Writ Large

New Writing on the English Stage 2003-2009

A Report for Arts Council England by the British Theatre Consortium

July 2009

Contents

Writ Large: New Writing on the English Stage 2003-9

p. 2 Chapter 1: **Summary of findings**

p. 15 Chapter 2: **Methodology**

p. 25 Chapter 3: **The background**

p. 34 Chapter 4: **The last decade**

p. 51 Chapter 5: **Statistical analysis**

p. 68 Chapter 6: **In-depth company interviews**

p. 99 Chapter 7: **Playwrights, agencies & dramaturgy**

p. 124 Chapter 8: **Recommendations**

p. 129 Chapter 9: **Sources**

Appendices

p. 131 *Appendix A:* **List of questionnaire respondents**

p. 137 *Appendix B*: **List of interviewees**

p. 138 *Appendix C:* **Questionnaires**

p. 144 *Appendix D:* **Interview questions**

attached *Appendix E:* **Excel spreadsheet of gathered production data**

1: Summary of findings

1 **New writing in the English theatre: historical**

1.1 Since the mid 1970s, playwrights have organised to campaign for more new writing to be presented in the English theatre. Their concerns included:

- continued domination of the repertoire by out-of-copyright plays,
- concentration of new writing in small spaces,
- an emerging trend towards collectively-written plays, excluding individual freelance writers from the process.

The Arts Council responded positively to these concerns and sought to increase the proportion of new writing in the repertoire by various means.

1.2 From 1970 to 1985, new work represented about 12% of the repertoire of the building-based sector of the English theatre (excluding national companies). During this period production of classical plays declined significantly, while the number of musicals and adaptations increased. Just under half the productions were of post-war drama, a proportion which remained fairly constant. Musicals, pantomimes and children's work attracted significantly higher audiences than straight drama throughout this period.

1.3 The box office performance of new plays was usually a little lower than the average for straight drama, though in one year new plays did better than the straight drama average (both in percentage and numerical terms).

1.4 Both the number of productions and the box office performance of new plays dropped sharply in the late 1980s, falling to 7% of the repertoire. The main beneficiary of this decline was the category of adaptations.

1.5 The 1990s saw a significant revival both in the number of new plays presented and their box office performance. In one year, new plays outperformed adaptations, post-war revivals, translations, classics and Shakespeare. Other significant changes in the repertoire included an increase in the number of productions for children and a decline in the production of the post-war repertoire.

1.6 By the end of the 1990s, the Arts Council had ceased to collate production and box office data submitted by theatres.

2 New writing in the last decade

2.1 In 2000, the Arts Council published two reports arguing that text-based theatre was in decline. One of them (the Boyden report) argued that new writing was failing to attract audiences to main houses. These reports – and subsequent theatre policy documents – advocated new, collaborative methods of playmaking. These policy changes were seen by many playwrights as privileging devised, performance-based work over individually-written new plays. Despite this, the Arts Council's 2003 Theatre Writing Strategy promoted initiatives which presumed a traditional relationship between writers and companies.

2.2 The Arts Council's £25m (72%) funding uplift to the English regional theatre appears to have had a dramatic effect on the amount of new writing presented on the English stage. On the basis of samples of the uplift theatres assembled by the 2009 Theatre Assessment, new work of various kinds seems to have increased from just over half the repertoire of building-based regularly funded theatres in 2001-2 to 72.5% in four years. The proportion of productions of the established repertoire declined from just under half to 28% during the same period. Despite this, some playwrights see the decade as one of challenge and decline.

2.3 The statistics on which the Theatre Assessment based its figures are problematic in various ways: they give no indication of box office performance and, in their analysis of numbers of productions, they do not provide robust distinctions between different types of new work nor of different parts of the established repertoire.

3 The quantitative questionnaire to theatres

3.1 We drew up and distributed questionnaires to the English building-based, subsidised producing theatres, as well as to new writing companies, asking for details of their programme and its performance from 2003 to 2009. We were initially asked to gather data only for each year up to 2007/8, but were later advised by the Arts Council that we should also ask for 2008/9. However, this was not successful, because the number of returns containing the final year was much smaller, giving aberrant figures. We have retained the information on the spreadsheet but have not included it in tables where it would give a misleading impression. In all, we received replies from 65 companies

(out of 89 contacted), including the three national companies, most of the major reps and several touring and community theatres.

3.2 Analysis of our data confirms the general direction of the Theatre Assessment figures. Over the period studied, just under half (47%) of the repertoire of our reporting theatres and companies consisted of or included new writing, the largest single category of work (apart from new plays, this category embraces new adaptations and translations, and some devised work). The next largest production category was post-war revivals, followed by classical revivals. It should be noted that exactly half of the new plays presented are produced by the nine largest new play producers.

3.3 Within the new writing category, the overwhelming majority (77%) of theatre works produced are plays. 14% of all new writing productions are adaptations. 42% of all theatre shows are new plays.

3.4 In addition to comprising nearly half the productions, the box office performance of new plays showed a considerable increase on any previous figures for new plays, exceeding theatres' overall average box office performance in the last two years of our period. New writing box office rose from 62.1% in 2003-4 to 68.6 in 2007-8.

