



Select Committee on Communications

Corrected oral evidence: Skills for the Theatre Industry

Tuesday 14 March 2017

3.30 pm

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Members present: Lord Best (The Chairman); Lord Allen of Kensington; Baroness Benjamin; Baroness Bonham-Carter of Yarnbury; Earl of Caithness; Bishop of Chelmsford; Lord Gilbert of Panteg; Baroness Kidron; Baroness McIntosh of Hudnall; Baroness Quin; Lord Sherbourne of Didsbury.

Evidence Session No. 1

Heard in Public

Questions 1 - 12

Witnesses

I: Christine Payne, General Secretary, Equity Actors' Union; Julian Bird, CEO, UK Theatre and Society of London Theatre.

USE OF THE TRANSCRIPT

This is a corrected transcript of evidence taken in public and webcast on www.parliamentlive.tv.

Examination of witnesses

Christine Payne and Julian Bird.

Q1 The Chairman: Welcome, Christine Payne and Julian Bird. Thank you both very much for joining us. Could I ask you in turn to say a few words about yourselves and introduce yourselves? Then we will kick off with some questions. Christine, perhaps we could start with you.

Christine Payne: Thank you very much for inviting me to meet with you today. My name is Christine Payne; I am the general secretary of Equity. I have been Equity's general secretary since 2005—as you know, it is an elected position—but I have worked for the union since long before that in both of our industrial departments, negotiating agreements in film, television and theatre.

Julian Bird: I am Julian Bird, chief executive of two organisations: the Society of London Theatre, which looks after all the theatre in what you might call the West End and the surrounding boroughs; and UK Theatre, the theatre association that covers the entire rest of the UK. In total, that is about £1 billion-worth of tickets. To put it into context—this is a stat we always like quoting—more people go to shows in our venues than go to all league football games in the UK, so it is not an elitist kind of thing that people do.

The Chairman: Are your members the theatres themselves?

Julian Bird: We cover the physical theatres, the producers, the people who put the productions on; what we call the general managers, who are the people who often run the shows day to day; and the marketing companies, the press companies and all the other bits that make the industry work.

The Chairman: Excellent. Thank you both very much for joining us. The way we do this is that we ask a question but, if the person who has spoken first has said roughly what you were going to say yourself, please do not bother to repeat it. Then we can get through our agenda.

Q2 Lord Sherbourne of Didsbury: Good afternoon. Can I ask you, first of all, about finance and the money that finances theatre? I am talking about public and all the other forms of finance that you get through tickets, sponsorship, et cetera. What is going well and what is going not so well, and how are you responding to that?

Julian Bird: Theatre is financed in many different ways. In one sense, the West End is very different from the rest of theatre. Of the 52 main theatres in London, many are owned privately by owners such as Cameron Mackintosh, Andrew Lloyd Webber, Nica Burns and many others. Although they are the private owners, I would give them credit for reinvesting in the theatre stock that they own, so they are ploughing money back in. I have heard each of those three individuals talk about

themselves as owners for this moment in time and, in due course, somebody else may well be an owner of those venues.

Around the UK, the position is very different. We have many venues the length and breadth of every region of the UK, many of which are owned by trusts, foundations, charities or local authorities themselves, which are hugely reliant on local government spending. We all know how under pressure that is. I think the stat is that over the last three years local authority direct funding for these types of venues has fallen by 11%. They are under enormous pressure and are doing everything to raise income from other sources, but that pressure is really coming to bear at the moment. There is a catalogue of examples: Bath, Bristol and Somerset have venues that are closing, or are under severe strain and on the verge of closing as a result.

Christine Payne: Julian is absolutely right. Public funding is very important and it is under enormous pressure at both levels, through Arts Council England investment and through local authorities. We really are starting to see the impact of some of the cuts that local authorities are having to make. Theatre is responding by doing its best, but I think the crisis is yet to come. It is doing its best, in particular, by trying to use its resources differently, and you can do that for so long. It is using its resources differently, for example, by sharing resources, increased co-production, pressure on cast sizes, pressure on new writing, pressure on how many productions a theatre can do, even pressure on what the theatre itself does. Newcastle, of course, changed from being a producing theatre to a receiving house, and that is a trend we need to be very mindful of.

One of the great qualities about our theatre is the uniqueness, the new work, the new writing, the new opportunities, the new productions, the risks that subsidised theatre can take. If we have to be more reliant on buying product in, it has an impact not only on what we see but on the local community. For example, Newcastle would have employed actors locally; it would have supported the community locally. Now productions come in and then they go, and that has an impact on the economy as well as on what you might see. Theatre is doing its best to adapt to these trends, but the crisis is getting worse.

Lord Sherbourne of Didsbury: Can I ask you two specific questions to follow up what you have both said? Can you give me one or two examples of the problems and pressures that theatre is under at the moment having a really bad impact, and of something that has been a loss to our cultural life, wherever it might be? Secondly, trying to be positive, where are there good examples of theatres that have been really creative in responding to the pressures they are under, which could be used as a role model for other enterprises?

