



# “Bristol Live” A Performance Culture of Ambition

A Discussion Paper

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## **Table of Contents**

### *i. Executive Summary*

#### **1. Introduction**

*What is this paper's purpose and how has it been produced?*

#### **2. Public Investment for Public Benefit**

*Why should we invest public money in performance?*

#### **3. Overview**

*What have we got in Bristol and what are we missing?*

#### **4. Values and Guiding Principles**

*What is the right "ethos" for publicly resourced theatre?*

#### **5. The Building Blocks of Opportunity**

*What are the opportunities and what do we aspire to in 5 years time?*

#### **6. Action**

*What can we do to make it happen?*

#### **Annex 1**

Consultees

#### **Annex 2**

Glossary of Acronyms

## **"Bristol Live": A Performance Culture of Ambition - A discussion paper Executive Summary**

Bristol faces the 21st century with a quickening cultural confidence reflected in the prosperity of its creative industries but undermined by pockets of social exclusion, economic deprivation and educational under-performance. As the 9<sup>th</sup> largest UK city, it has a population of 382,000 and a catchment area (measured by 45 minute drive time) of over 1.34m people. It is the South West's only conurbation with aspirations based on genuine metropolitan critical mass and so is able to make and participate in creative activity at all scales and in all disciplines.

Performance (a continuum that embraces drama, music, dance, circus and other disciplines that create events to happen in real time in front of an audience) is a crucial tool that can be used to achieve complex social, and economic ends as well as cultural dividends. When based on a commitment to quality and integrity, performance can link the economic clout of the creative industries with the social imperatives of creative communities. It can unlock the potential of young people through education and build creative environments across the public realm.

In the last 10 years the performance infrastructure in many UK cities has been transformed by lottery investment: the collapse of Bristol's plans for a harbourside Performing Arts Centre in the late 1990s means that Bristol hasn't benefited from this investment and now lacks appropriate 21<sup>st</sup> century facilities for either produced or presented work. The closure of Bristol Old Vic (BOV), the historical focus for professional production, has exacerbated this situation.

Against this background, Theatre Bristol (TB) was commissioned by Arts Council England to drive an extensive programme of seminars, consultation and research designed to raise the collective level of ambition for the sector. This discussion paper provides a point of reflection, focus and vision in this ongoing process. Section 1 details how the consultation was carried out. Section 2 discusses how investment in performance can generate public benefit. Section 3 summarises the current situation in Bristol. Section 4 looks at the right "ethos" for publicly resourced theatre. Section 5 looks at the issues and opportunities for the next five years. Section 6 argues that collective responsibility for a collaborative future is the way forward.

The over-riding impression from the consultative discussions has been of a dedicated group of passionate practitioners, (producers, writers, performers, directors, designers, technicians and marketers) standing on the threshold of something exciting – a plural, flexible, and diverse theatre sector willing and able to respond collaboratively to the needs of a 21<sup>st</sup> century creative city. If the city is to grow, we need this talent to thrive rather than merely survive. Although the case is made for increased investment, the paper concludes that if we are entering a period of constraint in public resources, money must be carefully targeted towards the talent and energy.

### **Key Issues**

- 1.** Bristol attracts and retains many artists working in performance across disciplines. However the paper highlights the need for better links between professional practice and training institutions as well as between professional production and young artists. Senior talent needs to be better identified and celebrated. Support for artists and companies at the "middle stage" of their career is weak and further investment in the producer function would help push this talent through to a higher level. The development of writers requires dedicated initiatives.
- 2.** Theatre and dance lack performance and production facilities appropriate to a first division city. There are effectively no middle scale spaces for theatre serving the city and only a limited number of spaces designed for other purposes that have the capacity to be used for performance. In particular there are very few community spaces suitable and available for performance across the city. Production facilities (including production office, rehearsal

spaces, writing spaces and making spaces of all kinds) need to be more accessible to a wider range of artists. Harbourside's "South Bank" (stretching from L Shed to Spike) represents an opportunity at the heart of the city for focused creative industries production. From a performance perspective the development of L Shed as a highly flexible European-style creation and presentation space is key.

**3.** There has been limited investment in regular promotion of international work, and international cultural exchange is compromised as a result. While a vibrant performance culture in Bristol depends on its resident artists, there is also a need to bring a stream of national and international talent to work in the city. In a performance culture of ambition and in conjunction with appropriate partners, a renewed BOV must respond to this opportunity. Alongside HE and training institutions, it is the only organisation with the resources and critical mass to work at the necessary scale.

**4.** Bristol is classically configured as a festival city. Its topography and urban design provide spectacular "stage sets" across the city centre. Although the festivals culture in the city has progressed significantly over the last 10 years it remains an area of huge potential for a performance culture of ambition. There are several deep rooted community initiatives on which to build and a strong and supportive group of circus and street theatre artists with the capacity to engage with the animation of the public realm through festivals of all kinds and at all scales.

**5.** Audiences need pathways through the theatre city as much as artists. The ability to "move" audiences from one venue to another is compromised by the fact that very little is known about the habits and wishes of Bristol audiences. Audience development initiatives are limited and under-resourced. A joined up box office that could serve the large live events organisations as well as smaller one-off performances would tackle this.

**6.** Bristol has several existing companies using participatory approaches to reach a number of constituencies – including youth offenders, people with disabilities, learning difficulties and mental health problems. Many lack the resources to grow into their full potential. Both the network of participatory services and ladders of progression from participatory work into professional production are under-developed and uncoordinated. As a result access points into participation are not clearly visible.

**7.** While there is a range of existing work focusing on young people, there is nonetheless a huge need for youth theatre in many parts of the city – especially those areas prone to social and economic disadvantage. The need for cross-city coordination of activity is acute. A network of Young People's Participatory Theatre could be developed across the city, engaging effectively with all relevant BCC departments and the Children's Trust.

**8.** BOV has historically been the focus for professional production in the city, reflected by the high proportion of public investment it has attracted. Unless this pattern of investment is to be reconsidered from first principles, the choices made by BOV about its future role and function are the critical variable in the future of produced and presented work in the city.

## **Moving Forward**

The next phase in the consultation process will be an Open Space event on the 19th July 2008 where interested parties will be invited to come together to discuss the issues and opportunities highlighted in the paper and agree actions that individuals, companies and organisations need to take.

## 1 Introduction

*What is the paper's purpose and how has it been produced?*

Bristol faces the 21st century with a quickening cultural confidence reflected in the prosperity of its creative industries but undermined by pockets of social exclusion, economic deprivation and educational under-performance. It is the South West's only conurbation with aspirations based on genuine metropolitan critical mass. 600,000 people live within a 20 minute drive of the city centre. Bristol is therefore capable of making, supporting and participating in creative activity at all scales and in all disciplines. It represents a perfect opportunity to test what kind of performance culture is best able to provide the full range of cultural, social and economic returns on public investment that theatre is uniquely capable of generating.

In December 2006 Theatre Bristol (TB) issued an open invitation to an Open Space event entitled *What's Possible and Who Cares?* 100 people came over two days to discuss what they thought was possible for theatre in Bristol. Amongst other actions TB decided to continue this enquiry by planning a series of seminars for autumn 2007. TB invited representatives from models of excellence from around the UK to come and discuss their work in an attempt to raise the level of collective ambition for theatre in Bristol. Then in May 2007 Bristol Old Vic (BOV) announced it was going to close the theatre from August 2007. The decision to close the Theatre Royal, the country's oldest continuously working theatre, and mothball the company followed a long period during which sequential BOV managements struggled to find a sustainable artistic, production and financial model for the King Street complex and its production facilities. During the winter and spring of 2007 costs rose and earned income declined to the point at which it was no longer possible to continue trading. What should be the city/region's creative engine for live performance had fallen silent.

TB responded by issuing an open invitation to a second Open Space event in July 2007 entitled *So, Where Do We Go From Here?* 200 people came despite the floods. The conversations that took place laid the foundations on which to re-build a fit-for-purpose performance culture for a thriving city. In December 2007 a new proposition for BOV was accepted by public stakeholders as a workable framework in which to consider the future of the King Street complex and the BOV Trust. In early 2008 it has coincided with the TB-driven investigation into what it might take to produce a performance culture of ambition in the city. TB was commissioned by Arts Council England to work with consultants Peter Boyden and Pippa Jones to carry out this investigation. The work being undertaken at BOV (under its new Executive Chair) to determine a new artistic policy in a sustainable business model has subsequently been fully engaged in the TB process.

