

Theatre  
Royal  
Plymouth

Key Findings from **Your Voice Matters**

# Context



In early 2022, TRP's new Chief Executive, James Mackenzie-Blackman, commissioned a consultation programme to explore options for the **future creative leadership of the organisation**.

Throughout March 2022, six leading artists and creative producers from across the UK hosted group and individual conversations with stakeholders who have an interest in the future of Theatre Royal Plymouth.

## Creative Leads



→ **Angie Bual**  
Artistic Director,  
Trigger



→ **Suba Das**  
Creative Director,  
Liverpool Everyman  
and Playhouse



→ **Emma Gladstone**  
Independent  
Producer, dance  
specialist



→ **Ned Glasier**  
Artistic Director,  
Company Three



→ **Laura Horton**  
Playwright and Plymouth  
Laureate of Words 2021-22



→ **David Micklem**  
Consultant



85+

## Methodology

**Over 85 people who work in the performing arts took part in individual and group conversations.**

Most were freelancers, the majority of whom live and work in the South West region. We also invited industry leaders, and future leaders, from across the UK to share their perspectives with us.

Consultees also included children and young people, TRP staff, our trustees and other participants on our projects.

# Key Findings



The consultation led to a report for our CEO and trustees backed-up, and supported by, extensive notes, audio recording, photographs and personalised feedback from each participant.

## Creative leadership should be

- Open and transparent in its decision-making, accessible to artists & companies;
- Clear in its intentions;
- Joined-up across the organisation and between artforms, encouraging clear progressions routes for artists and companies;
- Connected to the communities TRP exists to serve (within the city and region, and more widely in the industry nationally);
- Diverse and pluralistic in its programming;
- Fluid and not fixed indefinitely (in terms of membership and approaches to programming).

## Some suggested change that needs to be made

- There can be an implied hierarchy of importance and influence between the three different stages at TRP that is understood to be rooted in how much income they generate for the organisation;
- Unavailable/impenetrable routes for external companies and artists, and a sense of there being a small number of external professionals with access to 'the club';
- A lack of animation of front of house spaces (especially during the daytime);
- A creative leadership that had been fixed for too long;
- A culture where creativity and artistry lived in one department rather than across all TRP functions, and where the creativity of all staff was insufficiently valued.



# Recommendations

**Consultees expressed little enthusiasm for the notion of a single Artistic or Creative Director.**

The report therefore recommends that the organisation considers creating a collaborative Producing & Programming Creative Team.

Artform specialism, across all scales (and including consideration of digital and hybrid forms), is recommended within the team to provide a joined-up and collegiate approach to programming TRP's venues, found and community spaces, and online platforms.

Given the diversity of TRP's programme the report recommends the team is made of specialisms including: theatre; dance; artist development; children, young people and families; co-curated and off-site work and scenic design.

Many consultees expressed that whilst they were keen to pursue careers in venue leadership the root to achieving that felt complex and challenging. A new approach at TRP could create space for developing artists to experience working in a venue.

Members of the new collaborative creative team could be practicing artists and/or creative producers. Some roles would need to be full-time, others could be part-time.





# How?



How this new creative team operates is deemed extremely important by consultees and stakeholders.

The team needs to be **transparent** in its decision-making and **accessible to staff and the wider artistic and cultural communities** of the city, region, and country.

The team should be clearly described and available to external stakeholders, with email addresses published on the theatre's website.

Decision-making should be transparent to the wider staff team and the public, and ultimately in service to the organisational mission.

As a collective, the team need to listen to the needs of artists, participants, and audiences, and needs to actively breakdown barriers (real or perceived) between engagement (lower case 'e'), theatre, dance and musicals.

The team should actively seek to **break down hierarchies** of scale (and between live and digital programmes) to create a broad and joined-up public offer across the organisation and its two sites, any digital platforms it curates and other public spaces.

Consultees favoured a dynamic and changing team composition, unencumbered by long-term appointments. Consultees expressed a reasonably consistent view that a five-year fixed-term appointment (renewable) would be preferable to an open-ended set of appointments.



## Embodying TRP's values

A new team should clearly embody the values of creativity, collaboration, diversity and quality in its approach to planning and delivering a programme for TRP.

It is recommended that this new team reflects the diversity of the city and region, and that the team is easily accessible to artists and companies based locally, nationally and internationally.

Consultees were enthusiastic about a much more dynamic, bold and flexible set of programming commitments.

There have been real and perceived barriers to programming ("we only programme three-night minimums in The Drum") that many are confident a more diverse and open creative leadership can break down.