3.5 New plays do well in absolute as well as relative terms. During our period, over seven million tickets were sold by our companies for new plays (rising from just over one million in 2003-4 to a peak of nearly one and a half million in 2006-7). Further, new plays no longer appear to be 'ghettoised' in small spaces. New play productions are evenly divided between auditoria of under and over 200 seats. Over the period of our sample, nine out of ten tickets for new plays were sold

for main stages. New play box office performance declines a little in the larger theatres (as does all kinds of work): plays do 68.5% business in studios, 64.7% in theatres with over 200 seats, and 58.4% in theatres with over 500 seats (as opposed to an average for straight drama of 62.9% in the largest theatres). Fears that new writing empties main houses appear to be unjustified. Further, an increase in new plays on main stages was one of the priorities in the Arts Council's 2003 Theatre Writing Strategy, and so was clearly achieved.

3.6 New writing for young people is a particular success story. This work represents 20% of all new writing productions. Attendances at young people's theatre (much of which consists of new writing) regularly exceeded 70% in our period, peaking at 81% in 2004/5.

3.7 Productions of devised work represent 19% of all new writing productions, 7% of new writing performances and 5% of new writing attendances. Physical theatre is the smallest category of productions, but what productions there were did well; achieving 68% business over the six years.

3.8 Although the number of productions of the established repertoire has declined compared with the 1970s and 1980s, there is little evidence that audiences are rejecting the existing canon. Dominated by Shakespeare, the number of productions of the classical repertoire was small, but achieved the highest audience figures of any category. Although achieving the largest number of performances of revivals, post-war theatre is the least popular era in percentage box office terms.

3.9 In summary: both as a proportion of productions and in terms of its box office performance, new writing has grown dramatically as a category since the mid-1990s, and - most notably - has broken through onto main stages to a substantial degree. Overwhelmingly, new writing appears to consist of individually-written works, predominantly straight plays. Although present in the repertoire, devised work and physical theatre remain a minority component. The promotion of new writing in the repertoire is a major success story both for English theatres and the Arts Council.

4 Qualitative research: the in-depth interviews and the playwrights' survey

4.1 Despite the increase in the number of new plays produced and their box office performance, many writers appear to take a less positive view of their position. Playwrights assembled by the Writers' Guild agreed unanimously that it was harder for playwrights to live off their writing than it had been in the past. The Theatre Assessment found that writers felt there had been a reduction in the amount of work commissioned and produced, which is clearly not the case. Our own playwrights' survey - supplemented by interviews and a study of writers' agencies - confirmed that playwrights felt that the playwright's voice was less valued and that it was harder to sustain a playwriting career.

4.2 One reason for this disjuncture might be that writers have other concerns about the process of commissioning, developing and presenting their work. In the Theatre Assessment, writers were found to be generally positive about the support and encouragement for

new writing, but raised concerns about the move towards multimedia theatre and an increased interventionism by dramaturgs and producers in the writing process. Some saw a risk of 'multilayered processes' marginalising the writer. There were also long-standing concerns about the lack of female playwrights, and the difficulty of getting work presented outside London and on main stages.

4.3 To investigate these concerns and to assess current policies, we conducted in-depth interviews with a group of writers (assembled by the Writers' Guild) and with 12 theatres producing new writing (including the three national companies [National, RSC and Royal Court], major reps, new writing theatres and touring companies, and one company dedicated to new writing for young people). We also drew on the results of our questionnaire to playwrights, from which we received 106 replies. In addition, we sent a short qualitative questionnaire to the 89 theatres and theatre companies which had also received the quantitative questionnaire referred to above. We received 60 responses to this.

4.4 For all of the companies we interviewed, new writing was a core part of their work. Many had either recently modified their new writing policies, or were in the process of doing so. All had dramaturgs, literary managers and/or literary departments.

4.5 Over the last few years, theatres have developed much more complex and interventionist methods of working with writers on plays. Although a majority of the 60 companies which filled in our questionnaire read unsolicited scripts, a number of companies have ceased to do so (though some companies which say they don't, in fact do). The old model of commissioning a writer to write their next play,

receiving it and putting it on is clearly a less common occurrence. Theatres have built up a number of much more interactive systems to develop an idea to the point of commission, from seed money schemes via residencies and attachments ('embedding' writers in the company's work) to various forms of rough-and-ready try-outs of scripts in development, as well as more traditional workshops and rehearsed readings.

4.6 In addition to companies' own pre-commission procedures, many funded writers' agencies work with playwrights to develop and test work before it is submitted for commission. For those theatres and companies without their own literary departments there is evidence of widespread use of dramaturgical support from Arts Council-funded writing agencies, with theatres 'sub-contracting' script reading and script development work. Agencies also perform a brokering role between writers and companies. There is a patchy but influential network of dramaturgical practice emerging throughout the country. (This is also the case in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.)

4.7 Along with literary departments in theatres and playwriting courses in universities and colleges, the expansion of the role of independent writing agencies is the third major institutional development of recent times. 31 out of the 60 companies who returned our questionnaire said they worked with such agencies. However, unlike literary departments and playwriting courses, writers' agencies are suffering from funding cuts and their reach is declining. Although it is arguable that, challenged by these agencies, literary departments have taken on their role, others claim that the 'invisible', pre-commission work of writers' agencies, and their independent character, provide a unique service to playwrights and theatres.