This paper provides a point of reflection, focus and vision in this ongoing process to develop theatre in the city that acknowledges the significance of BOV - in terms of scale, facilities and the level of public investment it receives. That said it absolutely isn't about a single organisation. Its purpose is to stimulate a live performance culture of ambition for Bristol as a whole – a culture which sees BOV as one "building block of opportunity" among many. It anticipates a future in which "theatre" is part of a continuum of live performance (embracing drama, music, dance, circus and other disciplines) in events that happen in real time in front of an audience. It presumes that audiences and participants will be drawn to work of all kinds in an inter-connected network of dedicated, found and public spaces. Above all it is predicated

on the notion that for artists, audiences and participants alike, active engagement is better than passive consumption.

This is a Theatre Bristol document rather than the view of a single individual. The process has involved people across the city in an integrated programme of seminars, consultation and research during the spring of 2008. The people talked to are listed in Annex 1. Thanks to them all. The seminars have brought an important national perspective to the debate. John Fox, Lucy Neale, Pax Nindi, Tony Reekie, John McGrath and Jonathan Church have led discussions informed by different approaches to festivals, carnival, young people and "buildings that work". We are in their debt. Against this background, we have examined the opportunities and challenges presented by Bristol's existing and potential assets (in terms of infrastructure, programmes and talent) and the aspirations and perceptions of the theatre sector – both within and beyond the city.

We have taken pragmatic account of available public funding together with its impact on a strategy of ambition for Bristol - and for the artists, audiences and participants on which a dynamic culture depends. Although the case is made for increased investment, the presumption is that, at the least, public revenue support for theatre in Bristol from all sources will remain at full 2007/08 levels. Section 2 discusses how that investment generates public benefit. Section 3 summarises where we are now. Section 4 looks at the right "ethos" for publicly resourced theatre. Section 5 looks at the issues and opportunities for the next five years. Section 6 returns to the case for investment in a strategy of ambition and argues that collective responsibility for a collaborative future is the way forward.

***This discussion paper provides...***

- A stepping stone on the journey to a performance culture of ambition
- An impressionistic snap-shot of where we are in the spring of 2008
- An assertion of sectoral ownership - of both opportunities and difficulties
- A rallying call for everybody involved in performance in Bristol
- A statement of intent for the next five years
- An invitation to sustained partnership and collaboration
- A strategic context for future public investment decisions

***What the discussion paper is not...***

- A detailed audit of everything that's currently happening
- A new strategic plan for Theatre Bristol
- A short-term "quick-fix" for long-term problems
- A proscriptive view of a single approach to the future
- A solution to the challenges facing companies and individuals
- A prioritised shopping list for capital development

Although the paper has grown out of the consultation, in itself it is neither a destination nor a conclusion. The process has had innate value; its energy now needs to be harnessed, focused and re-doubled. We must make continuing use of the hard-won ability to communicate and to share. By implication it started with an attempt to fix something that seemed damaged; the debate has illuminated the emergence of a vibrant performance culture with the potential for startling good health. The task now is to unlock the potential. The over-riding impression from the consultative discussions has been of a dedicated group of passionate practitioners standing on the threshold of something exciting – a plural, flexible, porous and diverse theatre sector willing and able to respond collaboratively to the needs of a 21<sup>st</sup> century creative city.

## 2 Public Investment for Public Benefit

### *Why should we invest our money in performance?*

A performance culture of ambition (seeking social and economic as well as cultural dividends) depends on making good choices about public investment. The commercial end of the spectrum provides entertainment for profit. Sometimes it succeeds and sometimes it doesn't. Public money changes the equation. This paper concentrates on the application of public investment for public benefit – decisions which start and finish with public impact. The starting point is a better understanding of the nature of that impact.

### 2.1 Quality, integrity and ambition

There are issues of quality, scale and critical mass relative to ambition to be considered in a city the size of Bristol. Bristolians deserve the best. This is equally true of produced, presented and participatory programmes. We want to produce national "hot ticket" work in Bristol that people get on trains to come and see. We want to present the best work from the most exciting companies in the city knowing that Bristol audiences will flock to see it. We want the young people of Bristol to engage with and participate in a culture of ambition. We want to grow world-class performance talent in the city. It is a primary task of the TB process and of a re-invigorated BOV to bring these things about – not on their own, but in collaboration with other sources of creative energy within and beyond the city.

Culture is capable both of having profound value in its own terms and of delivering a wider return on public investment. The important thing is that the quality of the process and the quality of the outcome are inextricably linked. Whether it happens in the Theatre Royal or a community centre, the ability to create social and economic impact depends on the integrity of the art. Bad work goes nowhere – it alienates the people it is aimed at while frustrating both the practitioners that make it and the funders that support it. It is only by driving up quality (of both process and outcome) that we achieve both excellence and access.

### 2.2 Creative enterprise

Measured by GDP per head, Bristol has the second strongest economy in England outside London. As the 9<sup>th</sup> largest UK city, it has a population of 382,000 and a catchment area (measured by 45 minute drive time) of over 1.34m people. Outside London no other urban centre in the South West, the South Midlands and Southern England has anything approaching Bristol's creative capacity. It is, quite simply, the only regional city with metropolitan "critical mass" in terms of creative industries, practitioners, audiences and consumers.

The February 2008 Creative Britain strategy paper<sup>1</sup> launched by the DCMS suggests that in 2004 creative industries in UK accounted for 7.3% of gross value added. They have expanded at 5% a year for the last five years - twice the pace of the economy in general, twice as much as tourism and about the same as financial services. Between them they now employ over 1 million people (2.7% of total employment) in high value jobs. Across the South West the creative industries are worth an annual

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<sup>1</sup> *Creative Britain - New Talents for the New Economy*. Department of Culture Media and Sport. February 2008

£1 billion and employ nearly 5% of the workforce. The sector in Bristol is much better established than in other parts of the region, with a 12.8% growth in employment between 1998 and 2002 compared to a regional average of 8.2%. Bristol-based creative companies are growing at 4% per year and generating a turnover in excess of £360 million a year – over a third of the regional total.

Since it was first coined in the early 1980s, the term "creative industries" has been widely used and frequently abused. For Bristol, it reflects the reality of how the city's economy works at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Over the last 25 years, new media, film, TV and radio production companies, designers of all kinds, architects, musicians, writers, artists, sculptors, performers and other "creativity-driven" enterprises have voted with their feet. That so many have chosen to live and work in Bristol enhances the city's "creative capacity" and builds its "creative capital". They are part of a self-fulfilling prophecy through which more and more people of talent and energy are being attracted to the city and retained within it.

The contribution of performance-skills to the creative industries is routinely underestimated and misunderstood. Its impact stretches well beyond the 3% of total South West creative industries employment identified in 2005 by the Burns Owen Partnership<sup>2</sup>. Theatre works through skill-sets which are intrinsically team- and task-oriented. A live production exercises creative, technical, financial and project management skills in a complex deadline-driven environment. The whole is greater than the sum of the parts; the individual plays second fiddle to the collective. No wonder performance is such a powerful training tool.

More importantly, theatre provides a production line of talent which feeds into the wider creative industries at the same time as generating the "content" on which cross-media platforms depend. The core creative skills developed through subsidised theatre (writing, directing, designing and acting) are those which drive the bigger turnover worlds of film and television as well as commercial West End and touring theatre. A healthy performance sector feeds and drives creative enterprise across the city.

### **2.3 Sustainable communities**

We are diminished if we make a world in which creativity has only financial value. Performance is a crucial tool used in many different ways to achieve complex and important ends. The fragmentation of established communities and the isolation of individuals with no stake in a collective future drives the imperative for social inclusion. Publicly funded creative groups in Bristol play a crucial role in helping communities and individuals articulate their needs and aspirations.

Diversity lies at the heart of a creative city. Bristol's "communities" (whether of class, ethnicity, gender, age, religion or cultural inclination) draw strength from their interaction in a plural culture. The "achievement gap" between "creative movers and shakers" (many of whom have actively chosen to live and work in the city) and long-term problems in older city communities is a different proposition. A "two tier" city which structurally inhibits access to the benefits of "boom town" creative Bristol is profoundly damaging. We can't tolerate a future in which children from Clifton, Redland and Cotham inhabit a different world from those born in Hartcliffe, Lawrence Weston or St Pauls.