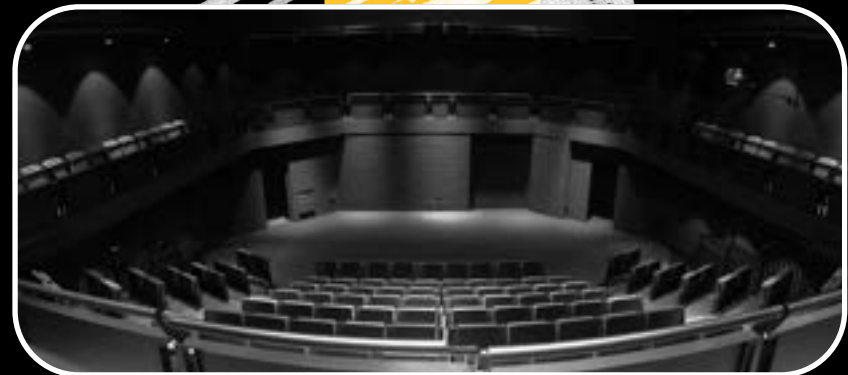
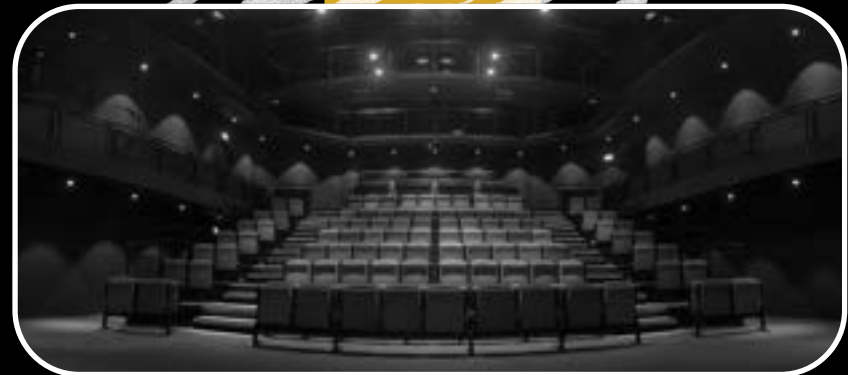
# The Drum

The Drum is seen as a key venue for Plymouth and the South West. At 174 seats its significance extends across Cornwall and represents a strategic focus for the entire region at this scale.

The reputation of The Drum as a **centre for new writing** was widely noted. Partnerships with touring companies including Paines Plough, Kali Theatre, Wardrobe Ensemble, Ontroerend Goed and Frantic Assembly had helped cement the theatre's distinctive reputation as a **home for quality new work**.

Some consultees made a strong case for the continuation of The Drum as a centre for new plays in the South West. Group sessions with freelancers from across the region suggested a wider remit for The Drum.

The refurbished auditorium offers a range of opportunities for artists and companies, with several consultees expressing a **desire to break down barriers to other artforms** in The Drum. It was noted that The Drum could also play a role as a home for studio-scale dance in the South West whilst also recognising and collaborating with other venue's programmes in Plymouth to ensure a broad offer to audience without duplication.





# Your Voice Matters



Group sessions concluded with a request for a simple piece of unattributed advice for TRP as they consider options for the future creative leadership of the organisation.

Selected examples include:

**"Please be brave, bold, please listen to who the artists are and hold space for them, new and old and for us all to meet and support one another."**

**"Invest in championing what large-scale professional participatory work can look like with the right backing."**

**"Have open and clear artistic progression routes for artists within the theatre. Have clarity about this on the website."**

**"Encourage diverse and transparent creative leadership – don't let people occupy influential positions forever, and reflect/review policies and messaging regularly."**

**"Please can TRP create more opportunities for artists to come together and make it feel that I am included as part of the arts community in Plymouth."**

**"Please truly listen and reach out to your local artists and freelancers. Make it sustainable, accessible and exciting for us to continue living and working in Plymouth."**

**"We need to start seeing community and professional as an equilibrium – one is not subordinate to the other. Value it all equally."**

**"Be bold. Engage a bunch of artists and producers who can shake up the programme!"**



## Next Steps

In the coming days, weeks and months, TRP will be sharing more information about a period of creative renewal.

The changes and announcements will deliver against the recommendations of the consultation in a reorganised business focussed and orientated around creativity.

To ensure you're connected with the announcements and opportunities that follow make sure you're following us on our social media channels.





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