development
- A number of venues reported specific professional initiatives aiming to address sector issues around underrepresentation, for example, Derby Theatre who run:
 - an EMBA black artist training programme, where each participant received £10k to work on a co-creation piece with the local community
 - In Good Company Fundraising for D/deaf, disabled, and neurodivergent artists workshops

- Some of the initiatives were for creatives outside the performing arts sector: Mercury Creatives, a programme run by the Mercury Theatre, was specifically designed as a 3-year professional development programme for 100 SMEs working in creative industries allied to the performing arts, in order to deliver business skills and networks
- The following case studies demonstrate how mid-scale theatres, and their talent pipeline initiatives, can have a national and international creative impact

Case Study: Octagon Theatre Bolton – The Book Thief

The theatre premiered a production of the global best-selling book in 2022. The show has attracted commercial investment, been licensed for remounting in the UK, and is receiving international interest in reproductions from the US, Australia, and Pacific Asia.

◆ Support for other local organisations

- The qualitative interviews revealed how the theatres are regularly called upon to provide technical and other support to other local organisations who work outside the confines of their theatre spaces
- This included production advice and the provision of technical support to other organisations delivering events and festivals in the local area
- The following account by the Yvonne Arnaud Theatre highlights the breadth of other local organisations that rely on this support

Case Study: Yvonne Arnaud Theatre

Yvonne Arnaud Theatre in Guildford works with and support partners across a wide range of local organisations, including: Guildford Shakespeare Company, Guildford School of Acting, Performance Preparation Academy, Italia Conti Woking, Royal Grammar School, Tormead School, George Abbott School, Broadwater School, East Berks Opera Society, Chiddingfold Pantomime, Watts Gallery, Secretts Garden Centre, G Live, Guildford High School, The Boiler Room, The Britannia pub.

Footnotes and references

<https://solt.co.uk/economics-of-theatre/>

² 'Creative hubs: A critical evaluation', Andy Pratt, City, Culture and Society Journal, 2021

<https://www.campaignforthearts.org/reports/the-state-of-the-arts/>

https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/sites/default/files/download-file/Analysis_theatre_England_16112016.pdf

7. FINAL THOUGHTS

Mid-scale theatres are more than a collection of buildings: they are dynamic, civic institutions embedded in the creative, social, and economic fabric of their communities. This research confirms their role as engines of local regeneration, talent development, and public wellbeing, with ripple effects that extend far beyond their immediate vicinity. They are an integral part of our world-class theatre ecosystem. Their ability to attract inward investment, stimulate footfall, and deliver targeted social impact places them at the heart of place-making strategies and the wider creative economy.

Yet this impact is not guaranteed. In an era where touring models are increasingly outdated, 28% of theatres are running deficits, and one in five venues require substantial capital investment simply to remain operational, the mid-scale sector is among the most vulnerable. These theatres face a critical tipping point, where rising costs, fragile funding models, and growing expectations — often operating as the leading cultural venue in a large area — risk outpacing organisational capacity. Their contribution must be supported not just to survive, but to thrive. Strategic investment at regional and national levels is essential to safeguarding these powerhouses so they can continue to drive local prosperity and shape our national cultural story.



APPENDIX

Case study 1: Derby Theatre

Themes: Generating inward investment, leadership, social impact and placemaking

Derby Theatre has been the lead partner of many city-wide strategic projects that have generated significant amounts of inward investment for capital development and community programmes, which benefit many cultural partners in the city and the community. Their ability to act as a convenor of partnerships, creating a crucible of ideas informed by their deep engagement with communities has proven most beneficial to the local ecology. Some projects include:

- Reimagine - £1.1m investment
- Derby CAN - £1.5 m investment
- CANVAS - £700k investment
- Derby Creative Arts Network - £1.5m investment
- Levelling Up Funding - £10m Capital investment
- Speak Out - £165,000 investment.