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<sup>2</sup> *Mapping the Creative Industries in the West of England*. Burns Owen Partnership. November 2007.

Performance supports these communities to a new sense of self-confidence based on the celebration of what makes them distinctive. Bristol's 13 local "neighbourhoods" are sometimes seen as a problem to the city's identity rather than an opportunity based on their distinctive personalities. As in any metropolitan centre, without a sense of belonging and ownership, some risk being trapped in a cycle of deprivation, exclusion and failure. Breaking that cycle is a key priority for the public sector. Helping people feel their contribution is valued and respected is the first step on the long journey. Through festivals and engaged participation, performance has a proactive role to play.

## **2.4 Children and young people**

Performance can therefore be a powerful economic and social driver. Through education and lifelong learning it also engages and empowers individuals of all ages. Their creativity is the central long-term component in developing the skills of the future generations of Bristolians. It's only through education that the benefits of a vibrant creative economy will extend to all Bristol's people; only thus will they, in turn, maximise their personal contributions to the city within self-confident sustainable communities. 23% of Bristol's population is aged between 16 and 29 – compared with a national average of 17.5%. Harnessing the creative energy of these young people is the key to Bristol's sustained prosperity. Performance is a significant route.

At primary and secondary school level, there is a particular tension for the city between its thriving creative economy and a state education sector in long-term trouble. The underlying reasons may be complex and intractable; the implications are nonetheless stark. 22% of Bristol children are educated in independent schools - compared with a national figure of 6%, this is the highest proportion in the country. It is the children of those unable to afford this option who are most in need of creative educational opportunity. They deserve help in conceiving and articulating a personal dream which raises collective ambition. Performance can provide it. Turning their dreams into reality through ladders of progression into working lives which build on this spark of creative energy isn't easy but it must be done. Making work for, by and with young people is therefore a primary component of a performance culture of ambition. There is nothing more important that the city could be engaged with.

## **2.5 Performance and the public realm**

The creative animation of the city's public spaces through festivals and events which respond to and reflect the unique power of Bristol's urban context remains an important challenge for the public sector. BCC has understood the opportunity and is constructing a response. That it plays to one of Bristol's performance strengths is a splendid piece of creative serendipity.

For several reasons, circus and street theatre artists have congregated in the city for over two decades. There is now a strong and supportive group of resident artists in the city with the capacity to engage with the animation of the public realm through festivals of all kinds and at all scales. BCC has also been active in developing a programme of city-wide festivals and events which respond to grass-roots energy and community engagement. From Ashton Court Festival to St Pauls Carnival and from Easton Community Festival to Harbourside the city has a robust framework on

which to build. The aspiration must be to build one of Northern Europe's most dynamic water-based cities animated by a high profile programme of performance activity which links outlying communities with their city centre.

### **3 Overview**

*What have we got in Bristol and what are we missing?*

This section provides a "view from space" (rather than an "inch to the mile" map) across a crowded and fast-moving landscape. Without claiming to be exhaustive, it draws together the position in the Spring of 2008. Based on a commitment to quality and integrity (see 2.1), performance links the economic clout of the creative industries (see 2.2) with the social imperatives of creative communities (see 2.3). It unlocks the potential of young people through creative education (see 2.4) while it builds creative environments across the public realm (see 2.5). A strategy of ambition must seek a return on public investment across all five. To create it there must also be an appropriate range of buildings and public spaces, programmes which generate production, promotion and participation to animate the spaces and people with the talent to link the two together. This section summarises existing circumstances from these three crucial perspectives.

#### **3.1 Spaces: Buildings and the Public Realm**

Live performance takes place in real time in a defined space. It is made in specialist environments. The nature of the spaces affect the experience of both artist and audience. The existence of a range of dedicated and non-dedicated buildings suitable for production and performance combined with appropriate and accessible public realm spaces is a pre-requisite of a strategy of ambition.

##### **3.1.1 Dedicated performance spaces**

The performance infrastructure in UK cities and towns has been transformed by lottery investment. New dedicated spaces have been built while existing theatres have undergone refurbishment. As a result the national building stock is probably in the best condition it's been in since the wave of municipal regional theatre building in the 1960s and early 1970s – the last time the King Street complex was refurbished. The collapse of the plans for a harbourside Performing Arts Centre in the late 1990s meant that, sadly, Bristol hasn't benefited from this investment. It is the only one of the top 20 UK cities to have missed out so fundamentally. As a result, it now lacks appropriate 21<sup>st</sup> century facilities for either produced or presented work. For a performance strategy of ambition, it is a big problem.

While the exciting new Colston Hall and St George's (with its high quality acoustic) plug the gap in terms of live music, theatre and dance lack performance and production facilities appropriate to a first division city. While the King Street complex is closed (for what can only be a limited refurbishment on restricted funds), there is no dedicated middle scale venue of any kind. When BOV re-opens, how it chooses to use its spaces becomes a major factor in the future balance of provision. School and university theatres (the QEH, Redgrave and Wickham Theatres) no longer provide regular public programmes of toured in work. Though its role is hugely important, at the smaller scale the Tobacco Factory currently lacks the resources to play a secure role as performance venue in the city. Circomedia has responded to

the closing of BOV by using its Portland Square space as a successful receiving venue but likewise currently lacks the infrastructure and resources to make this sustainable. acta's building is an important resource as a dedicated space for the making of participatory and community based work. Arnolfini's role as a venue for live performance remains strategically ambivalent – though of great significance. Though small, the pub theatre The Alma Tavern plays a significant role, particularly in support of new writing, programming 48 weeks of theatre a year.

### **3.1.2 Other performance spaces**

The city also has only a limited number of spaces designed for other purposes that have the capacity to be used for performance. In particular there are very few community spaces suitable and available for performance across the city – though Southville Community Centre deserves an honourable mention. Although they are available under some circumstances, small-scale venues such as The Hope Centre and the Albany Centre have ceased to promote theatre.

New initiatives constantly bubble up. As in other cities, some will gain a foothold and thrive; others will collapse in on themselves and disappear. The Residence project (under the wing of Artspace/Lifespace), for example, is a dynamic artist-led initiative through which seven young companies are collectively using the Old Horfield Police Station to make and present work. These kinds of initiatives lie at the heart of Bristol's creativity. A culture of ambition must seek them out and nurture them.

### **3.1.3 Public space**

Bristol is classically configured as a festival city with outdoor events taking place across the public realm. Its topography and urban design provide spectacular "stage sets" across the city centre, the wider conurbation and the hinterland. Open areas at the heart of the city like Portland Square, Castle Park, Queens Square and Millennium Square are tremendously important; so too are the vibrant initiatives connected with individual community festivals. The integrating, linking and demarcating presence of water, the pattern of public domain spaces and the quality of important parts of the built environment across the city are all huge assets for performance across the city.

Although the festivals culture in the city has progressed significantly over the last 10 years (13 festivals currently contain a theatre and performance element) it remains an area of huge potential for a performance culture of ambition. There are several deeply rooted grass roots community initiatives on which to build.

## **3.2 Programmes: Animating the City**

Buildings and spaces need programmes to animate them. They embrace produced, presented and participatory work in an inter-locking pattern of activity which constantly feeds into and off itself. Programmes are the life-blood of performance in the city; creative talent is the heart that pumps it.

### **3.2.1 Produced programmes**

BOV has historically been the focus for professional production in the city. This position is reflected by the high proportion of public investment it has attracted. Two things follow. While it is shut, Bristol isn't producing work which is appropriate to a performance culture of ambition. That this is equally true in terms of both quantity and quality reflects the extent to which BOV receives the lion's share of public resources. Once it re-opens, the way it perceives its role in the city will still, to a large extent, determine the nature of the work produced in Bristol, the processes through which it is made and the creative collaborations it embraces. This issue can't be fudged.

It follows that while BOV is closed the amount of production in the city and its capacity to make work is reduced. The Tobacco Factory's aspiration to produce remains unresolved and largely unresourced. A cluster of puppet-based organisations and (often informally constituted) companies drawing on Circomedia graduates do what they can – often with startling results. Travelling Light makes work as an ACE RFO specifically for young audiences and for national touring. The long-established Show of Strength continues to seek out project-funded opportunities. Theatre West serves the cause of new writing at the Alma Tavern on the same basis. acta's work (also as an RFO) within a community context is addressed elsewhere.