4.8 Perhaps as a result of pre-commission development, over-commissioning appears to be less of a problem that it has generally been held to be. While the national companies have a high attrition rate (the National Theatre's ratio of commissioned to produced work is about 5:1) reps and touring companies take pride in reducing that ratio to a minimum.

4.9 On subject matter, all companies favour plays which address contemporary issues and are set in the public realm. Some regional theatres report that local subject-matter and treatment is popular with audiences. Writers are seldom pressured to accept unsuitable celebrity casting. Companies report that the diversity both of subject-matter and audiences has increased in the last six years.

5 Playwrights' concerns

5.1 Some of the concerns expressed by playwrights about the contemporary scene appear not to be justified. While some companies encourage non-traditional ways of writing, there is only a small following for devised work or projects in which the primary mover is not the writer. Where such projects are mounted, they are rare, and predicted contractual difficulties have been less intractable than expected.

5.2 Companies have also addressed a number of more long-standing concerns among playwrights. Most dramatic is the expansion of new plays on large stages. While some playwrights are concerned about the use of adaptations as a way of presenting new writing without

presenting new original plays, others welcome the growth of adaptations and note that writing an adaptation can be a gateway to the commission of original work.

5.3 Playwrights express concerns about contemporary processes. Inevitably, a more interventionist, hands-on development strategy is experienced as more prescriptive than the traditional commission-and-present model. A 'treatment culture' of continuous play development makes it harder for playwrights to write independently and present finished scripts. The new processes have clearly enabled inexperienced playwrights to develop plays that can be produced, but they may stifle more experienced writers.

5.4 There has been a clear increase in the number of plays written by BAME writers, though some writers point to a lack of BAME directors. However, most theatres are suspicious of paying attention to the ethnic origin of the writers they commission. Some theatres (like the Birmingham Rep and the Royal Court) take a proactive approach, which has been successful.

5.5 There is general agreement that the increased prominence of women playwrights in the 1980s has not been sustained. Women receive fewer commissions than men; of those commissions fewer are delivered; and of those delivered fewer are put on. Some companies (and writers) ascribe this to a lack of confidence among women writers, but there was no conclusive view or explanation of this phenomenon.

5.6 Some writers argue that it is harder than it was to sustain relationships with theatres and to get a second play commissioned.

There also remains a major lack of second and subsequent productions of living playwrights' work, which are unpopular with all the companies we interviewed except one. These two factors may account for playwrights reporting that, despite the increase in new plays being produced, their income has not grown in the 2000s.

6 The overall picture

6.1 Quantitatively, the last decade is a huge success story for new writing in the English theatre: for the companies which have developed and presented it, and the local and national bodies which have encouraged it and funded it.

6.2 Our qualitative research indicates that literary and dramaturgy departments have developed imaginative and robust schemes to develop the work of inexperienced writers, have increased ethnic diversity in production and attendance, and have succeeded in breaking new work out of studio confines.

6.3 In this, theatres have contributed to an expansion both of the amount of new work and its character. The distinct echoes of the expansion of the early 1970s draw attention to how theatres have successfully addressed the concerns that arose after that period (notably, about the ghettoisation of new work).

6.4 However, these processes have led to greater company intervention in the writing process which some writers (though not others) find intrusive and prescriptive.

6.5 A continued gender gap and the lack of second and subsequent productions are two long-standing problems which appear to remain intractable.

6.6 It appears that companies have succeeded brilliantly in developing new writers, but may (thus far) have been less successful in providing a context for writers to develop and sustain a life-long career. Mid-career writers clearly feel excluded, and many find it hard to make a living. The distinction between the emergent, the developing and the established writer is of course an artificial one: the aim of theatre and funding policy should be to turn emergent writers into developing writers and developing writers into established writers. Without policies in place to do this, theatre will lose its brightest young talent to other media.

6.7 One mechanism for converting emergent writers into established ones was demonstrated in the later 1970s when the National opened up its main stages to the writers who emerged in the early part of the decade. Now that main stages are much more open to writers, it is time to address other factors which might prevent today's new writers from developing and sustaining life-long playwriting careers.

2: Methodology

1 Background

1.1 The British Theatre Consortium was formed in 2007 to provide 'a forum in which theatre makers, administrators, students and academics can come together to share views on all issues concerning contemporary theatre and performance in Britain, from playwriting to live art, regional theatre to international touring, site-specific theatre to Shakespearean revivals, politics and art, subsidy and creativity. We organise the British Theatre Conference series, conduct and publish research, and act as consultants and advocates for British theatre in all its forms'.

1.2 The British Theatre Consortium consists of

- **David Edgar**. One of the generation of playwrights who emerged from the alternative theatre of the early 1970s, moving on to having his plays staged at the RSC and the National Theatre. He co-founded the Theatre Writers' Union in 1975 and was part of the team which negotiated the TWU/Writers' Guild Agreements with the national companies and the TMA. He is now President of the Writers' Guild of Great Britain. He founded Britain's first, dedicated post-graduate playwriting course, at the University of Birmingham, in 1989.
- **Dan Rebellato.** Professor of Contemporary Theatre at Royal Holloway University of London. He has published widely on contemporary British theatre. He is also a professional

playwright whose work has been produced on stage and radio across Britain, Europe and America.