Julian Bird: The most recent and good example is probably north Devon. One is in danger of certain parts of the country becoming a little like deserts with no arts provision. Recently, the Queen's Theatre in Barnstaple and the Landmark Theatre in Ilfracombe have suddenly gone dark. They were both owned by the local authority, which, as many have

done, transferred the running of those buildings into a trust. There was a lack of funding and attendance, and those buildings are now closed. The local authorities still own the freehold on the buildings. These are practical examples of this happening in just in the last few months. I could talk about Bristol. I could talk about Birmingham City Council slashing the funding to the arts venues in Birmingham by about 60% from April onwards. This is happening; it is not just a theory. Christine is absolutely right. We have not quite seen it happen yet.

There is really good practice in terms of new partnerships. The Octagon Theatre in Bolton is doing new work with housing associations, and collaborating to try to find new forms of partnership and new ways of working. The artistic team of HOME, in Manchester, is partnering with the university, so there are assistant professorships whereby they are both working in the theatre and training the next generation. Those are all emerging things that are having to happen as a result of the pressures.

Christine Payne: You mentioned north Devon. Somerset now has no local arts organisations at all. All funding has been withdrawn from that county.

In terms of additional partnerships, the Dukes, Lancaster, is also looking at entering into partnerships with universities. Theatre is trying to find those new sources, but we have to be mindful that there are not unlimited additional resources.

Earl of Caithness: Can I just follow that up? Julian, you said you were the whole of the UK, so that covers the devolved Administrations. All your examples so far have been in England; what about Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland? Do you see a difference in financing?

Julian Bird: My apologies; that was not intended. Creative Scotland, which is the equivalent body to Arts Council England, has had some budget cuts. I would say the devolved Administration and the Scottish Parliament treat arts very well, in the main. Yes, there are pressures, but we have not seen examples of high-profile regional venues in Scotland closing yet. In Wales, to my understanding—and we have the executive director of the National Theatre Wales on one of our boards—there is a feeling that some of that may be coming, but it has not quite hit yet.

Christine Payne: For completeness, Northern Ireland has had an 11.2% reduction in its arts funding, which has affected two very longstanding theatres, Tinderbox and Kabosh, which did a lot of work in the communities. Again, we will start to see the impact of that.

Q3

Lord Gilbert of Panteg: Julian, you drew a parallel between the theatre and big business football. Big business football is under huge pressure to put resources into grass-roots football and lower leagues. Is the successful commercial theatre doing enough to make up some of this gap and put money into grass-roots theatre?

Julian Bird: I believe it is, yes. As I said, some of the people who own the major theatre groups take their responsibilities towards future generations and the future of the physical assets very seriously. I think

the risks are not in that area, but in the areas around the UK where, due to pressure on resources, inevitably, things such as education and work with local communities come under extreme pressure as to whether they can continue.

Lord Gilbert of Panteg: That is what I am referring to. Should the successful, big-business commercial theatre not be pushing money into grass roots as well as maintaining their own infrastructure, the theatres they are responsible for and their own companies, and building something for future generations? Should they not, like football, be putting money into grass roots, into stuff outside London, into local theatre, into community theatre?

Julian Bird: They very much are, in a whole range of ways, and I can talk for hours about all the different schemes. At the SOLT and UK Theatre, we are trying to work with some of those big companies, both commercial and the major subsidised companies, to try to ensure there is overlap and that the available resources are being used to the best of their ability. I include organisations such as Disney in that, as much as the RSC or the National Theatre. One of the big things we currently have under way is trying to look at a new approach to the joined-up nature of all that.

Christine Payne: The ecology of theatre in the UK is complicated. The relationship between commercial and subsidised theatre is very important and, in the past, it has been very balanced. Investment in subsidised theatre will very often have a commercial life, which will, in turn, feed back into the subsidised sector. Lots of your members have done that, the National Theatre being just one.

On local authority funding, I take your point about the industry itself looking at how it might fill some of these gaps. From Equity's point of view, we think the Government need to take a lead on this, and we have written recently to the Secretary of State, because it seems like local authorities are almost rudderless in how they are addressing some of the very serious funding crises and issues they face, and arts funding is bound, in some case, to take a lower priority. Therefore, we would very much like the Secretary of State to take leadership on this and give some direction to local authorities on how they tackle these difficult issues. The one thing we are absolutely all agreed on is that investment in theatre and the arts is very important, and we will probably talk a bit more about that anyway.

Q4 **Baroness Bonham-Carter of Yarnbury:** This very much picks up on your answer. Listening to you, I am reminded of working on a speech a long time ago and the suggestion that arts organisations need help in how to fundraise, particularly local ones. The big London-based arts organisations have fundraising departments and so on. We all know there is terrible pressure on local government and it has to fund all kinds of things. Do you think that would be helpful? Aid so that local theatres can learn how to fundraise might be a useful tool.

Julian Bird: One hundred percent, yes. Arts organisations the length and breadth of the country have become very good at this. They have had to become very good at it very quickly. Lots of organisations, such as us, on behalf of the industry, run training schemes for them on it. They can apply for funds to the Arts Council. It is called “catalyst funding” and does exactly what it says, acting as a catalyst on resources or on the way of doing it.

Every bit of the UK is different, and I will give you two examples. I chair two major arts organisations in the UK. One is the Yvonne Arnaud Theatre in Guildford, where it is much easier. It has a longstanding bedrock of support from both individuals and corporates, which keeps the theatre going. I also chair the De La Warr Pavilion in Bexhill, a town that, arguably, is now developing but is not in an area with huge industry, so there are no big corporates you can naturally go to and say, “Please will you support us?” Although the fundraising operation is very good, it is much harder to make those inroads.