The formal evaluation of the work of TB's Creative Producers demonstrates how much this programme of artist support has achieved in a relatively short period of time. Although they have lacked the resources to play a full producer's role in the city, their impact at the development end of the spectrum is firmly acknowledged by practitioners. Their inability to invest in production is a significant constraint. Nonetheless they have undoubtedly caused work to happen that would not otherwise have surfaced. Collectively they represent an innovative approach which merits further development and support in a culture of ambition.

Knowledge from these Creative producers, as well as data from the user-generated TB web-site (which relies on artists to define their own artistic practice) suggests there are more than 80 "professional" companies active in the city. Most are struggling below the bottom rung of the funding ladder and heavily dependent on Arts Council's funding stream Grants for the Arts (GfA), which provides project not core funding. They are therefore directly at risk as the lottery budget shrinks. Of these 17 could be described as having a national or international profile while 67 have a regional or local profile. The web site also identifies 17 "non-professional" companies in a thriving amateur scene.

These small companies report limited access to funding and, equally importantly, to rehearsal and production facilities. A 2007 report<sup>3</sup> suggests the high commercial demand for work space in places like Paintworks and the Tobacco Factory tends to place them out of reach of subsidised performance companies. Ventures like Bristol Studios, Spike Island, Mivart St Studios, Centrespace, Jamaica St, Green Ginger Studios, the Albion Dockside, Kingswood Foundation, Albany Centre, Kuumba and acta make a combination of unmediated and under-resourced responses to the demand for production space. It would benefit from coherence.

While the balance of production in the city is erratic, uncertain and hand-to-mouth a surprising level of work is being created. In March 2008 25 companies in the city

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<sup>3</sup> *Bristol Creative Industries Workspace Study*. Prepared for South West Regional Development Agency by nmp. November 2007

responded to a questionnaire from TB asking for details of their work in the previous financial year. Between them they have:

- created 86 performance "products"
- given 859 performances to approximately 174,500 people
- 56 of these performances were abroad, 718 in the UK and 296 in Bristol

### 3.2.2 Presented programmes

Only a tiny proportion of the national and international work available in the touring market currently finds its way to the city. As a result audiences have diminished choice and lack a framework for risk. The city misses out on subsidised and commercial product at all scales and of all kinds. The impact on the "quality-of-life" considerations which drive in-bound company relocations isn't quantifiable but may well be significant. In part this is a question of the lack of appropriate buildings and in part the lack of investment in organisations funded to present work. In terms of the range and quality of available building-based presented and produced programmes, the two conspire to make Bristol something of a desert for theatre lovers of all kinds. Considering the city's demographic (and its resident talent), this is a gap in Bristol's entertainment offer.

A TB questionnaire sent to venues in March 2008 shows that in the previous financial year, between the Hippodrome, Tobacco Factory, Wickham, Alma, Arnolfini, BOV, and TB's Lighting the Touchpaper, there were:

- 1174 performances
- seen by approximately 565,500 people
- 151 performances were by companies from Bristol, 421 from elsewhere in the UK and 27 by companies from outside the UK

The TB web-site draws on a "space audit" carried out in 2004/05 which suggested there are 122 spaces in Bristol "suitable for live performance and/or rehearsal". Of these, 24 have full performance licenses and, of the 24, only three (BOV, Hippodrome and Colston Hall) have more than 400 seats while 15 of them seat less than 200 people. There are effectively no middle scale spaces serving this city of 600,000 people. There are two outdoor venues fully licensed for more than 2,000 people – a further eight have a history of successful applications for temporary licenses. BCC's Arts Festivals and Events department highlighted 13 annual festivals with a performance element in their programmes. None of them are resourced with commissioning or coproduction budgets capable of bringing international work to the city.

While the Theatre Royal and the New Vic are shut there are no dedicated theatre spaces between Bedminster's Tobacco Factory (with 200 seats) and Live Nation's Bristol Hippodrome (with 2,000). Even when it was open, BOV's commitment to toured-in work in both spaces was inconsistent. The Tobacco Factory has yet to achieve a stable trading base while the Hippodrome is frequently "block booked" with long-running commercial product. Faced with these circumstances, Circomedia's conversion of St Pauls in Portland Square has been pressed into action as a public venue – though it is conceived of and configured as a training resource. Its value may ultimately lie as a pivot point for outdoor festivals involving St Pauls Park and Portland Square itself. The live art and dance programme at Arnolfini remains a

beacon of experimental work grouped around the biennial and nationally significant In Between Time festival. The Cube in King Square, occasionally presents live work with an experimental and cross-discipline flavour. New and emerging initiatives such as the Artspace/Lifespace project demonstrate the sector's continuing capacity for self-renewal.

Once more, in terms of promoted work, music is better served by active programmes in a combination of commercial venues, notably the Academy, Colston Hall and St George's. Dance is scarcely served at all. The Lighting the Touchpaper pilot takes the rural touring model as a guide for urban community promotion. Its innovative approach suggests it may provide an important model for cross-platform promotional activity by supporting people to promote high quality professional live events in and for their local community.

Audiences need pathways through the theatre city as much as artists. The ability to "move" audiences from one venue to another is compromised by the fact that very little is known about the habits and wishes of Bristol audiences. Audience development initiatives are limited and under-resourced.

### **3.2.3 Participatory programmes**

Although Bristol has a long and honourable tradition in this area, the nature and extent of participatory programmes in the city is harder to quantify. Participatory work actively involves non-professional performers in creating original work (usually devised) through open-door policies without auditions. The professional participatory company is generally there to support and facilitate the process by providing expertise, advice and experience as well as acting as a creative producer. There is an equal partnership between the professional facilitators and the participants and shared ownership of artistic content. Although the primary focus is on the impact of the process on participants, there is a constant concern for the quality of the outcome.

BCC Arts Department supports five key companies to use performing arts in a participatory way. They are acta, Art and Power, Travelling Light, St Pauls Carnival, and Circomedia. These companies have a long-standing and much valued presence in the city. Other companies in the city working in a participatory way include Multi A, Firebird Theatre, Misfits, Myrtle Theatre Co. and Stepping Out. They collectively work through a range of approaches to reach a number of constituencies – including people with disabilities, learning difficulties and mental health problems. Arts and health, young carers and youth offenders are particular areas of interest. Most lack the resources to grow into their full potential. They are likely to be particularly affected by constraints in the GfA pot. The breadth of activity opens up the possibility of non-arts funding – a possibility to which companies have been quick to respond. The strength of Bristol's Creative Partnerships is widely acknowledged and there is considerable good will as it evolves into the new RiO initiative.

A TB audit in October 2006 identified 20 youth theatre organisations working with young people in the city. On the TB website 16 companies are listed as youth theatre companies. acta run eleven youth theatres, including three for young people with learning difficulties. This involves around 150 young people per week. Travelling Light has three groups with 55 regular attendees. They also run an annual Summer

School for 25 young people. BOV Education Department also continues to run a youth theatre programme during the period of closure.

For all the range and quality of existing work, there are gaps in many parts of the city – especially those areas prone to social and economic disadvantage. Once again these are the communities with the most vulnerable children at the point of maximum need. The majority of the work that does happen is project funded which has led to "stop start" provision with little capacity to develop talent through to higher levels. The need for cross-city coordination of activity is acute an aspiration made harder as there is no performance specific network for practitioners working with young people. The lack of an annual festival to showcase work and the absence of a city centre venue that is perceived as being welcoming and accessible to young people combine to limit aspirations and ambitions in this sector.

Work with young people feeds into adult community theatre and begins to provide the crucial ladder of progression into sustainable working lives (see Section 3.3 below). acta's ADVANCE project creates non-professional devised work for community touring within and beyond the city. Once again it is critically dependent on GfA funding and at immediate risk should it be further reduced.

Participation also embraces amateur activity. This sector is overlooked in most public exercises in cultural planning yet it is particularly strong in Bristol. 12 Amateur companies responded to a questionnaire from TB in April 2008. Between them they produce 33 full-length shows a year. Several groups also run rehearsed readings. Unfortunately audience data is not comprehensive enough to list. Almost all state that they struggle to find appropriate performance venues.