- **Janelle Reinelt.** A leading American scholar publishing on contemporary British theatre. Her books and articles circulate world-wide. She is currently Professor in the Department of Theatre Studies at the University of Warwick.
- **Steve Waters**. A playwright who has worked in a number of Arts Council-funded venues, most recently the Bush with his play *The Contingency Plan*. As the course convenor of the MPhil(B) in Playwriting at Birmimgham University he works with young and mid-career playwrights as they attempt to enter the theatre. He is also a Board member of the Junction Theatre in Cambridge.
- **Julie Wilkinson**. Author of tv and radio scripts, and over twenty plays for the stage, including new plays for children and young people. She teaches at Manchester Metropolitan University where she is currently Senior Lecturer in Creative Writing.

1.3 On this project we were joined by

- **Jane Woddis** (project manager). A freelance cultural researcher, who for many years also worked as a senior administrator in community arts and theatre-in-education. Her research has included work on playwriting policy and playwrights' organisations.
- **Ruth Farrar** (assistant). Has worked at Manchester Metropolitan University as an Associate Lecturer in twentieth century British and American drama for the past five years.

Her PhD thesis considers the effects of paranoia and state censorship on the dramatic form of Cold War-era plays.

2 Research project

2.1 In November 2008, our successful proposal to the Arts Council England's tender for an assessment of new writing 2002-2007 proposed

- to assess the success of the institutions and systems in which new writing is developed and the quality, range and appeal of the new plays written over this period;
- to consider the effectiveness of the Arts Council's initiatives in supporting new writing;
- to prepare a national and regional map of the policies of various institutions concerned with the development and performance of new plays;
- to establish the state of the playwright's career in England today.

2.2 After some adjustment of the strategy in January 2009, in consultation with the Arts Council, we agreed that we would meet these objectives by

- gathering in representative statistics from a large selection of Regularly Funded Organisations (RFOs);
- conducting in-depth face-to-face interviews with a number of major theatres and other new writing stakeholders;

- distributing a questionnaire to canvas the opinion of playwrights working in England;
- consulting the other relevant Arts Council assessments and other consultancy documents;
- maintaining contact and sharing information, as appropriate, with Emma Dunton, Roger Nelson and Hetty Shand: the second group also charged with reporting on new writing.

3 Statistical gathering

3.1 In consultation with Dunton et al., we divided responsibilities between our group and theirs. They were primarily to look at non-building-based, small-scale companies; we were looking at national and repertory theatres and larger touring groups.

3.2 We divided up responsibility for contacting particular groups, based on our mutual areas of responsibility, and sometimes, when the groups overlapped, our personal contacts with the companies.

3.3 We contacted 89 theatre companies, requesting details of their repertoire – work they had produced and presented – between 2002/3 and 2008/9. The information requested, on an MS Excel spreadsheet, was:

- the title of each show
- the place of performance
- the year of performance
- number of performances
- attendances by headcount
- attendances by box office

- whether they produced, co-produced, or presented the show
- which categories it came under:
    - play
    - devised
    - new writing
    - classical revival (pre-1850)
    - modern revival (1850-1945)
    - post-war revival (1945+)
    - translation
    - adaptation
    - physical theatre
    - pantomime or Christmas show
    - music theatre
    - children or young people's theatre
    - other

3.4 We also asked some more general information, in a short MS Word questionnaire, about their literary policies, their literary departments, and so on (see Appendices).

3.5 We eventually received 65 replies, a respectable 73% return. (57 of these replies were to the quantitative Excel questionnaire, with 8 companies returning only the Word form and 5 returning only the Excel questionnaire.) 3 companies returned their data too late to be included in the main statistical analysis. 1 company return was in an insolubly incompatible format.

4 Methodological issues arising from the state of the statistical data

4.1 A 73% return, which included all the national companies, most of the major regional repertory theatres, and a large selection of major touring companies, is a healthy slice of the theatre being made over the period 2003-2009.

4.2 However, it does not represent the whole sector, and in matters of total audience attendances or total performances or productions over the period, it understates the true figures.

4.3 It is possible that there is an in-built bias in the selection of companies we consulted (see 3.1, 3.2). Not having figures for the small-scale and community sector, which was outside our remit, it has not been possible to assess the extent of the bias, nor to correct it.

4.4 There are issues of comparability between returns:

4.4.1 Not all companies returned data in the same form (for example, some treated one production transferring from one venue to another as a single show, others as separate productions).

4.4.2 not all companies returned data complete (for example, some didn't identify what categories their performances were, leaving us to make decisions about whether to research each case or leave the information blank; some companies gave box office percentages *and* headcounts, some one or the other, a few gave neither).

4.4.3 Not all companies agreed on the definition of terms; for example, companies differed on where the year started. Not all

companies agreed on how to apply the categories; this was particularly true in the case of children's theatre. There was very frequently disagreement between different theatres on a single show's tour, over whether it was new writing or not.

4.4.4 These inconsistencies between questionnaire returns appear to be random, and should not produce a bias in any direction. The size of the sample – containing over 5,700 individual productions – still makes for the production of reliable data. Each dataset will have a different margin of error but we estimate that the most reliable figures will have a margin of error of no more than 1-2%. We have treated statistics with higher margins of error with greater caution.

4.4.5 However, it does mean that correlation between different sets of figures is difficult and sometimes impossible. A figure for box office performance, for example, cannot be set directly against numbers of attendances because they derive from fundamentally different datasets.