Baroness Bonham-Carter of Yarnbury: There is crowdfunding now. There are all kinds of different ways.

Julian Bird: There are all sorts of ways and they are all being exploited, but it is easier in certain parts of the country, if you are based there, to raise substantial money philanthropically than it is in other parts. It is sometimes implied that every organisation can raise the same sort of money that the National Theatre or the RSC can, and we are seeing that that is not the case.

Baroness Bonham-Carter of Yarnbury: I was not really trying to suggest that. I was just trying to suggest that organisations could be helped to explore all the different routes.

Julian Bird: Yes, we need to give everyone every bit of help we can.

The Chairman: Can I just remind my colleagues to declare any interests they may have before they ask a question?

Baroness Bonham-Carter of Yarnbury: May I declare mine after? I am a trustee of the Lowry.

Q5 **Baroness Kidron:** I declare that my company develops film, television and theatre projects and I am married to a playwright.

My question is going back upstream a bit and is about schools. If I can, I would like to ask it in two parts. One is about the curriculum and what subjects you think young people need to be studying in school, in order to have the skills by the time they hit the professional world. Specifically, I would like to ask you about recent government policy on the EBacc and whether you think it has had an effect; and, more recently, the T-levels they have just announced and whether there is, perhaps, some light there. I would like to ask you that and then ask you about extra-curricular for the same age group.

Christine Payne: I am going to say what I think most people would say: that arts subjects—drama, music—in schools are very important. They

are very important from an early age, from key stage 1 right up to 4. Most of the encouragement for my members, for actors, to come into the profession is given at school. It is given through good teaching, good experience and exposure, seeing the work. We were very pleased that there has been some recognition of that and encouragement that schools and seeing live performance is a very important part of a young person's education.

In terms of the EBacc, there is definitely evidence that taking arts subjects out of the curriculum leads to a decrease in the take-up of those subjects in all schools, less so in privately funded schools. Nevertheless, if it is not recognised as an acceptable subject there is a tendency to dismiss it, which is bad. It is bad for the young people and for the future of our industry. There is a saying: "Get them young and you will keep them when they are older". We need to instil that value and appreciation of what we do as a proper job. It is not a bit of fluff, what my members do. They are not playing at acting; it is proper work that they need to be paid for. We need to convince parents especially that it is proper work: that their child could become an actor and that would be as respectable as being a lawyer; that there are proper careers to be had; and to encourage young people to get involved and to appreciate that.

Julian Bird: I agree with absolutely all of that. The current statistic is that between 2015 and 2016, there has been an 8% decline in the take-up of creative subjects, which is the largest year-on-year decline ever, so there is an issue going on here. It is important to say that, from our perspective, creative subjects are vital not just for the next generation of actors and artists, but also to inspire people who may have technical abilities in other areas that our industry needs, whether that is IT or engineering. For all sorts of productions that are now happening, we need automation specialists who are very heavily skilled in engineering and computer sciences. But if their eyes are not open to the creative industry as an opportunity to work in, and I say this for film and television as well as theatre, they will never consider those as routes they might pursue in their later life.

Baroness Kidron: I would like to pick up on what you said about the split between private schools and state schools. Are you seeing any evidence coming into the industry of that split of opportunity, or is that just something you have noticed more recently?

Christine Payne: There is a lot of evidence that working-class children and working-class people do not have the same access and opportunity to come into the industry. This is evidenced by the fact that both the Labour Party and the Government have set up inquiries into the issue of class, social mobility and how talent, wherever it is developed, can be given the opportunity to come in. You have probably also seen a lot of comments from my members about concerns that, to work in the arts, you have to have either personal resources or contacts. It is those barriers that we have to break down if we are going to continue being world leaders, with a diverse workforce represented in our theatres, film and television that reflects the country and remains one of the major

contributors to the economy. Your point is very important; we have to identify all barriers, and class is one of them.

Baroness Kidron: Julian, is there anything in after-school activities or otherwise that your members can contribute to this age group, in a way that is at scale, to help?

Julian Bird: Absolutely. There are youth theatres, linked to all our member theatres the length and breadth of the country, doing extraordinary work. Once again, though, that is relatively selective, in that parents who are already au fait and find arts a personal passion give their children more encouragement to do it. That in no way negates the need for education itself, schools and colleges, to be promulgating the arts and the creative industries as an important potential employment opportunity for the future.

Q6 Baroness Quin: This follows up on that question and thinking about the outreach work of theatres and arts organisations. I know, for example, when the Sage was set up in Gateshead, it started off with a very structured programme of outreach with schools across quite a large area of Tyneside and the north-east. I just wonder if some of that activity has reduced because of the funding situation. I also wonder how good practice is spread around the industry and what kind of monitoring you can do to see that it is a widespread process and not limited to certain parts of the country or certain localities.