Example: Speak Out is an innovative project funded by the Paul Hamlyn Foundation to connect arts practitioners and teachers together in a joint ambition to build oracy skills and so impact on the social inclusion of targeted students. Working with 6 primary schools in the St Ralph Sherwin Catholic Multi Academy Trust, 12 teachers and members of the SLT worked with 5 artists with a specific focus on pupils who have English as an additional language.

The Institute of Education at the University of Derby measured the impact of the project and found:

- 100 % of participants had an overall improvement of oracy skills which was significant and noticeable
- 100% of teachers would recommend the continued use of these strategies
- 100% of teachers believe that drama can improve oracy

One of the schools was inspected by Ofsted just as this project came to a close and they were specifically commended on the level of oracy skills. The school attributed that success to this project.

“Ofsted were literally blown away with the way oracy was demonstrated by the pupils... and that is definitely down to this project.”

St Elizabeth's Primary



Case study 2: The Octagon Theatre

Themes: Economic and social impact, and return on investment

The Octagon Theatre is a 390-seat venue in Bolton.

Economic research by Amion Consulting in 2021 found that the Octagon's overall activity:

- Generates an annual economic impact of £10.8m per year
- Generates a social impact of £0.89m per year, through health, education and volunteering
- Provides a benefit ratio of £43 to £1 of investment by Bolton Council.

Case study 3: Mercury Theatre

Themes: Generating inward investment and placemaking

The Mercury Theatre is a producing theatre in Colchester that has two performance spaces.

The team raised £14.2m for their Mercury Rising Capital Project, which they used to update the fabric of their building and build a new 'piazza' around the theatre, that is now used for monthly farmers markets, outdoor performances and community events. The project has put their building at the heart of their local community, increasing both participation in it and the activities they run.

Case Study 4: The New Vic Theatre

Themes: Education – nurturing early years development, fostering inclusion, and building foundations for lifelong learning

The New Vic Theatre is a 605-seat venue in Newcastle-under-Lyme, home to a vibrant programme of community and education work that in 2024–25 reached over 42,000 children and young people. One strand of this work is the Story Treasures Project, a creative learning initiative designed to support communication, confidence, and literacy development in early years education.

Delivered in partnership with local schools, the project uses immersive storytelling, drama, and arts-based pedagogy to help children aged 3–5, particularly those in Stoke-on-Trent's most disadvantaged communities, to develop the foundational skills they need to thrive in school.

85% of children showed sustained, significant improvement in verbal and communication skills, which supports developing literacy skills

95% demonstrated increased confidence and social skills, encouraging participation in the classroom

85% showed marked improvement in school readiness, ensuring children can engage meaningfully with the curriculum from day one.

"The programme is completely different to any literacy schemes we have experienced, it is fun and engaging, well-placed and pitched at the correct level for our cohort."

Participating Teacher, Story Treasures Programme

Case study 5: The Yvonne Arnaud Theatre

Themes: Social impact and working in partnership

The Yvonne Arnaud Theatre is a 586-seat venue in Guildford.

Their Discover Theatre Project engaged children with Special Educational Needs. At the end of the project, there was a:

- 50% increase in the number of children who described themselves as feeling happy
- 30% increase in the number who described themselves as feeling confident
- 40% increase in the number who described themselves as a 'creative person'

Supporting testimony:

"The children have become more confident in their speaking and listening skills. They have challenged themselves to have a go at unfamiliar activities in new venues with new adults."

Catherine Kneller. Woodpeckers Teacher, Gosden House

Case study 6: Theatre By The Lake

Themes: Addressing social issues through culture

Theatre by the Lake is a producing theatre in Keswick, Cumbria, that houses two stages.

Communities within Cumbria suffer from social isolation, and suicide rates in the area are 50% higher than the national average (Suicide Rates in England and Wales by Local Authority 2021). In response to that, Theatre By The Lake programmed 'Every Brilliant Thing', a production that explored the challenging subject matter of suicide and depression, and proactively toured it to isolated rural communities, with the aim of using theatre to bring communities together to talk and connect about issues that were affecting them. They worked on the project in partnership with regional and national suicide prevention charities. Testimony from an employee of one of those charities, Every Life Matters, evidences the impact of the initiative.