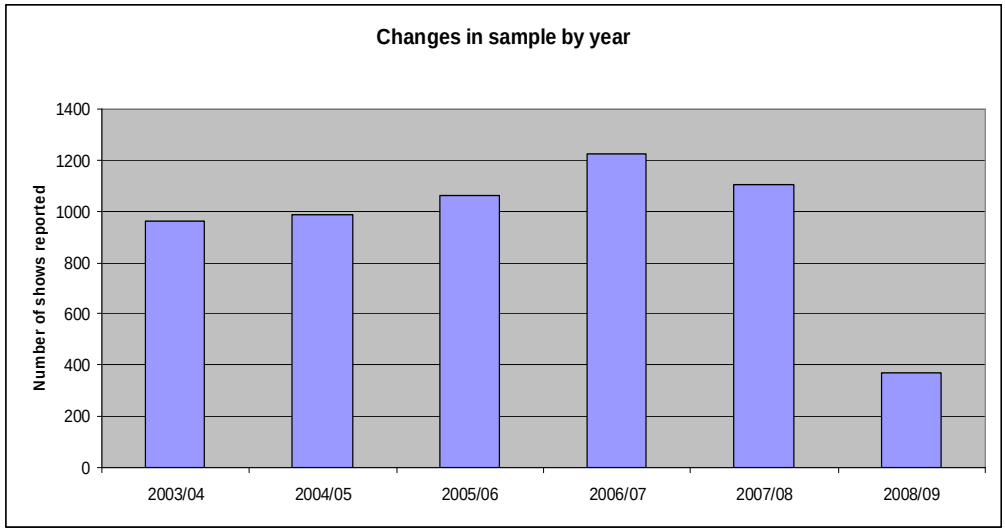
4.5 We were initially asked to gather data only for each year up to 2007/8, but were later (March 2009) advised by the Arts Council that we should also ask for 2008/9. However, this was not successful, because the number of returns containing the final year was much smaller, giving aberrant figures. We have retained the information on the spreadsheet but have not included it in tables where it would give a misleading impression.

4.6. Not all companies were able to complete information for all of the years. Given that we almost exclusively addressed the Arts Council's current clients, there will be some companies which performed no

work in (or had no remaining records for) the earlier part of the period and there will be companies active in that earlier period which we did not contact. Many of the companies we spoke to did not have the information ready for the last period of the survey. Hence, one would expect to see a slight bias towards the middle years of the sample, and indeed that is the case; but as fig 1 shows this bias is, in fact, marginal except for the greatly reduced return for 2008-2009, which, when comparing data across years, we have ignored.

4.7 We have corrected information on occasion where there are simple errors of fact, or to ensure consistency. Generally we accepted companies' identification of what categories their works came under, except when we felt there was simple human error or evident misunderstanding involved.

Figure 1



5 Playwrights questionnaires

5.1 All members of the British Theatre Consortium sent copies of the playwright's questionnaire to any writers for whom they had a direct contact. This amounted to around 350 writers. Copies of the questionnaire were also distributed by writer's agencies across the country and, given the potential for cross-postings, it is hard to get precise figures for how many writers eventually received a copy of the questionnaire. A reasonable estimate would be around 600. We received 106 replies.

5.2 The replies had a reasonable demographic spread, although we were somewhat under-represented by women and writers from BAME groups, compared to national population figures. However, our figures for, say, women writers (40%) was similar to the far larger membership of the Writer's Guild. It is at present not possible to say if our returns accurately represent the slight disparity between national population figures and the demographic profile of English playwrights, or if that disparity is produced by a sampling error in our statistics.

5.3 Given the subjective nature of many of the replies, and the marginal comments of a significant proportion of respondents, we would treat this material as indicative only, akin to a large and wayward focus group. It nonetheless represents a snapshot of playwriterly experience and opinion and we have drawn attention to some striking features of these returns.

6 Other data

6.1 Details of documents consulted are set out in the section 'Sources' (p. 125) and blank copies of the questionnaires, lists of respondents and interviewees, and outline interview questions are in Appendices 1-4.

3: The background

1 Why is new writing special?

1.1 Funders, theatre companies and audiences have always acknowledged that new writing is different from other work in the theatre repertoire. Although old plays can be new to some audiences, new plays are new to everyone. As well as being unfamiliar to audiences, they are also an unknown quantity to directors, designers and actors. They need to be promoted differently, and usually take longer to rehearse.

1.2 New plays are also more expensive. Out of copyright plays are free for theatres; revivals of in-copyright plays are cheaper to present because they do not require the additional payments (including commission fees and rehearsal attendance payments) which are guaranteed by playwrights' contracts for premiere performances.

1.3 Rightly or wrongly, playwrights have sometimes suspected that theatres choose not to do new plays, not because they are deemed to be a higher box office risk, but because they cost more. Playwrights feel additionally threatened when companies choose to present new plays which are devised or improvised by actors. Hence, since the abolition of theatre censorship in 1968, the main issue that has exercised English playwrights collectively has been the effect of dead writers and writer-less writing on the character of the repertoire, and the challenge which they provide to the amount of playwrights' work that is presented on the English stage.