### **3.3 Talent: Making Things Happen**

Without people of talent, passion, integrity and energy working to use them well, theatre buildings, public performance spaces and revenue investment in their programmes all have limited meaning.

#### **3.3.1 Building the asset base**

In part TB has succeeded because it has become a collective voice for practitioners in the city. Before it existed key individuals lacked a forum for the discussion of common interests and practitioners seeking a start in the industry or wanting to develop their careers to the next stage lacked a map to guide them. This is as true of production and technical skills as it is for actors, designers and directors. The next phase of TB's existence needs to understand these key roles and develop them.

A convincing body of research demonstrates the importance of Higher and Further Education to a creative city. Bristol's two universities bring more than 36,000 young people into the city every year. Their primary and secondary impact on the city's economy is significant. Graduate retention figures are among the highest in the country. Along with the BOV Theatre School and Circomedia, they provide more than 400 highly motivated performance, drama and theatre graduates each year - a huge asset to the city. Filton and City of Bristol Colleges provide trained technicians in a range of performance-related skills. The creative gene pool is capable of annual refreshment at a high standard. Although its significance is widely acknowledged

within the business (the quality of its alumni ensures this is the case), the BOV Theatre School is a particularly under-valued resource within the city.

### **3.3.2 A sustainable life for Bristol artists**

75 individual theatre practitioners are listed on the TB web site or are known to the Creative Producers. Data from the same sources shows that in addition to people who class themselves as individual practitioners, there are 37 writers, 11 technical professionals, 33 sound designers, 26 producers, 44 designers, and 20 directors. Some of these people no doubt also work for the companies mentioned in Section 3.2. Many of these artists struggle to build working lives from performance in the city.

The consultation demonstrated the passion of artists in the city. It is a key task for a performance culture of ambition to support these artists to a sustainable future. The first couple of years after graduating can be very difficult, it is one point at which talented people are forced into other working areas and are lost - both to the sector and the city. The second notable point of loss of creative talent comes seven to ten years after graduating. At this stage of development companies and individuals are often still reliant on project funding. This instability matched with the cost of bringing up children and/or paying mortgages forces creative talent into other industries or managerial and administration roles.

### **3.3.3 Bringing "world-class" talent to Bristol**

To a large extent a vibrant performance culture in Bristol depends on its resident artists – but this isn't the whole story. From the perspectives of both artists and audiences we also need to bring a stream of national and international talent to work in the city – through residencies, teaching engagements, workshops and master classes as well as to create and perform. The lack of such engagement is a profound brake on the ability of young Bristol practitioners to stretch their practice. It also seriously compromises the range of experience available to audiences and the quality of production which happens in the city. In a performance culture of ambition and in conjunction with appropriate partners, the renewed BOV must respond to this opportunity. Alongside HE and training institutions, it is the only organisation with the resources and critical mass to work at the necessary scale.

## 4 Values and Guiding Principles

*What is the right "ethos" for publicly resourced theatre?*

This section sets out a public domain "ethos" which will guide, sustain and amplify public investment over the period.

A publicly resourced performance culture in Bristol will expect to:

- encourage and support world-class ambition whenever appropriate
- balance the need for produced, presented and participatory programmes
- encourage live performance as a focus for public debate
- help the city to talk to itself about the things it holds most valuable
- drive creativity through relationships which are dynamic, fluid, plural and flexible
- reflect the texture and flavour of an inter-cultural city
- demonstrate a commitment to the principles of empowerment
- be emotionally and economically accessible to all Bristol citizens
- understand the power of performance in education
- develop the contribution of performance to the creative economy
- make a positive contribution to the development of sustainable communities
- mediate between public and private sector interests
- work through a primary commitment to collaboration and partnership
- "add value" to other initiatives rather than compete with them
- develop open and inclusive management styles and operating cultures
- design and fine-tune fit-for-purpose governance structures
- respond to the shifting relationships between artists and audiences
- encourage active engagement rather than passive consumption
- be the recipient of increased public investment for widening public benefit
- ally that investment to a strongly entrepreneurial creative vision
- attract significantly more public investment from non-arts sources

## 5 The Building Blocks of Opportunity

*What are the opportunities and what do we aspire to in 5 years time?*

This section explores the huge opportunities that exist in Bristol to build a performance culture of ambition and proposes a set of aspirations in response. They provide objectives for stakeholders and practitioners over the next five years which are rooted in Section 3's overview and reflect Section 4's "Statement of Intent". Issues and aspirations are grouped under four headings. They should interrelate wherever possible. Each strengthens the other; all are diminished if one is weak:

- Production: making work
- Promotion: showing work
- Participation: taking part in performance
- Artists: working lives for performance professionals

### 5.1 Production

*Making work in Bristol*

A performance culture is bound together by the process of making work in a city. If that work aspires to and achieves excellence (in all its complex forms) then so much the better. The alchemy of performance combines creative imagination with craft skill to transform mundane environments into places of profound experience. Theatre's ability to reflect and reinforce the narratives which bind communities and cultures together must be specific to place as well as tracing the trajectory of the art form. It absolutely requires the production of more and better work across the city.

#### 5.1.1 Opportunities

*What are the opportunities for production?*

- Unless the pattern of investment is to be reconsidered from first principles, the choices made by BOV about its future role and function are the critical variable in the future of produced work in the city. Unless the new BOV proposition is driven by the aspirations set out in Section 4, they will have limited chance of being achieved
- The majority of Bristol's production investment has historically been controlled by BOV's one or two Artistic Directors. Plural focuses for production are highly desirable. The future role and function of BOV as a production resource for a variety of artists is central to increasing the scale and ambition of work produced in Bristol
- Bristol has inappropriate resources to build for outdoor work at the large-scale. If Bristol is to maximise its talent base in outdoor performance it must address this issue
- Production facilities need to be more accessible to a wider range of artists, including production offices, rehearsal spaces, writing spaces, and making spaces of all kinds which can be block booked during production periods
- Harbourside's "South Bank" (stretching from L Shed to Spike) represents an opportunity at the heart of the city for focused creative industries production.

It could embrace the new Aardman studio and BOV workshops. From a performance perspective the development of L Shed as a highly flexible European-style creation and presentation space is the key. It could include elements of Jerwood Space-style rehearsal and production facilities and a social gathering space for performance creatives

- Links between professional practice and training institutions must be improved
- A pool of technical and production skills needs to be re-built within the city
- Links between professional production and young artists need to be actively forged across all the creative skills involved in performance. Development in this area should embrace the spectrum of writers, stage and lighting designers, directors, actors, circus artists, dancers and musicians
- There should be greater value placed on spotting talent and, where it is found, greater investment in talent regardless of sub artform or genre. Senior talent should be identified and celebrated

### **5.1.2 The five year challenge**

*What do we aspire to over the next five years?*

- Production investment from all sources will have gone up considerably
- It will respond to creative energy and artistic talent rather than institutions
- It will regularly fuel local, regional and national collaborations
- The volume and quality of work "made in Bristol" will have increased
- A reputation for high quality product will have been established as a result
- Producers and coproduction investment will be drawn into the city
- Work produced in Bristol will generate post-home stage income by touring
- Work will be produced through a range of creative process and at all scales
- Artistic-driven collaborations will be brokered and delivered
- World class artists will regularly come to Bristol to make work
- Outdoor work will be a particular feature of the production landscape
- Bristol-made theatre will feed into and draw strength from other creative media production in the city
- There will be clear "ladders of progression" from ideas to full production
- A Bristol "South Bank" will be identified as a focus for creative production
- L Shed will be a designated centre for making and showing live work
- It will embrace rehearsal and production facilities

## **5.2 Promotion**

*Showing work in Bristol*

Promotion is a window into wider cultural worlds. A full spectrum of performance enhances our understanding of the plurality and diversity of human experience. Our ability to respond with tolerance and compassion is proportionately enhanced. Choice is the key. Work is available on the touring circuit across the performing art forms and at all scales. It plays in all kinds of venues to all kinds of audiences. Their level of engagement is the key to a thriving performance economy. Different financial relationships determine how much of the gross box office is retained by the venue and how much by the visiting company.