Julian Bird: Practice is very varied, obviously. Some of our members report quite a substantial reduction in the number of schools able to engage in theatre visits and bring children to their local theatre, which used to be fundamental. I am sure we all did it when we were at school and it was just part of the curriculum, but of course there is now a lack of funding and all the bureaucracy around those kinds of visits. Some of the member theatres and companies like ATG, which is probably the biggest regional network, are trying to work with schools on a different basis, on career development, and have people in not necessarily to see a production but to talk about careers. That will vary, though, and as I said, we plan to do some more work on all that to see how we can link everyone together. When resources are tight, theatres have to keep operating, and that is where we have to help them with the funding, tools and links with charities to make it easier for them.

Lord Gilbert of Panteg: I can see the funding obstacle, but what is the bureaucratic obstacle to schools getting into local theatres?

Julian Bird: I am not an expert on this, but in my understanding there is now a requirement on schools to see health and safety policies, statements and, in particular, risk assessments before they take a school group to a local theatre. They have to ask for certain risk assessments and all these kinds of things, and that bureaucracy is obviously a huge added pressure compared to what it used to be.

Lord Gilbert of Panteg: Is it excessive?

Julian Bird: As I said, I am not an expert. If you would like, I can find out more and let you know, but I would not want to comment erroneously on that.

Lord Gilbert of Panteg: I would like to know.

Baroness Benjamin: What kind of lead does your organisation take in promoting the importance of children being involved in theatre? I know we have had a conversation about “children” being a category in the Olivier award ceremonies, for instance, which sends the right message to the nation that children are important and affirms the value of children visiting theatre and theatre being produced for children. What lead do you take, as an organisation, to promote that?

Julian Bird: I would like to think we are doing quite a lot. We have the major theatres that produce specifically for young people, whether that is touring or physical venues. We have the Polka Theatre, the Unicorn and all those ones we celebrate, but the major touring companies are also with us, and we have tried to do some very boring things, such as helping them with costs. The amount of money they can raise from tickets for children’s productions is very different from the big blockbuster shows, so how can we help them get all the support and advice they like but at a much reduced cost? We are doing some of the very practical things.

We have to try to promote theatre of all different types. The thing we worry about the most is not necessarily the specific shows that are geared to young people, but how we encourage schools to engage with their local theatres and their local theatre companies in a much broader sense, around curriculum and lots of other things.

Baroness Benjamin: Do you not think that, with a big, highlighted event like the Oliviers, having a children’s category and seeing children’s productions sends the clear message out that children are important? What is holding you back from having a category that says “children”?

Julian Bird: Our board has discussed that. We may change it for next year, since we cannot change a category in the middle of a year. At the UK Theatre Awards, which are in October, we have an award specifically for children and family theatre, which is new. We are making strides, but that is one very small part of the importance of schools engaging.

Q7 **Lord Gilbert of Panteg:** Moving on to further and higher education, Arts Council England has identified a widening gap between the skills that your sector demands and those it sees as currently being supplied by primary education providers. Is there a gap? Are colleges and universities providing the graduates in the areas of skill that you need? Do you identify that gap yourselves? If so, is there anything that Government can do to deal with the issue?

Julian Bird: In the summer last year, we embarked on the first ever piece of research into the long-term health, workforce-wise, of the performing arts industry. That will report soon after Easter, but it is an incredibly comprehensive piece of work, involving a major survey of thousands of people in the industry, all the major organisations, a series

of workshops face to face—all those kinds of things. The reason we did it, and I have wanted to do it for a few years, is that, without doubt, we know there are some major gaps emerging within our industry and they are not all necessarily emerging in the areas you might think they are. We know that there are issues with IT and technical skills and in the new, emerging areas such as automation—what moves sets on and off stage automatically without people pushing and pulling them.

Interestingly, though, it raised the issue of the people who run our theatres, some of whom are, one might say, at a certain age. Where is the next generation coming from? We also know from this piece of research that there is a real lack of book-keeping skills in our sector. We are quite a specific sector and industry, so how do we attack that? The reason we have done this piece of research is to give us the evidence we need to come together as an industry and talk about how we do that, how we build a consortium to do that and, crucially, how we go to Government and say, “What can you do to help us? How can the apprenticeship schemes and the new qualifications work for our industry, which is unique compared to some other industries?”

Lord Gilbert of Panteg: On the other hand, do you see any oversupply of graduates or trainees in some areas? You have identified areas where there is an insufficient number of people coming through. Are there areas in which, frankly, there are too many people coming through to be absorbed by the industry?

Julian Bird: It is hard to say. We produce a lot of very good actors in this country; there are a lot of very good directors. There is not work for all of them at the moment, 100% of the time. Does that mean there is an oversupply? I do not know, because many actors work. We know that there are real shortages in other areas, where there are just not enough people. I would not go so far as to say there is an oversupply of actors. That is going too far, but it is a much more competitive world for an actor than it is for a specialist in lighting programming.

Lord Gilbert of Panteg: Are you saying that really, the problem is in the technical areas?

Julian Bird: It is in the technical areas, the back-of-house areas, the very practical areas. It is the generation of carpenters who build the sets. For all the fancy technology that is going on, most sets in this country are still built by carpenters, for film and television as well. They are all of a certain age and a certain generation. Are we going to bring enough carpenters into our industry in 10 years’ time? If we do not, we have a real problem.

Lord Gilbert of Panteg: That is very interesting.