2 1968-1987

2.1 In combination with the abolition of censorship, the great expansion of arts subsidy in the late 1960s enabled the development of many alternative, small forms of theatre company and theatre space. Lunchtime and late-night theatre expanded from the Edinburgh Festival Fringe to London and other major British cities. A new generation of theatre writers fed a voracious theatrical appetite for short new plays. New theatre spaces over pubs and in other found environments inspired regional and London theatres to open studio theatres. Planned new theatres added second, smaller spaces to their buildings.

2.2 There were early concerns about the consequences of this expansion of small-scale theatre. Some playwrights felt that studio theatres were already becoming a ghetto, providing an excuse for theatres not to do plays on their main stages. One informal study suggested that studio theatres might actually reduce the number of new plays presented.[1] Although much new work was presented by residential or touring fringe companies (some of which, like Portable Theatre, had been set up by playwrights) there was growing concern about companies who chose not to use writers, but to develop their work through improvisation and other devising techniques.

2.3 In 1975, the Arts Council announced cuts in funding to the fringe sector (including new writing), which led to the setting up of a Theatre

[1] David Edgar, 'Against the General Will', *Plays and Players*, May 1973.

Writers' Group, initially intended to campaign against funding cuts and for more new plays to be produced.

2.4 The Arts Council responded positively to playwrights' concerns about the amount of, and payment for, new work. The New Writing Committee in particular developed schemes to encourage theatres to present new work (and second productions) and to pay writers more for it. Under Peter Hall, the National Theatre presented challenging new plays on its large stages, and the opening of the Other Place and Warehouse theatres allowed the RSC to expand its new work production considerably.

2.5 The increase in the amount and prominence of new work production encouraged the Theatre Writers' Group to change its name to the Theatre Writers' Union and to campaign for a minimum terms writers' contract with the NT, the RSC and the Royal Court. In collaboration with the Writers' Guild of Great Britain, TWU negotiated agreements with the three national theatres in 1979, and, in 1980, with the Theatrical Management Association (the employers' body for the regional repertory and most of the building-based London theatres). Both agreements established the principles of commission fees in addition to royalties (compensating for the lower royalties in heavily-subsidised small spaces), a playwrights' 'bill of rights' guaranteeing consultation, textual integrity and the right to attend rehearsals, and provisions limiting theatres' residual earnings from plays they premiered.[2]

[2] See Jane Woddis, *Spear-Carriers or Speaking Parts? Arts Practitioners in the Cultural Policy Process*, unpublished PhD thesis, University of Warwick, May 2005, pp. 198-201.

2.6 Despite warnings that the agreement would lead to a reduction in the number of new plays presented, the major national companies continued to produce new work in their large as well as small spaces in the 1980s. Between 1981-2 and 1986-7, the National Theatre, the RSC and the Royal Court accounted for 20.5% of all new plays presented by building-based, subsidised English theatre companies. New work formed 30.6% of the National Theatre's repertoire, and 32.6% of the RSC's (though, in the latter case, concentrated in the smaller spaces). Between 1982 and 1984 over 10% of new plays were presented at the Court[3]. In particular, the Court provided a site for a major new influx of theatre writers in this period: between 1956 and 1980, eight per cent of the plays presented at the Court had been written by women; in the 1980s it was 38%.

2.7 In the building-based sector as a whole, new work continued to average around 12% of the repertoire of the repertory theatres. Although (as will be seen) new work's box office performance lagged behind the average for straight drama in the mid-80s, in 1982-3, new plays attracted 61% audiences while straight drama as a whole attracted 58%.[4]

3 The Cork Report

3.1 In 1986, the Arts Council of England produced a report of its enquiry into professional theatre in England, *Theatre IS for All*, under the chairmanship of Sir Kenneth Cork (and thus known as the Cork report). The secretary of the Cork report, Ian Brown, went through the production and attendance figures for Arts Council-funded

[3] *Playwrights: A Species Still Endangered?* Theatre Writers' Union, 1987, p.11.
[4] Kenneth Cork, *Theatre IS for all*, Arts Council of England, 1986, p.94.

building-based theatres since 1971. He acknowledged that statistics were patchy before 1981.

3.2 In order to tabulate productions in the English theatre between 1970 and 1986, Brown divided shows into seven categories: classics, Shakespeare, children's plays, musicals, adaptations, post-war plays and Alan Ayckbourn. (By the end of the 1971-1985 period, Ayckbourn's work represented 6% of productions in the subsidised regional theatre).

3.3 The overall pattern revealed during the Cork period was a decline in classics (from 18% of productions in 1971-2 to 8% of productions in 1984-5), an increase in musicals (up from 4% to 9% of productions), adaptations (5% to 9%) and Ayckbourn; and consistency in the other categories. Post-war drama rose slightly, from 45% of productions to 48%. As stated, new writing represented around 12% of the repertoire during this period.[5]

3.4 The report revealed a significant regional variation: between 1981 and 1985, classics were most popular in the South West, Shakespeare and musicals in the North, adaptations and Ayckbourn in the West Midlands and post-war drama in East Anglia. The highest proportion of productions of new writing were in Merseyside at 35.2% (with London second and the North West third); the lowest was in East Anglia (at 6%), followed by Yorkshire and the South.[6]

3.5 The report was also able to analyse the comparative box office performance of new work. Although declining between 1982 and

[5] Ibid., p.88
[6] Ibid., p.90.

