

Developing audiences for drama: a critical analysis of England's regional touring strategy



WRoCAH funded Collaborative Doctoral Award between Performance and Cultural Industries at the University of Leeds and Royal National Theatre¹

Lead Academic and Partner Organisation Supervisors

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Project summary

Are you passionate about developing theatre audiences? Do you have skills as a researcher and practitioner and a desire to hone them both by working closely with the School of Performance and Cultural Industries and the National Theatre on a Collaborative Doctoral Award? If so, then please consider applying for this unique doctoral opportunity!

The aim of this project is to critically review different approaches to developing regional audiences for drama in England based on a comprehensive case study analysis of National Theatre's Theatre Nation project. Working alongside the dedicated evaluation team based at the University of Leeds and with relevant staff from the National Theatre and its key regional partner venues, the successful candidate will undertake an extensive literature review of leading audience development theories and practices from around the world and critically apply and compare these to the partnership model developed by NT with its regional venues.

Project description

There is growing evidence that audiences for drama outside London and the UK's large metropolitan areas are in decline. There is also a wealth of evidence to suggest that existing audiences for drama are significantly wealthier, better educated and less ethnically diverse than the population at large (Neelands et al, 2015; Taylor, 2010). In order to justify public investment, there is thus an urgent need for theatres to diversify their audiences. This PhD will respond directly to this challenging context by providing fresh empirical evidence to support future touring and audience development strategies in

¹ If you are selected by the CDA project team to be put forward to WRoCAH, your application will be considered competitively within the main WRoCAH competition. Being put forward for consideration is not a guarantee of funding.

England. It will therefore make an original contribution to the emerging academic field of audience development and inform future scholarship and practice in the field.

Theatre Nation Partnerships is a 3-year in-depth programme focused in six areas of England which aims to grow audiences and develop engagement in theatre in a sustainable way. Working with local partners, communities and audiences, the programme encompasses large and mid-scale touring, an extensive learning programme, sustained community projects with people of all ages and an audience development research project. The initiative reflects the NT's objective to support theatre and reach new audiences across the UK through its touring, digital and broadcast and education work. The NT intends that learning from this national programme of activity will inform its future strategies for national work. Importantly there is a strong desire for the learning to also help inform strategies for all partners in the project, and to be shared with the wider sector.

The core aim of this collaborative project is to critically review different approaches to developing regional audiences for drama in England based on a comprehensive case study analysis of NT's Theatre Nation Partnerships programme. Working alongside the dedicated evaluation team based at the University of Leeds and with relevant staff from the NT and its key partner venues, the successful candidate will undertake an extensive literature review of leading audience development theories and practices and critically apply these to the partnership model developed by NT with its regional venues.

Key research questions:

- Which key factors influence drama attendance amongst low-engagement audiences outside London?
- What are the most effective strategies to respond to these factors?
- How can theatres best engage with schools to drive up engagement with drama in a sustainable way?
- How can best practice in audience development be shared most effectively across a large organisation and across a touring partnership network?

Based on a critical analysis and application of the underlying theories, the successful candidate will undertake an in-depth analysis of the relative effectiveness of the tactics and strategies used by NT and its partners to target, reach, attract, engage and retain school groups and/or new or 'low-engagement' audiences. The PhD will explore these segments' attitudes towards drama and the NT brand, and investigate their perceptions of the various strands of the NT experience, including touring at different scales, broadcasting, learning programmes and audience development initiatives, and evaluate their respective propensity for sustained engagement. It will benchmark NT's approach with other tried-and-tested national touring and audience development models across the UK and beyond. We envisage that the successful candidate would work closely with the evaluation team at the University of Leeds, as well as with NT and its regional partners to produce critical, in-depth case studies of NT's audience development strategies.

How will the studentship contribute towards the priorities and objectives of the project partner

The National Theatre is committed to the strategic goal of making its productions more widely accessible across the UK through touring at different scales, education work, audience development and partnership with a wide range of venues. The Theatre Nation programme is aiming to test a number of different models, with the overarching goal of achieving a lasting impact on local audiences for drama. Research is therefore integral to the Theatre Nation project and the findings will inform the NT's future strategies for programming outside London, as well as the audience development strategies of the NT and its seven partner venues. The NT will share learning from the programme, captured through the research, with Arts Council England and with other touring partnerships and theatres, so there is scope for the research to contribute more widely to future touring policy beyond the National Theatre and the programme partners.

Engagement, outreach, dissemination and impact

The successful candidate will take an active role in any dissemination events organised by NT and the evaluation team and will take a leading role in shaping the research legacy of the project, including working alongside the PI (Dr Ben Walmsley) to develop evidence for a REF Impact Case Study. A symposium on audience development based on the evaluation of the Theatre Nation project is planned for December 2020.

Other Partner Organisations

- Cast, Doncaster
- The Lowry, Salford
- The Empire Theatre and Fire Station, Sunderland
- Theatre Royal Wakefield
- The Grand Theatre, Wolverhampton
- The Queens Theatre, Hornchurch
- The Audience Agency

Financial support

Full-time AHRC Competition Studentships for doctoral research are 3 years in duration (or 5 years part time). Awards are subject to satisfactory academic progress. Awards must be taken up in October 2019. No deferrals are possible. Awards will comprise UK/EU fees at Research Council rates and, for eligible students, a maintenance grant (£14,777 in 2017/8).

Eligibility

Please note that all applicants should meet the AHRC's academic criteria and residency requirements (<http://wrocah.ac.uk/new-student/2019-cda/>).

How to apply

Before applying for any WRoCAH Studentship, please first ensure that you have read the WRoCAH webpages about Collaborative Doctoral Awards, the WRoCAH training programme and requirements

<http://wrocah.ac.uk/new-student/2019-cda/>

Please note that the selection of Collaborative Doctoral Award applicants is a two stage process:

STAGE 1

Applicants must apply for a place of study

http://www.leeds.ac.uk/info/130206/applying/91/applying_for_research_degrees, clearly stating to which project you wish to apply, by the deadline given below.

To assess your academic ability to undertake three years of independent research you may be required to provide the following evidence:

- Project Statement (a two-page statement that conveys your motivation and enthusiasm for the project and demonstrate your suitability for the intended study)
- Curriculum Vitae
- Transcripts of marks for undergraduate and postgraduate degrees plus certificates where available
- Two academic references
http://ses.leeds.ac.uk/download/1484/reference_template-research_degrees from referees who will be able to provide their references by the deadline for Stage 1
- IELTS Certificate (if applicable)

Interviews will then take place to select a suitable candidate.

Deadline for STAGE 1 applications

3 December 2018

Date of interviews

10 December 2018

STAGE 2

Apply for funding to WRoCAH

Candidates selected after Stage 1 then liaise with the project supervisory team to submit a WRoCAH studentship application via the WRoCAH online application form by the **5pm on Wednesday 23 January 2019 deadline**.

NB: Candidates who have been unsuccessful in Phase One can submit a separate WRoCAH application as a non-CDA applicant.

For more information about this project contact

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