Christine Payne: From my members’ point of view, there are so many training courses that actors can take and that will purport to give them access to the profession vocationally. There are a very limited number of genuinely defined vocational training courses. Our two organisations were involved for many years in NCDT and Drama UK; we are still involved in the CDET. I would answer it slightly differently and say that there is not

an undersupply of actors, but there is an undersupply of actors from the diverse range of our society that we need, in order to reflect on stage and screen the society that we want. I have read so many letters suggesting that the difficulty in getting BAME actors is because they are all working, there is an undersupply or they are not training. There is always a reason. One of the main reasons is that getting good professional training is very expensive. As I said earlier, if it is not seen as a viable, proper profession, then those people are not going to be encouraged to take that risk. There is lots of work for white men and white women. We need to change that, to show that there are real work opportunities for all our communities. Unfortunately, they are not getting access to the training they need in order to progress those careers.

Lord Gilbert of Panteg: What, if anything, do you want the Government to do about this?

Christine Payne: I would like the Government to do, to some extent, what they are encouraging: better monitoring so that we can see where the gaps are. Ofcom, Project Diamond and Arts Council England are all undertaking monitoring, so we can see what we are seeing in a meaningful way and we can count. The union is encouraging our members to take part. If we can get proper figures—and we are a little frustrated by the way that some of this monitoring is being done; nevertheless, we will support it and hope that it gives us the evidence we want—we need to come back to the point about education, about accessing the industry from the beginning, about getting training, about pay. That is all interconnected, but it seems that we have to do this monitoring first in order to state the obvious and then move forward with different policies from there.

I would very much like Government to continue doing what they are doing, which is making this monitoring meaningful and saying that it will affect funding of theatres if they do not step up and make our stages more diverse. Ofcom must do what it says it will do, which is to support that and make it really happen.

Julian Bird: The apprenticeships issue, with the transfer of responsibility for them from BEIS to the Department for Education, is quite challenging. We need to work on that transition very closely and work out how new apprenticeship schemes can apply in the theatre.

I endorse the diversity point 100%. One of the big things that will come through from the research, when we publish it, is how we get the right careers advice into schools the length and breadth of the country, schools that traditionally might not have ever had careers advice in the creative industries. That is how we can get to the root of this socioeconomic issue. We know there is a problem there.

The Chairman: There is.

Baroness Kidron: I would like to pick up on two things that you both said. One of them follows directly on from that. In the film industry, I have spent quite a lot of time telling young people about the stories of what else there is to do. To your point, you can be a book-keeper; you

can be a carpenter. Do you think there is something about the narrative coming out of theatre that needs to address that from your end, to be a little bigger and bolder and say, this is a world, and it is a world of full employment rather than only the performance side? I am putting that slightly as a challenge to you.

I am amazed. We have talked about this part of education and no one has mentioned fees. Have you seen a shift since young people have had to pay fees for their education? I find it curious that that did not come up.

Julian Bird: The single best advert for our industry was the opening ceremony of the London Olympics, where we could literally point to every person and technical thing and say that every single one of them had come through the theatre world. For two years, it was the best advert we had. We could go out and talk about it. The Government had us do so much around it and we did. We have to keep saying that to people. In the film world, Hollywood is packed with British technical and creative skills, 90% of which have come through regional theatre. That is where they trained. It is a training issue not just for the theatre industry but for film, television and everything else.

Q8 Bishop of Chelmsford: Apart from the rich participative drama that is the liturgy of the Church day by day, I have no interest to declare—aside from the costumes, which is another subject. Christine, I wanted to pick up on something you have mentioned a couple of times, which is entry-level salaries. This seems to us to be a critical issue, because the number of no-pay or low-pay jobs is clearly one of the things limiting who is able to enter the industry. At the same time, this is an industry that is making the nation an awful lot of money and, as we have heard, is a great success story. The figures from Equity for 2013 about the number of people who either are not being paid anything or are being paid a very low amount are rather alarming. I suppose the question is this: how do you account for the discrepancy between its success and its contribution to the economy on the one hand, and this ongoing issue of very low pay? What can be done to change a culture that seems increasingly to be expecting free labour?

Christine Payne: Thank you very much for that question. You have quoted some of our figures. You are probably also aware of our Professionally Made Professionally Paid campaign. This is a really important part of the work that the union has been doing for the last four years. Essentially, it revolves around the fringe. We have very good industrial agreements that set reasonable benchmarks for where our members work in theatre, but the fringe is a completely different area. We have been using the national minimum wage and the fact that our members are workers and are entitled to be paid at least the national minimum wage to support our Professionally Made Professionally Paid campaign. We meet with venues and producers, and encourage them to use our fringe contract. We have been very successful: 168 productions are using our contract, involving 800 performers, and we anticipate that around an extra £1 million has been paid to those performers as a result of the national minimum wage being paid.

The culture in which you work in your early years for nothing we are addressing by saying, "No, you do not. There is now legislation in this country called the national minimum wage. Our members are workers, even though they are self-employed for tax and national insurance purposes, and this is what should be done". For us, this is a huge step forward and we have put a lot of resources, as a union, into it. We have a full-time member of staff. We go out, and we meet and talk to these producers and venue owners about why they should be doing this.

We would very much like the Government to support this by doing what they have promised to do for years through the Low Pay Commission, which is to make it clear that when actors are working they have this status as workers and they should be entitled to the national minimum wage. If that one thing could be stressed and emphasised, it would make our job a lot easier. It would make a big difference and start to address this culture in which, if you want to start out in the profession, you have to be prepared for two, three or four years to work for nothing. We have to start to address that. In that way, we hope we can encourage more people to come into our industry and more young people to stay within it, because it is about getting that start and keeping going as an actor.