1984, new work averaged 55% box office attendances as opposed to 58% for other straight drama (musicals, children's work and pantomimes attracting significantly higher audiences). Although the statistics make no distinction between studios and main houses, the actual sales figures are reasonably constant, and, in the year when new work out-performed straight drama (1982-3), it did so in average audience numbers (351 to 316) as well as percentage (61% to 58%)[7], indicating that new work was being performed in large theatres as well as small.

4 1987-1990

4.1 Between 1986 and the mid-to-late 1990s, the Arts Council continued to produce production and attendance figures based on the Cork categories. These figures informed a Theatre Writers Union report, published in 1987, which was able to interrogate the annual Arts Council playlists on which the Cork Report was based, and also factored in figures from the National, the RSC and the Royal Court, and the results of its own survey into new play production in small-scale theatres in London and the West Midlands.

4.2 Not surprisingly, the addition of the national theatres and some fringe theatres upped the percentage of new plays in the 1982-1987 English theatre repertoire to 17.8%.[8] During the period covered by the TWU report, new plays performed only marginally less well than the repertoire average on the main stages of the National and the RSC. In 1985-6, the box office average in the Olivier Theatre was 85%; the

[7] Ibid., p.94.
[8] *Playwrights: a species still endangered?, op cit*., p. 11.

new plays did 75%, 92% and 98% business respectively (the 98%'er being Howard Brenton and David Hare's *Pravda*).[9]

4.3 In the building-based theatres covered by the Cork report, however, the second half of the 80s saw a precipitate decline in the presentation of new work, dropping from around 12% to 7% of productions, and in its box office performance, dropping below 50% capacity throughout the period. As a result, the gap between new work and the rest of post-war drama widened to 12% in 1988-9. The other major change was a concomitant rise in the number of adaptations (up from 6% of the repertoire in the 70s to 20% in the late 1980s).[10] The production of new work fell out of fashion, with many young directors dismissing the quality and importance of new writing, and seeking to forge careers in the classics.

4.4 A further issue for playwrights was the increase in the number of new plays not written by writers. The Theatre Writers' Union 1987 report cited a 1987 TWU survey of eight small-scale companies over three years: of the 49 plays (a remarkable number) presented by those companies, 42 were new, but no less than 36 of these were either devised or written by company members.[11] A 1992 Manchester survey of 35 fringe and touring companies producing new work, found that 21 did only devised or company-written work.

4.5 One consequence of the decline in the quantity and (some argued) the quality of new theatre writing in England was the rise of a self-help movement among playwrights in the 1980s and 1990s. Inspired

[9] Ibid., p.17.
[10] Arts Council annual playlists.
[11] *Playwrights: a species still endangered?*, op cit, p.10-11

by Northern Playwrights and the Scottish Society of Playwrights, the North West branch of the Theatre Writers' Union founded North West Playwrights in 1982. An equivalent playwrights' development agency, Stagecoach, was founded in the West Midlands ten years later. The late 80s also saw the foundation of the first post-graduate playwriting course, at the University of Birmingham in 1989, which was followed by many others in the 1990s and since.

5 1990-1997

5.1 The Cork figures continued to be produced at least until 1997, with one small category change, the addition of translations. After the dip of the late 80s, the main feature of the early 90s was the increase both in the number of new plays presented across the spectrum of the English building-based theatre (up from the low of 7% of productions in the late 80s to an average of over 19% of performances between 1993 and 1997) and their box office showing. In the reps, new work attracted 53% of audiences in 1993-4 and 57% in 1996-7, outperforming (in percentage terms) adaptations, post-war revivals, translations, classics and even Shakespeare. [12]

5.2 By now, Cork figures were distinguishing between studio and main house work. Despite the overall increase in new play productions since the late 1980s, the 1990s saw a (smaller and comparative) decline in the number of new plays produced during the course of the decade. Between 1993 and 1997, the number of performances of new plays in theatres with over 200 seats declined from 14.5% to 11%; performances of new plays in smaller theatres declined from 52% of the repertoire to 36%. However, new work sold around 60% of seats

[12] Art Council Statistics Office, 20 May 1998

in the smaller theatres, and 52% in the larger (as opposed to 54% and 49% for the post-war repertoire).[13]

5.3 Despite the decline in performances, new plays' impressive box office figures were very important to the case that playwrights' organisations made to theatres and to the Arts Council for more new writing to be commissioned and presented.

5.4 The striking figures for new writing drew attention away from other major developments: while, compared with 1981-5, musicals had increased as a proportion of the repertoire (a little) and children's theatre (a lot) by 1996-7, classics had reduced from 13% to 8.2% of the repertoire, Ayckbourn from 6% to 3% and - most significantly of all - post-war drama from 46% to 26%.[14] After 20 years in which the shape of the English theatre repertoire was pretty consistent, things appeared to be changing.

[13] Ibid.
[14] Ibid.

