

# **Report on the attitudes toward theatre and theatre attendance in the UK, and how Royal Theatre can use a new application to increase attendance and interest**

## Introduction

Within this study, we present our research on the differing attitudes toward theatre and how this can affect theatre attendance. This ranges from assessing data regarding those with disabilities or illnesses, location and travel, and diversity within the theatre industry.

Alongside this, we are to present a number of recommendations surrounding ways in which an application or website would help to support and enhance the business of the Royal Theatre. From evaluating the data we have compiled, we have suggested features such as a feedback system, an information page, and drop down or comment boxes when booking seats.

## Attitudes to theatre and theatre attendance in the UK

There are varying attitudes to theatre and theatre attendance within the United Kingdom. From 2020 to present, 97% of millennials, Gen x, and baby boomers have heard of going to the theatre. 63% of them like attending the theatre, whilst 14% dislike going. 20% are neutral. (The latest data is based on 1361 nationally representative interviews of the GB population, collected during Q1 2022.)<sup>1</sup>.

This data suggests that whilst many generations have heard of going to the theatre, only 63% will actually attend. There are numerous factors why 37% of the population choose not to go, or are apart of the 14% who dislike attending.

To properly understand these factors, we must first consider the members of the British population who have disabilities that alter their experience of visiting the theatre. This includes those with an illness or disability that means they have significant difficulties with memory or the ability to learn, concentrate or understand.

The average running time of a West End show is typically between 2 hours – 2 hours and 30 minutes<sup>2</sup>. For those with disabilities or disorders such as Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder<sup>3</sup>, sitting in the same seat for 2 and a half hours and having to continuously concentrate on one area will most likely be uncomfortable for them. Hence, why they are unlikely to attend the theatre.

Another example includes those with Auditory Processing Disorder<sup>4</sup>. Those with APD cannot understand what they hear in the same way others do. When in a setting filled with plenty of other

---

<sup>1</sup> [https://yougov.co.uk/opi/browse/Going\\_to\\_the\\_theatre](https://yougov.co.uk/opi/browse/Going_to_the_theatre)

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.encoretickets.co.uk/articles/west-end-performance-times/#:~:text=The%20running%20time%20of%20a,depending%20on%20the%20production%20itself.>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/attention-deficit-hyperactivity-disorder-adhd/>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/auditory-processing-disorder/>

people, watching a show with different sounds whilst performers are talking could be difficult for them to process.

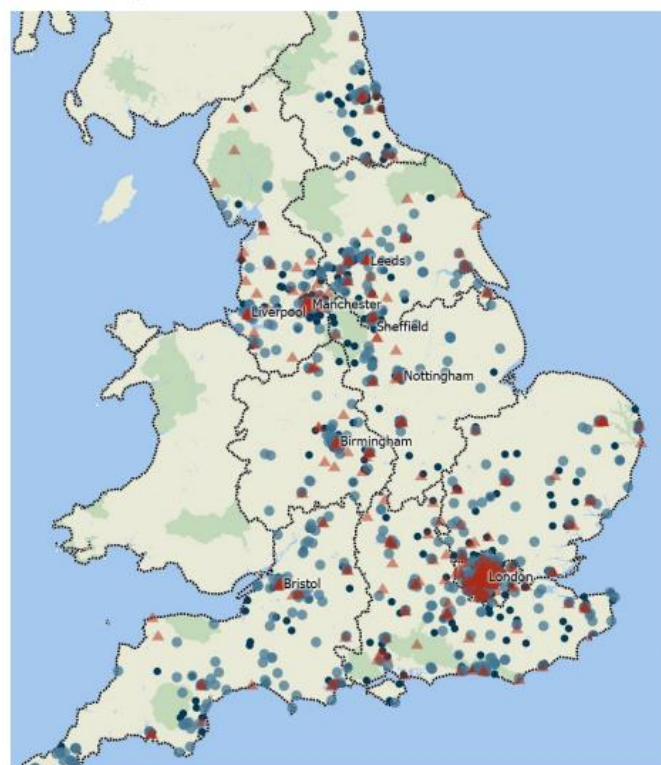
Below is a table showing theatre engagement statics regarding a societal group of adults with a disability or illness which provides difficulties with learning, concentration, and memory<sup>5</sup>. Whilst 65% have engaged with the arts in the past year, only 30.3% has attended a play, drama, pantomime, opera or musical. This could be due to a lack of consideration for such disabilities or illnesses.