Bishop of Chelmsford: It seems to be common sense that the lack of that is hugely narrowing the ability of people from anything other than a fairly wealthy, privileged background to get the start that they might want.

Julian Bird: As Christine said, at SOLT and UK Theatre we look after the professional theatre world, so everyone who is employed by one of our members is subject to the agreement between Equity or the other unions and us. On the other side, just back to the technical areas, historically there has always been a perception of unpaid internships and work experience. I am very pleased that, among our members, there are only paid internships; there is no expectation that people will work for free. I cannot comment on other parts of the sector, such as the fringe areas, but across our membership we expect people to be paid for those internships.

Bishop of Chelmsford: Are you getting any pushback from those who have been on the other side of this and have, perhaps, enjoyed being able to get free or very cheap labour?

Julian Bird: For the professional theatre world, there is an absolute recognition that this is the right thing to be doing, so I do not think we are getting pushback on that. As I said, I cannot speak for other parts of the sector.

Baroness Kidron: Can I just pick up on that exact point? I spoke to one of your members recently, who said that they are worried about the next generation of producing people, because they cannot get the numbers of people through the door. Obviously, everyone recognises that paying people as they come through the door is a good thing, but just having people for three or four months, seeing if they are your kind of people and keeping them on possibly creates a little gap in talent at the bottom. I am interested in your opinion. It was an interesting pushback, I

thought.

Julian Bird: It could be. Theatres, particularly regionally, operate on very tight margins and so, because they are paying, they are probably taking fewer people, I would suspect, on internships and the like. I still think it is the right thing that they should be paying people even if they take fewer of them; otherwise, how do you ever break through some of these diversity issues? It then becomes, "My parents can afford for me to do a free internship and, therefore, I will", so you are never going to break into this. That is why we think, fundamentally, those paid opportunities are so important.

Baroness Kidron: If one thinks about it creatively, it goes back to your point about apprenticeships and so on, rather than a binary good/bad issue.

Julian Bird: Yes.

The Chairman: Did you do any work immediately after the Budget to see what the impact is on self-employed people, which quite a few of your members will be categorised as? Is the payment of national insurance contributions by self-employed people going to make a difference?

Christine Payne: Yes, we think it will. It seems to us a little ironic that, when our members were working for UK Theatre, for SOLT and in film and television not three years ago, they were paying class 1 national insurance and it was the industry that lobbied against the status of actors as employees, as paying class 1. Having lobbied against that and achieved the change whereby our members and the employers no longer pay class 1, to start tinkering with class 4 seems a little ironic. However, we have been having some useful discussion with Government since the Budget was announced, whereby if there is going to be an increase in class 4, then perhaps at the same time there should be an increase in benefits. Three of the benefits that we are particularly looking at are a maternity and paternity allowance for self-employed persons and sick pay perhaps becoming a bit more comparable. If they are going to be paying a bit more, perhaps they should get additional benefits. At the moment, those conversations are going on, but you are absolutely right. There is going to be an impact.

Julian Bird: Away from the acting profession, it is worth saying that we are an industry with lots of genuinely freelance workers who work on a number of different things during the year. Coming through the research much more strongly than even I thought are a lot of challenges associated with that and the nature of the freelance worker: being self-employed, not having one employer, working for 12 different people during the year. How do we look after those people, as an industry? How do we make sure they are being trained and have CPD? How do we make sure that they have the support structures you would have if you had an employer; if you do not, how do you get them? That is a challenge for us, as an industry, to think about for the future. That is backstage, as well as the acting profession.

Q9 **Baroness McIntosh of Hudnall:** I am afraid I have rather a lot of interests to declare. I am, for the record, deputy chair of the Royal Shakespeare Company and a trustee of Southbank Sinfonia, which is currently appearing at the National Theatre, which is why I declare that. I was formerly executive director of the National Theatre and, in the interest of full disclosure, I have two children who are both conservatoire trained, both of whom have worked as performers, one of whom still does.

I want to pick up with Christine, if I may, this question of the floor that you have put underneath the smallest companies in introducing the idea of the minimum wage. Obviously, that has a great deal to be said for it and I very much support the campaign. However, what view do you take about the level of innovation that comes from performers, directors, lighting technicians and all kinds of others who are at the very beginnings of their career or sometimes a little further in, who want to make something happen and who do not pay themselves or each other, but who try to get something to happen?

I am very much in favour of people being paid for their work. On the other hand, some of the best new work has emerged out of that "let us do the show right here" kind of impetus to make something happen. I would point you, for example, towards Tooting Arts Club and the background to that. Now they are off-Broadway and, of course, they pay people, but sometimes you have to lead into it, so can you talk a bit about that?

Christine Payne: Yes. There is a fine line on some of these things, and you are right that young people particularly will want to come together as friends, create something and see how it works. If it is a genuine collaboration, such that there is not a worker-employer-producer type of relationship, it is possible that it could fall outside the scope of the national minimum wage. However, those getting involved have to be very sure and confident that what they are doing is a genuine collaboration. We have found that, when things go wrong and one of the genuine collaboration is let go, suddenly it is, "Well, you have let me go; I am no longer part of this. Therefore, I am now a worker and I wish to exercise my right to be paid".