Historically ACE has concentrated its support on production rather than promotion. It continues to see its primary responsibility in this way – with funding for artists preferred to funding for audiences. Support for the bricks and mortar of a flexible built infrastructure at all scales of activity remains low on the list. The renewed emphasis on "excellence" is likely to reinforce this approach. Section 3.1 showed the extent to which Bristol currently misses out because of problems with its venue infrastructure linked to the lack of investment in presented programmes. Inappropriate performance infrastructure for a city the size of Bristol remains a significant challenge to promotion in a performance culture of ambition.

### 5.2.1 Opportunities

*What are the opportunities for promotion?*

- There has been limited investment in regular promotion of international work, and international cultural exchange is compromised as a result. A renewed BOV programme needs to respond to this situation
- Plural focuses for promotion at all scales, in many spaces, indoor and out, are highly desirable. Investment must, therefore, support plurality
- The *Lighting the Touchpaper* pilot warrants further development as a cross-platform promotional activity supporting people to promote high quality professional live events in and for their local community
- The Tobacco Factory needs to achieve a stable trading base if it is to sustain its significant contribution to promotion in the city
- Venue/promoter networks must be improved and visions shared
- A joined up box office that could serve the large live events organisations as well as smaller one-off performances would provide an opportunity for much greater knowledge of audiences. The leadership of a project of this size could lie with Colston Hall
- Outdoor performance in the city needs more coherent programming. Single agency leadership is needed to drive it forward
- The contribution of Arnolfini's live programme to Bristol's national reputation as a centre for Live Art and Experimental Theatre should be acknowledged and celebrated
- New and emerging initiatives should be nurtured and developed

### 5.2.2 The five year challenge

*What do we aspire to over the next five years?*

- "Key venues" will be supported with integrated stakeholder partnerships
- Bristol will promote high quality performance work across a range of forms
- World-class performance in the city will draw an audience from across the UK
- World-class and home-grown work will be linked through partnership, residency, skills sharing, and ideas exchange
- Artists will receive unrivalled levels of access to promoted work of all kinds
- So too will young people
- Access to quality work will benefit from appropriate distribution across the city
- Accessible and vibrant community venues will balance the flagships
- 24 hour programming will attract new audiences
- A "Bristol Live" map will give audiences a clear idea where to go for what
- A central box office will simplify ticket buying and consolidate patron data
- Designated "satellite" box offices will spread the point of access
- Patron data will be systematically collected, analysed and used
- Audiences will be developed by sharing that data amongst venues
- A network of festivals will bring high quality work of all kinds to Bristol
- Outdoor work will become a major speciality at the heart of such festivals
- New and emerging promotion initiatives will be given the support and space to thrive

### 5.3 Participation

*Taking part across the city*

"Active engagement" rather than "passive consumption" remains a recurring theme in government policy as it considers the purpose of public investment in culture. It is reflected in the priorities of the agencies which channel treasury resources via the DCMS to the organisations that use them – including ACE. This isn't to undermine the power of professional live performance; audiences can be as actively engaged as participants. Indeed the existence of an informed and critical audience is a crucial component of the performance equation. One of the key determinants of good theatre is its ability to bring people to the edge of their seat in response to the inherent risk of the artist in the living moment. It doesn't happen the same way sitting back in a cinema's comfortable seats immersed in high volume surround sound – or in response to other technologically reproduced creative forms in which the pause button can intervene at the consumer's convenience.

Engagement through participation is something else. Ever since Jennie Lee's pioneering work as Minister for the Arts in the mid-1960s there has been a

developing understanding that the ability of the arts to transform lives (rather than merely to touch them) is a powerful tool for personal and community development. To argue for the primary value of the arts as a "civilising" influence in our culture (as could easily be done in the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century) is to lose touch with the realities of 21<sup>st</sup> century politics. The recent emergence of "excellence" adds to rather than replaces the sense that public benefit requires more than the subsidy of "high art" so that ticket prices can be kept lower than market forces might dictate. We need excellent participatory programmes just as much as we need excellent professionally produced and presented work. In this sense participation embraces a range of approaches from youth theatre through community programmes and into amateur practice. A performance culture of ambition must embrace all three.

### 5.3.1 Opportunities

*What are the opportunities for participation?*

- Bristol has several existing companies using varying participatory approaches to engage with different constituencies across the city. These companies lack the resources to respond to the scale of the need, and current provision is erratic and under-resourced. As a result both the network of participatory services and ladders of progression from participatory work into professional production are under-developed and uncoordinated. Access points into participation are not clearly visible
- Many of the companies working in this area attract funding from non-arts sources, and only a small minority are funded as RFOs by ACE, most being heavily dependent on GfA funding from ACE SW. The breadth and reach of participatory activity opens up the possibility of non-arts funding and this opportunity needs to be maximised
- There should be greater linkages between participatory activity and produced and presented professional work
- In terms of youth theatre there are pockets of energy, talent and commitment in the city (Travelling Light, Circomedia, Myrtle, acta, KFL, and BOV) that provide excellent cornerstones for developing a more strategic approach. The Arts Awards (a national qualification developed by ACE and Trinity Guildhall) provides an excellent infrastructure for developing and accrediting individual talent
- A performance "home" for young people should be developed in the city centre to provide a high profile focus for work made by, for and with young people. This space needs to be exciting, safe and suitable for all ages to experiment, learn and develop. This central hub must be located within a web of local and specialist facilities
- A network of Young People's Participatory Theatre should be developed across the city, engaging effectively with all relevant BCC departments and the Children's Trust. Access to taking part would be improved through greater levels of visibility for existing provision and the identification of gaps. An annual showcase would raise ambition and aspirations in the field

- YAB (Youth Arts Bristol) working in partnership with TB provides a good starting point for developing a new strategic network of youth theatre practitioners

### **5.3.2 The five year challenge**

*What do we aspire to over the next five years?*

- Investment in participatory practice from all sources will be increased
- Barriers between consuming and taking part will have been dismantled
- There will be clear access points for any child or adult to take part in theatre
- Those access points will be located within their communities with a good geographical spread across the city
- Social, ethnic, geographic or financial circumstances will not be a constraint
- Young people will have greater levels of access to promoted work
- A network of Young People's Participatory Theatre will be in active operation supported by special interest agencies for those young people with talent and for those from excluded groups
- It will be underpinned by groups with expertise in specific art-forms, e.g. circus, text based work, carnival, writing etc.
- It will engage with all relevant BCC departments and the Children's Trust
- Companies will share examples of good practice
- An annual showcase event will celebrate youth theatre across the city
- The principle of entitlement will govern performance activity in schools
- It will be a central building block on the government's "cultural offer"
- Links will be built from youth to community theatre
- Young participants will acquire accredited training of value in the work place
- Ladders of progression from youth theatre to professional practice will be built
- The principle of excellence will apply to process as much as to outcome
- Links will be forged between participatory programmes and festivals
- The value of amateur and informal participatory practice will be acknowledged
- There will be champions for performance across the city providing inspiration and mentoring
- This will be underpinned by a network of community champions working in schools, youth clubs and children's centres to encourage and facilitate participation

## 5.4 Artists

### *Working lives for creative professionals*

The sector depends on the producers, writers, performers, designers, technicians and marketers who routinely pull off the little miracle of performance. They are the life-blood of an industry which provides the narratives which bind our culture with the ties of shared live experience. If the city is to grow, we need them to thrive rather than merely survive.

This is especially true for young creative talent at the start of its working life. We need to understand the barriers experienced by young people. Their access points into the profession must be demystified and simplified. Ladders of progression must be designed and constructed which reflect the reality of professional practice. Only then can the city fully benefit from the creative skills of young Bristolians from all parts of the city and of those young people who choose Bristol for their undergraduate or postgraduate training. We need to retain more of them within the city by helping them through the first two years of their working lives. The work they make should then proudly be exported as having been "made in Bristol".

We also need to bring performance professionals of the highest quality to work in the city and to share their experience with both resident creative talent and audiences. This is more than simply hosting companies through presented programmes – though this has its own significance. It requires an understanding that it is the making of work in the city that provides the primary performance driver. The critical debate about what kind of work is best made through what kind of process has energising value – but its impact can only be judged by the quality of the work produced by the artists who make it happen.