	Adults with an illness or disability that means that they have substantial difficulties with memory or the ability to concentrate, learn or understand			All adults		
	Estimate (%) <sup>1</sup>	Range (+/-)	Respondents	Estimate (%) <sup>1</sup>	Range (+/-)	Respondents
Has engaged with the arts in the last year	65.4	6.0	469	76.1	1.2	10171
Has attended a play/drama or pantomime	19.8	5.0	469	29.5	1.2	10171
Has attended the opera or musical theatre	10.5	3.9	469	22.3	1.1	10171

<sup>1</sup> The percentage represents the weighted proportion of respondents who engaged with the arts

Another important aspect to consider is location. To the right is a map showing the theatre activity across the UK<sup>6</sup>. It shows that theatre activity is generally clustered around the core cities, particularly London, Birmingham and Bristol. London accounts for 47% of all performances and 43% of venues in England<sup>7</sup>. The Arts Council explained that London's theatre audience has swelled by the 43% of bookings that originate from outside London. Many of these bookings will have been made by international visitors, though clearly visitors from the rest of the UK are also a factor here. Whilst it appears that audience members are willing to travel to see shows, this raises the question of how often they would return.

Map of organisations that produce and present theatre in England, 2016 (venues: red triangle; production companies: larger light blue circle; sole traders: small dark blue circle)



Source: BOP Consulting / Arts Council England / Smith (2014) / TAA / UKT&SOLT / ITC / ATG and Qdos (2016)

<sup>5</sup> [https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/592701/Disability\\_and\\_theatre\\_table.xlsx](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/592701/Disability_and_theatre_table.xlsx)

<sup>6</sup> [https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/sites/default/files/download-file/ACE\\_Theatre\\_Analysis\\_BOP\\_FINAL\\_REPORT\\_Feb\\_2017.pdf](https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/sites/default/files/download-file/ACE_Theatre_Analysis_BOP_FINAL_REPORT_Feb_2017.pdf)

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.artscouncil.org.uk>

Finally, there is a clear link between attitudes to the theatre and diversity. The Arts Council England created a *Creative Case for Diversity* to focus on driving change through an emphasis on diversifying artistic activity and better opportunities for diverse artists and audiences. Interestingly, the number of organisations in the Arts Council's theatre NPO portfolio with BAME leadership or focus varies considerably between regions. In 2013/14, London (18.2%), the East of England (14.9%) and the North West (12.6%) registered the highest proportions of BAME programming<sup>8</sup>. However, the British population describe a lack of attention to BAME individuals and theatre. Affinity May explains that 'there is still distinct evidence that racism and judgment is a huge part of the UK's theatre industry and as much as we try and show clear equality in Britain, the amount of discrimination in these environments negatively overlays it all'<sup>9</sup>.

#### How Royal Theatre can use a new application (and if it were converted to a web application) to increase interest and attendance

A number of features can be applied to a new application or website that would help to support and enhance the business whilst considering the above research.

Perhaps several features can be applied to a new application or website to increase consideration of those with disability or illness. When booking, a drop down or comment feature in which the user could input any requirements or help they may need in order to attend the show could improve their experience at the theatre. Additionally, when booking seats, there could be a section purely dedicated to those who may need special requirements. This could be wheelchair access, or seats reserved near the front for those with hearing issues, or perhaps near an exit. Alongside this, there could be a 'learn more' feature, in which users could find out more about the seating options available.

Furthermore, an information page could be beneficial, with the purpose of telling the potential audience about how the theatre is attempting to learn and increase knowledge about inclusion of diversity, those with disability, and acknowledging the lengths some may have to travel to attend. This could also be demonstrated in the form of a 'frequently asked questions page', with answers to a wide range of queries. This could be extended to help those who travel for the theatre, with a 'how to find us' page, or a map showing the location of the theatre and directions on how to get there.

Additionally, a feedback system could be beneficial. This could be asking the user to enter a form of contact, and emailing them after the show, or perhaps having a feedback section of the application in which users can input to when they choose. This data could be beneficial in improving the audiences/users experience. Similarly, the data generated from the application in general – that being anything from the type of show the user has chosen to see, or perhaps asking the user where they are based, or the timings of the chosen show, can be used to further research areas to improve. You could see which shows are popular, where the majority of the audience is based, or the best timings to hold a show is. Essentially, this data can allow the theatre to invest in the correct resources to further improve theatre attendance and interest.

---

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.artscouncil.org.uk>

<sup>9</sup> <https://sites.marjon.ac.uk/doughnut/2021/01/04/a-century-after-black-british-theatre-and-yet-bame-actors-are-still-struggling-to-take-centre-stage/>