There is a fine line there, which people need to be very careful about. My advice would be that it is always safest to err on the side of the law and to build into the budget, no matter how difficult, payment of at least the national minimum wage for everybody involved. In that way, you do not run the risk of getting into difficulties if things go wrong.

Baroness McIntosh of Hudnall: Can I just follow that up? On the issue that Julian raised of people who are not performers, we know that this is mostly a problem for performers, but some people have other skills—accountants, carpenters, electricians—some of which have a very high market value. Why is it still very difficult to get what you might call the creative industries generally to recognise that the high market value that attaches to certain skills means they have to pay a high price for them and—sorry, I am going to be rather blunt now—not expect people to work

for less because it is fun?

Julian Bird: In the technical areas you are talking about, there are some very high wages being paid in our sector at the moment and that is partly due to scarcity of resource—the classic demand and supply. As somebody said earlier, this is almost guaranteed 100% employment. You can be incredibly busy, overemployed in fact, if you are very good in these fields. You are right, though, that our sector is having to pay heavily for those skills now, because there is a scarcity.

Baroness McIntosh of Hudnall: I missed out a declaration of interest, which applies to Julian: I am a life member of the Society of London Theatre.

Julian Bird: We do not look after the fringe world, but it is very interesting that a lot of amazing talent in this country has come through things like the Edinburgh Fringe. I am not commenting for the fringe world, but we have to be cautious, as Christine has said, about some of this for fear of what the repercussions might be. Having said that, I entirely endorse the view that everyone should be paid the national minimum wage, but as to how that applies to huge fringe festivals, where amazing creative talent has come through over the last 10 or 20 years, I am not entirely sure how one squares that circle entirely.

Q10 **Baroness Benjamin:** I declare my interests as well. I am a member of Equity and have been for the last 47 years, a patron of Action for Children's Arts, a fellow of the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust, an honorary fellow of the British Screen Advisory Council and a supporter patron of Globe Education. I think that is it.

You have partly answered my question already. We have talked about diversity and you have made a strong plea for more diversity given the lack of it, both behind and on the stage. Andrew Lloyd Webber's report highlighted the dominance of white students at drama schools, the lack of diversity on the UK stage, the financial barriers to training, the fact that BME actors are often only offered stereotypical roles. The latter point is the one I want to pick up on. How can we not only encourage actors from BME and other backgrounds, and especially different locations, to enter the industry—they are entering and we know there is a move to get more people in—but support them to stay in the industry? If you want a role, you have to wait ages before it says "a black role" and many of our actors, as you know, are leaving these shores and going to America; Samuel L Jackson complained that there are too many British black actors in America. Do you think we need to be colour-blind when we are casting, and what do we need to do to encourage actors to stay here and people to employ them in roles so that they do not have to leave these shores?

Christine Payne: This is an issue that is really close to my union's heart, and is a very important part of our equality and diversity campaign, which we call Play Fair. We have talked about pay; we have talked about coming into schools; we have explored those areas. I would say two things. First of all, it is recognising that the barriers to coming in are not

just about where you train; there are things like childcare. PIPA, which is a fantastic organisation, set up in the last few years, is looking at the impact of working in our industry on working families, on parents, on carers more generally.

Those sorts of initiatives are very important, but my union is looking in particular, because of the pressure we have had from members, at the casting process. How do we recruit people into our industry? If you look at the casting process, it is very interesting, and for a lot of our members it seems very closed and obscure, and, indeed, can be very expensive. Just coming to multiple castings can be quite costly. In our West End agreement we have tried to address that, for the first time, by saying that if there are multiple auditions performers will start to be paid for the cost of their transport at a certain point. There is no doubt that the centralisation of casting in London and the south-east is still a problem for many of our members.

We are looking at the barriers to the casting process and trying to broaden it out. My union is looking at producing a manifesto on casting, of what good casting looks like to us, to start addressing these issues. Accessibility you may think is a straightforward thing, but we have had members with disabilities who cannot even get into the casting session, because no thought has been given to their access. Simple things like that are very important. We think about the issue of inclusive casting and, therefore, incidental casting; why not cast a disabled actor, a black actor, an east Asian actor, a woman, a person with disabilities? That thought should be given before the casting session itself, and more thought needs to be given to looking at scripts and briefs with a more open mind and less narrowness.

The big issue that my members are facing more and more often is self-taping. Face-to-face casting is great, but it is becoming less used because of the pressure on the casting process, on the casting directors, on agents. Many of my members are not familiar with how you stand in front of your mobile phone and self-tape, and the result of that self-taping has a very important impact on whether you might get a job. As a union, we are trying to encourage our members and help them to do self-taping by investing in workshops—we are going to produce a video—and by working very closely with the Casting Directors Guild, the Personal Managers Association and the Co-operative Personal Management Association, so that we start looking better at the recruitment process into our industry and addressing the very point you have made about how we broaden opportunities for a more diverse cast.

Baroness Benjamin: How do we keep them, though?

Christine Payne: We pay them properly; we give them proper opportunities to be seen; we remove the barriers that many of them are facing now to just being seen. When they go to America and they get criticised, we support them. We say, if they are good enough to work in America, they are blooming well good enough to work here and we should be bringing them back. The very fact that they have had to go to

America speaks volumes about the lack of opportunities here. We have to create more opportunities.