### 5.4.1 Opportunities

#### *What are the opportunities for Artists?*

- Bristol attracts and retains many artists working in performance across disciplines, as having been trained in the city many choose to make a working life here. TB has been an important resource in responding to their needs, with the Creative Producers being a significant TB initiative in key areas. Circus, live art, street theatre, experimental, physical and visual theatre have particularly benefited from their work. Support for artists and companies at the "middle stage" of their career is weak and further investment in the producer function would help push talent through to higher level, better resourced production
- Developing a route map for progression from the seed of an idea to the point at which the art meets the audience and developing access to this process of production at all stages and for all people is essential
- The development of writers requires dedicated initiatives. TB's work with Writernet and a renewed BOV could have a significant impact in this area
- The value of TB as a forum for discussion and debate and a locus for the industry's collective voice has been widely acknowledged in this consultation. It should sustain this role

- The importance of social networking opportunities across artistic disciplines should be acknowledged and supported
- Both companies and individual artists would benefit from a framework within which to provide critical feedback to each other about work
- Recent platforming opportunities have been well attended by audiences and well subscribed to by artists and companies. Further development of platforming opportunities will endorse and encourage artists
- Relationships between HEIs and producing companies need to be improved in order to build bridges from training to professional practice. FEIs need to feed technical and production expertise into the sector

#### **5.4.2 The five year challenge**

*What do we aspire to over the next five years?*

- There will be clearer ladders of progression for practitioners
- Talent pathways will exist through to high level production
- They will feed into and off other major producing creative industries
- Artists will choose to make a working life in Bristol
- Creative talent will move between one creative industry and another
- Such moves will be positively encouraged by the structures that support them
- Senior talent will be linked via mentoring relationships with emerging artists
- Artists in the middle stages of their career will be supported
- Creative Producer energy will be injected into middle-scale companies
- Formal and informal critical feedback will happen regularly
- This will be true for both individual companies and artists
- Relationships between HEIs and producing companies will be much closer
- FEIs will feed technical and production expertise into the sector
- The role and function of BOV and its relationship to Bristol artists and companies will have been clarified and validated
- World-class artists will regularly visit Bristol to make work
- While here, they will actively engage with Bristol practitioners

## 6 Action

*What can we do to make it happen?*

If Sections 4 and 5 set out what we would like to achieve, what can we do to make it happen? Is it only about money – or are there other courses of action to be taken?

### 6.1 Strategic Investment

*Investing at the tipping points of opportunity*

ACE SW and BCC both provide core revenue funding for theatre in Bristol. ACE SW also manages the crucial GfA development investment of lottery resources.

Agreed "Regularly Funded Organisation" (RFO) investment in Bristol theatre for 2008/9 from ACE SW stands at £1,754,269 – plus a small proportion of the Arnolfini's £1,108,000 dedicated to live art and dance and a proportion for the performance related work of the Asian Arts Agency £25,000.

£578,000 of total RFO funding is allocated to the Bristol Old Vic. The remainder is allocated to Kompany Malakhi, Travelling Light, Circomedia, acta, and St Paul's Carnival.

A further £672,000 of funds for Bristol are "reserved to support the development of new ways of initiating and nurturing theatre production. The focus of this work is Bristol Old Vic, working with the widest possible range of other artistic and funding partners".

BCC's funding in 2007/08 to "Key Arts Providers" with a performance remit totalled £419,070. In rounded terms, this consisted of £274,000 to BOV with the rest going to St Pauls Carnival, acta, Travelling Light, Circomedia, Theatre Bristol, SoS, Shakespeare at the Tobacco Factory and the Tobacco Factory. A further £110,710 was allocated to Arnolfini, Art and Power, Kuumba, and the Asian Arts Agency, companies/agencies who have performance as part of their remit.

#### 6.1.1 Public investment in a period of constraint

It's easy to talk about cultural "strategies" as if the variables are controlled by the good will of the honest citizens. The truth is that the "creative industries" work in a "mixed economy" which links public investment for social purposes with entrepreneurial energy and the commercial exploitation of "product". In retrospect, the last ten years may come to be seen as a golden period for public investment in the mixed cultural economy. Treasury investment through the DCMS has increased as the complex role of culture in our communities has become better understood. The lottery has provided invaluable capital and (latterly) revenue support. Non-arts funding sources have responded to this sense of broadening opportunity. Regional theatre has been a particular beneficiary.

It's much easier to make positive change happen in an expanding universe than it is in a sealed system of finite resources. Sadly, we now face the likelihood that public sector resources of all kinds are entering a period of cyclical constraint – possibly

exacerbated by economic recession. ACE's GfA funding, for example (the key point of support for the development end of the creative spectrum) is under increasing threat from the Olympics and the general shrinking of lottery investment. Under these circumstances it is even more important that resources are concentrated intelligently. We must get the money to the talent and the energy rather than the bricks and mortar and the institutions. The discussion must therefore focus on how to make better decisions about highly targeted public investment.

### **6.1.2 Implications for a strategy of ambition**

Any consultative process runs the risk of generating a series of recommendations that respond to perceived problems but which carry a price tag beyond the reach of available resources. This discussion paper acknowledges the problems implicit in a world of shrinking public investment while insisting that a strategy of ambition is both achievable and desirable.

If it can only happen through funding increases from ACE SW and BCC then we are likely to be disappointed. Importantly, it isn't just about how much money is invested (though that's important) it's also about how well it's targeted. We must make the case for sustained and enhanced investment while seeking out the tipping points of opportunity at which each pound of public money has the maximum impact.

The aspirations touched on throughout this paper suggest that new ways of working combined with greater strategic focus will unlock a strategy of ambition for the city. BOV's catalytic impact at the heart of a network of city-wide initiatives is central to this new way of working – so too is an evolving role for TB as a sectoral development agency focusing on practitioners. Their ability to function collectively at the heart of a reenergised performance sector is the key determinant of success over the next five years.

## **6.2 Collective Responsibility**

*Working together to join things up*

Although the case must continue to be made with energy and focus for the sustained year-on-year increase of public investment, we must accept greater levels of individual and sectoral responsibility for the future of performance in the city. There's no point living in a culture of displaced blame. We need to construct opportunities, drive them through and own the outcome.

### **6.2.1 Owning the future**

Different routes to the same destination must therefore be designed and followed. They may involve using existing resources in different ways or they may seek to attract other kinds of investment and self-generated income. Either way they will involve taking responsibility for the future in a collaborative world rather than waiting for financial interventions from a public sector which lacks the ability to respond.

The consultation shows great willingness and energy to work together for the common good and to drive towards collective solutions which unlock Bristol's full potential. Crucially, BOV is actively engaging with the process as it articulates a new

approach to live production across the city. Alongside TB it offers a new paradigm for Bristol which reflects and reinforces the aspirations set out in Section 3 of this paper.

Through the consultation there has been significant "buy-in" to the culture of ambition from Key Stakeholders and the wider theatre industry. It is now incumbent on all those parties to realise the strategy through their actions and activity. It is not the place of this paper to state on their behalf what future action they will take to make the significant contribution to achieving the strategy that is required of them. That process will continue to evolve and must be allowed to do so.

### **6.2.2 What next?**

The next phase of this process will be marked by an Open Space event on 19<sup>th</sup> July 2008 where interested parties will be invited to come together to discuss the issues and opportunities highlighted in this paper. It will be an opportunity to share ideas and agree actions that individuals, companies and organisations will now take in order to achieve a culture of ambition. The Open Space event will kick start an ongoing process of response to this document, to the changing needs of the industry and to the ongoing attempts of Bristol to achieve a performance culture of ambition.

### **6.2.3 What are the key questions?**

- What role will you play to contribute to achieving the ambition in this document?
- What role will BOV play?
- What will other RFOs do?
- What will ACE do?
- What will BCC do?
- What will TB do?
- What does the industry want from TB now that the context within which it was conceived has changed so significantly?
- What will individual artists and companies do?
- What will HEIs do?
- What will the RDA do?
- What will organisations from related industries do?
- What relationship will BOV have to the wider sector?
- What relationship will TB have with BOV?
- What relationship will BCC and ACE have with each other and the wider sector to ensure best possible outcome?
  
- How do we account for the outcomes to these questions?
- If we are all responsible where is the locus of leadership?