"It was really powerful and impactful to take it into rural locations."

Vicky Boggon – Every Life Matters (on *Every Brilliant Thing* rural tour)



Case study 7: The New Wolsey Theatre

Themes: Social impact, mental well-being and community cohesion

The New Wolsey Theatre is a 400 seat in Ipswich.

The theatre ran a social prescribing programme in conjunction with the NHS. Tell Your Story was a nine-session well-being programme led by an award-winning artist and photographer.

Surveyed participants reported:

- 97% felt that had done something they didn't know they were capable of
- 94% agreed that it had a positive impact on their mental wellbeing
- 84% agreed that it helped them feel connected to people in the community



Case study 8: Theatres of sanctuary

Themes: Social impact and community cohesion

Three of our theatres – Derby Theatre, Mercury Theatre, Hull Truck Theatre and Octagon Theatre, Bolton – have all been awarded Theatre of Sanctuary Awards for going above and beyond to welcome asylum seekers and refugees seeking sanctuary into their communities.

In addition, following the onset of the war in Ukraine, the Lichfield Garrick Theatre set up Ukrainian language film screenings as a way of welcoming Ukrainian refugees to the venue and their local community. Testimony from an audience member illustrates the impact of that work:

“Thank you so much for showing these films. It made us feel like we were back in our home town for a couple of hours.”

Audience member

This work demonstrates how responsive the work of theatres can be to support people in their local communities.

Case study 9: Oxford Playhouse

Themes: Social Impact and Community Cohesion

Oxford Playhouse is a producing theatre in Oxford with a main stage and studio space.

In response to historic ongoing, institutional and systemic racism in the area, the theatre co-founded and are steering group members of the Oxfordshire Culture Anti Racism Alliance (OCARA).

The purpose of OCARA is to convene and initiate actions in pursuit of the Alliance's vision of an Oxford free of racism and discrimination. They focus on organisational culture and practices, and programme events as a means of proactively working to support and challenge each other, to achieve their vision, through the leadership of its arts and cultural sector.

Case study 10: Environmental Sustainability

Themes: Leadership

A number of the theatres had initiated strategic leadership in relation to environmental change.

The New Vic Theatre have partnered in 'Zero Carbon Rugeley (From coal mining town to zero carbon community)' with Keele University and Chase Community Solar. The aim of the project is to produce an innovative design for a town wide Smart Local Energy System (SLES). The project uniquely utilises pioneering User-Centric Design processes to enable the community to help engage with and thus shape the design of the SLES.

The New Wolsey Theatre's environmental impact achievements were recognised in 2023 with a Carbon Charter Silver Award. They are part of the Good Journey Scheme, which promotes car free travel to arts and heritage venues, and proactively educates through programming environmentally themed work.

York Theatre Royal also perform an education role around these themes, in addition to improving their own environmentally responsible practices. In summer/autumn 2023 they presented the Alive Season, a programme of activity which highlighted environmentally sustainable initiatives, and also co-produced 'A Play for the Living In A Time Of Extinction' with Headlong and Barbican.

Hull Truck Theatre signed up to 'Oh Yes Net Zero', a Humberside-wide initiative to drive down carbon emissions in the region. They are a lead cultural partner, hosted the 'Oh Yes Net Zero' conference last year and have been awarded Gold Status and a medal of best practise within the initiative.

Photography credits:

Front cover (l-r):

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New Vic Theatre, Newcastle-under-Lyme
Dukes Theatre Lancaster
Derby Theatre
Octagon Theatre Bolton
Yvonne Arnaud Theatre Guildford
York Theatre Royal
Exeter Northcott Theatre
Lichfield Garrick
Theatre By The Lake Keswick
Hull Truck Theatre
Queens Theatre Hornchurch
Mayflower Studios Southampton
New Wolsey Ipswich
Oxford Playhouse
Mercury Theatre Colchester

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Page 25	<i>Gogol's Underdogs</i> , Mercury Theatre
Page 26	Departure Lounge Derby
Page 28	Every Brilliant Thing at Theatre by the Lake
Page 29	Derby Mela

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