Julian Bird: We are funding a big pilot on diversity in casting with Tonic Theatre, who are experts in this. That will look at the real issues associated with the casting process in six different types of theatres across the UK, through six pilots, and we will see over the next nine months or so what comes back from that: what are the practical issues; what are the toolkits we can help provide to other theatres up and down the country to aid that ongoing casting process? Equity is part of this as well. We are joined together in lots of these things. People sometimes think we and the unions are on opposite sides; we are absolutely not, in all these issues. We are both excited to see whether we can provide some real, practical help for people on this.

Baroness Benjamin: The other issue is the audience. I know that, if there is a BAME production, a BAME theatre audience is different to the normal audience that would go to the theatre and book in advance. We have to get the right stories in the theatre to get the BAME audience to go, and they will go, but they do not book in advance. How do you understand what you are dealing with? The culture you are dealing with is different from the ordinary theatregoing one you are accustomed to applying the system to.

I remember there was a show from Stratford East that went into a theatre in Shaftesbury Avenue; I think it was the Haymarket. It closed because they did not have the three or four months' advance booking they needed. People with a BAME background book on the night or the day before, so what can you do to educate our audiences? Does that come through schools, through getting people to understand the system? What do you think you can do, as somebody who works in theatre?

Julian Bird: It is all those things and more. Yes, it is about schools and opening people up when they are young to the opportunities of either participation or just watching. The marketing specialists in our field and in many fields are becoming much better at—awful word—segmentation of potential audiences and understanding the things that apply. How can I market to this sector versus that sector, versus that sector? It is not only people from different BME backgrounds. We also know younger people very rarely book ahead; they book very late. That whole dynamic around how audiences behave in advance of a show is completely changing, mainly due to these things and social media. The marketers are getting much better at that. It is a combination of all those things, not just one.

Q11 Lord Allen of Kensington: If I could move to the wider creative industry, I am particularly interested in what theatre is doing to work with film, television and radio. The Government have focused on this as a world-class industry, which it is, but what is theatre doing to build those relationships? Going back to the point you made earlier, Christine, what else could the Government do to help bring people together? In one of your answers, you talked about how they could play a catalytic role, so you might want to respond to that.

Julian Bird: As I mentioned, with regard to film and television, the theatre and performing arts is often the catalyst. It is the starting point for people's careers. There is probably no doubt that, collectively, we all have to do more work together across the industries, and maybe it comes back the other way as well: not just what theatre can do but what the film and television world can do. It is interesting to see, both here and in America, some of the major movie studios move more and more into the theatre world, in order to capitalise on their copyrights and say, "How can we use something?" Let us just use Warner's as an example: *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* or *Harry Potter*. Maybe you will talk to them, but I certainly know from some of those people that they are absolutely amazed and gobsmacked by the talent that we have on and off our stages. It can only be a good thing that those major commercial organisations are looking at the theatre world in that way, and I hope it will lead to more and more opportunities, in terms of both training and audiences.

Christine Payne: I agree with what Julian has said. Both sectors of our industries forget each other at their cost. They are very connected. Just as we have talked about subsidised and commercial theatre being very close, the overlap between theatre, film and television should not be underestimated. The film and television employers could do more to support our members, in particular, and the industry. The theatre industry has a very proud record of supporting developing actors, not so much for the film and television side. It has not shown a great support for our members through Skillset, CCSkills or even Drama UK, when it existed. They could do a lot more, to be honest.

Lord Allen of Kensington: Thank you. I should have declared my interest before I asked my question; apologies. I am chairman of Global Radio and advisory chairman of Moelis and Company, which advises media companies. I have a declarable shareholding in ITV and my partner is a trustee of a London theatre.

The Chairman: There has to be a yes or no answer to the next question.

Q12 **Baroness Bonham-Carter of Yarnbury:** I do not think we can, today, talk about skills in the theatre without referring to Brexit. It is not a yes or no, I am afraid. As our Government go into negotiations, what things are essential for you?

Christine Payne: My union wants to be part of the solution. We want to be part of the Creative Industries Council. We want to have a voice. We do not want to be responding to consultations; we want to be receiving those consultations. That there is no voice on the CIC representing the workforce is a gap. I feel passionately about this: this is a very big challenge, and not having the voice of the workforce on that council when those implications are being discussed is a huge gap. That is what I want.

Julian Bird: Ditto—I completely agree on that. We need to be in the room, not just receiving the information. On the trade side, we are very good, as a sector, at trading around the world, and I would hope that the Government will come to us and use some of the expertise that we have,

not just on trade but on the immigration issues and moving talent around the world. We have great expertise that we could offer, and I hope people will take us up on that.

The Chairman: Well, we have taken you up on all the good advice that you could give us. Thank you both very much indeed. That was terrific and got us off to a great start.

Baroness Kidron: Can I ask Christine to write to us about the Skillset point and extrapolate, because that is key to us?

The Chairman: Yes. It was a bit of a throwaway remark.

Christine Payne: Yes, it was, and it is not in my notes either.

Baroness Kidron: That is all right; you can put it in your notes.

The Chairman: That would be great. Thank you both very much.