## **Annex 1 Consultees**

### ***Seminar 1: Lucy Neal (LIFT) and John Fox (Welfare State)***

Tanuja Amarasuriya	Theatre Bristol
Angie Belcher	Art and Power
Sita Calvert-Ennals	Youth Theatre Director/Lost Luggage Theatre Co.
Helen Cole	Arnolfini
Alison Comley	Theatre West
Dr Colette Conroy	UWE
Verena Cornwall	Theatre Bristol (CAST)
Helen Crocker	Circomedia
Dan Danson	Director/Producer
Paul Goddard	ACE SW
Sheila Hannon	Show of Strength
Phillippa Haynes	BCC
Simon Jutton	ACE SW
Katie Keeler	Theatre Bristol
Bim Mason	Circomedia
Clarie Middleton	Bristol Old Vic
Sarah Pym	The Works
Ali Robertson	Tobacco Factory
Chris Ryde	Equity
David Straun	Director/Producer
Jane Totney	Bristol Old Vic
Ian Wainwright	Bristol Old Vic

### ***Seminar 2: Pax Nindi (Carnival)***

Tanuja Amarasuriya	Theatre Bristol
Neil Beddow	acta
Amirah Cole	Kuumba
Alison Comley	Theatre West
Helen Crocker	Circomedia
Dan Danson	Director/Producer
Sarah Dickenson	Writernet
Adam Gent	Theatre Bristol
Paul Goddard	ACE SW
Sheila Hannon	Show of Strength
Richard Headon	Desperate Men
Katie Keeler	Theatre Bristol
Jude Merrill	Travelling Light
Dick Penny	Bristol Old Vic
Carol Sherman	Circomedia
Jan Winter	Circomedia

### ***Seminar 3: Tony Reekie (Imagine) and John McGrath (Contact Theatre)***

Tanuja Amarasuriya	Theatre Bristol
Neil Beddow	acta
Sita Calvert-Ennals	Youth Theatre Director/Lost Luggage Theatre Co.
Helen Cole	Arnolfini
Helen Crocker	Circomedia
Dan Danson	Director/Producer
Jo Dereza	South West Arts Marketing
Sarah Dickenson	Writernet
George Ferguson	Tobacco Factory
Hilary Garnham	ACE SW
Lucy Gibbs	The Special Guests
Cath Greig	Travelling Light
Sheila Hannon	Show of Strength
Philippa Haynes	BCC
Richard Headon	Desperate Men
Katie Keeler	Theatre Bristol
Jamie Luck	The Egg/Theatre Bristol
Bertel Martin	City Chameleon
Bim Mason	Circomedia
Barbara Matthews	ACE National
Jude Merrill	Travelling Light
Chino Odimba	Writer/Producer
Dick Penny	Bristol Old Vic
Edward Rapley	Artist/Residence
Ali Robertson	Tobacco Factory
Claire Teasdale	BCC
Ian Tidbury	Bristol Old Vic
Helen Tomlin	acta
Kate Yedigaroff	Producer/Mayfest

***Seminar 4: Jonathan Church (Chichester Festival Theatre) and Dick Penny (Bristol Old Vic)***

Tanuja Amarasuriya	Theatre Bristol
Amy Belson	Bristol Old Vic/BOV Theatre School
Amirah Cole	Kuumba
Helen Cole	Arnolfini
Verena Cornwall	Theatre Bristol (CAST)
Helen Crocker	Ciccomedia
Sarah Dickenson	Writernet
Lyn Gardner	The Guardian
Sheila Hannon	Show of Strength
Simon Jones	Bristol University
Jamie Luck	The Egg/Theatre Bristol
Bim Mason	Circomedia
Jude Merrill	Travelling Light
Chino Odimba	Writer/Producer
Ed Rapley	Artist
Ali Robertson	Tobacco Factory
Chris Ryde	Equity
Carole Sherman	Circomedia
Tom Sherman	Creaking Door Theatre Company/Equity

***Consulted one-to-one or in small groups***

Billy Alwen	Cirque Bijou/CAST
Tanuja Amarasuriya	Theatre Bristol
Edson Burton	Writer
Neil Beddow	acta
Jon Beedell	Desperate Men/CAST
Sam Berger	Director
Sarah Bleurs	Fairgame Theatre Company
Julian Bracey	Cirque Bijou/CAST
Alex Bradley	Artist
Sita Calvert-Ennals	Youth Theatre Director/Lost Luggage Theatre Co.
Miles Chambers	Writer
Rachel Clare	Crying Out Loud
Sharon Clark	Writer
Sally Clements	ACE SW
Amirah Cole	Kuumba
Helen Cole	Arnolfini
Alison Comley	Theatre West
Dr Colette Conroy	UWE
Mark Conway	Gonzo Moose
Helen Crocker	Circomedia/CAST
Joanna Crowson	Circomedia
Dr Rebecca D'Monte	UWE
Dan Danson	Director/Producer
Hilary Davies	Myrtle Theatre
Jenny Davies	Writer
Sara Davies	BBC
Jo Dereza	South West Arts Marketing
Sarah Dickenson	Writernet
Rachel Fagan	Equity
Michele Farmer	BCC
George Ferguson	Tobacco Factory
Chris Garcia	SWRDA
Lyn Gardner	The Guardian
Hilary Garnham	ACE SW
Adam Gent	Theatre Bristol
Paul Goddard	ACE SW
Kate Gough	Young Bristol
Gwen Hales	Frenetic Engineering/CAST
Sheila Hannon	Show of Strength
Phillippa Haynes	Bristol City Council
Annabelle Holland	Frenetic Engineering/CAST
Seth Honnor	Theatre Bristol
Sandy Hore-Ruthven	Kingswood Foundation
Graeme Howell	Colston Hall
Katie Keeler	Theatre Bristol
Matt Little	Creative Partnerships/RiO
Gill Loats	Show of Strength/Arts Award Trainer - Young Bristol

Sarah Lovell	ACE National (YPPT)
Jamie Luck	The Egg/Theatre Bristol.
Patrick Malahide	Bristol Old Vic/Actor
Tom Marshman	Artist
Bertel Martin	City Chameleon
Bim Mason	Circomedia/CAST
Barbara Mathews	ACE National
Louis McKenzie	Student Bristol Old Vic Theatre School
Jude Merrill	Travelling Light
David Micklem	Battersea Arts Centre
Bill Mitchell	WildWorks
Rob Mitchell	First Born Creatives
Hattie Naylor	Writer
Dr Lucy Nevitt	UWE
Katy Noakes	Gallery 37/BCC
Chino Odimba	Writer/Producer
Adam Peck	Fairground Theatre/Writer
Dick Penny	Bristol Old Vic and Watershed
Tom Phillips	Writer
Chris Pirie	Green Ginger
Ed Rapley	Artist/Residence
Ali Robertson	Tobacco Factory
Paul Rummer	Bristol Old Vic Theatre School
Chris Ryde	Equity
Tom Sherman	Creaking Door Theatre/Equity
Jaswinder Singh	Asian Arts Agency
Antony Smith	Writer
David Sproxton	Aardman Animations
David Straun	Director/Producer
Claire Teasdale	BCC
Debbie Thomas	BCC
Clare Thornton	Artist
Ian Tidbury	Bristol Old Vic
Helen Tomlin	acta
Ed Viney	Writer/Director
Annie Warburton	Arts Matrix
Professor Martin White	Bristol University
Emma Williams	Artist
Heather Williams	Myrtle Theatre
Ursula Wills Jones	Writer
Jan Winter	Circomedia
Stephen Wray	BCC
Kate Yedigaroff	Producer/Mayfest

## **Annex 2**

### **Glossary of Acronyms**

TB	Theatre Bristol
BOV	Bristol Old Vic
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
DCMS	Dept for Culture, Media and Sport
BCC	Bristol City Council
QEH	Queen Elizabeth Hospital
acta	Access Creativity Theatre Arts
ACE	Arts Council England
RFO	Regularly funded organisation
GfA	Grants for the Arts
RiO	Real Ideas Organisation
HE	Higher Education
ACESW	Arts Council England South West
HEI's	Higher Education Institutions
FEI's	Further Education Institutions
SoS	Show of Strength
RDA	Regional Development Agency
CAST	Circus and Street Theatre in Bristol
UWE	University of West of England
SWRDA	Southwest Regional Development Agency
YPPT	Young People's Participatory Theatre