4: The last decade

1 The Boyden report and its aftermath

1.1 In May 2000, Peter Boyden Associates published its report to the Arts Council on the *Roles and Functions of the English Regional Producing Theatres*. By this time, it appeared that the Arts Council itself was no longer collating repertoire statistics. Boyden refers to 'TMA figures provided to ACE for 1998/9 (using the so-called "Cork analysis")', which confirm the 1996-7 picture of a decline in classic drama (down from 18% in the early 70s to 8% of the repertoire) and post-war drama (down from 49% in 1982-3 to 30%).[15]

1.2 From this, Boyden concluded that audience tastes were indeed changing, and that, although theatres' programming was beginning to reflect this, English theatre still remained dangerously wedded to a core canon which the public no longer knew. Boyden cited an inexorably widening 'spectacle gap between subsidised theatre and a sophisticated mixed-media, event-based culture',[16] by contrast with which 'text-based "drama" is in relative decline'.[17]

1.3 Calculating (overwhelmingly text-based) new work at roughly 14% of the repertoire of English regional producing theatres (which appears to be a drop of around 5% in a year), and noting that 14 of the 36 responding regional theatres produced no new main stage work at all, Boyden argued that there was 'a relative dearth of "mainstream" new

---

[15] Peter Boyden Associates, *Roles and Functions of the English Regional Producing Theatres*, May 2000, pp.16-17.
[16] Ibid., p.17.
[17] Ibid., p.33.

writing capable of attracting core audiences to the main house'[18], associating new writing with this general decline.

1.4 The Arts Council's response to Boyden - *The Next Stage: Towards a National Policy for Theatre in England* (May 2000) - accepted this argument. While denying any suggestion that 'the text-based play as a form no longer has cultural value', *The Next Stage* insists that 'we cannot ignore the fact that many young people are now leaving school with little knowledge of the core texts'. A dynamic contemporary theatre must 'respond to a multi-cultural, digital and regional Britain', acknowledging that this means embracing 'a wider range of forms and traditions', by encouraging 'the creative and commercial potential of collaborative practice'.[19]

1.5 The Arts Council's theatre policy documents reflected this move away from the written text. In July 2000, the Arts Council produced a *National Policy for Theatre in England* which listed 'new work' (along with 'experimentation and the individual artist') as the first of the strategic priorities which it intended to address.[20] Further priorities favoured a 'culture of innovation', more collaborative practice and new ways of working.[21] Two years later, another *National Policy for Theatre in England* identified eight priorities to inform policy makers' decisions in the distribution of the dramatic uplift in its theatre budget: they included 'new ways of working' as well as 'engagement with young people' and the encouragement of a 'new generation of

[18] Ibid., p.20.
[19] Arts Council of England, *The Next Stage: Towards a National Policy for Theatre in England*, May 2000, p.7.
[20] Arts Council of England, *The Arts Council of England's National Policy for Theatre in England*, July 2000, p.3.
[21] Ibid., p.5.

artists'.[22] In 2007, the Arts Council's new *Theatre Policy* (intended to set the theatre agenda from 2007 to 2011) appeared to downgrade new work in a list of priorities which promised to 'give particular emphasis to experimental practice and interdisciplinary practice, circus and street arts'.[23]

1.6 Despite this overall emphasis on new practice that was collaborative, innovative and novel, the Arts Council's 2003 *Theatre Writing Strategy* promoted initiatives that presumed a traditional relationship between individual freelance writers and producing companies. Accepting the increase in college-based training and other forms of playwrights' development practice and the growth in literary departments, the Strategy nonetheless addressed concerns that were familiar in the 1970s, from the need to encourage theatres to present new plays on large stages and to overcome the resistance of conservative theatre boards to new work, to overcoming the perception that new work is inevitably a poor box office performer. There were also proposals for the creation of a new writing company based outside London.[24]

1.7 The widening gap between a perceived change in audience demand, Arts Council policy to encourage innovative practices, and the way that most new plays continued to be written and presented informed the new writing section of a major report produced just under ten years after Boyden's.

---

[22] Quoted in Anne Millman and Jodi Myers, *Theatre Assessment Findings: data and consultation*, Arts Council of England, 2009, p.2. Original document unavailable on Arts Council of England website.
[23] Arts Council of England, Theatre Policy, 2007, p.6.
[24] Arts Council of England, Theatre Writing Strategy, 2003.

2 The 2008-9 Theatre Assessment: overall

2.1 In 2008, the Arts Council commissioned Anne Millman and Jodi Myers to assess the impact of the £25m (72%) uplift funding to English theatre. Millman and Myers summarised the impact of the uplift thus: 'The grants of some theatre organisations were more than doubled. Almost all regional producing theatres received substantial increases. 83% of new funds went to producing organisations and companies'.[25]

2.2 Before the desk-work of the *Theatre Assessment* was undertaken, it had seemed that the uplift had had a spectacular effect both on general theatre attendances at English regional theatres (up 40%) and in the number of new plays presented. Statistics appeared to show that, from 2000-1 to 2005-6, the number of commissioned new works had increased from 312 to 737 in 117 theatres. In the seven major regional producing theatres, the number of new plays commissioned increased by 54.8% during the period of the uplift, and the number of new plays produced rose by 87.5% (implying, among other things, that more unsolicited scripts were being presented). The number of performances by theatres had increased by 10.6% for home-grown productions and 41.3% for tours.[26]

2.3 Much of the statistical work of the *Theatre Assessment* involved study of the annual returns submitted by regularly funded organisations (RFOs). During the period covered by the Assessment (2001 to 2007) the total sample of theatres among the RFOs increased from 126 to 225. However, as many theatres did not submit returns in all years,

[25] Millman and Myers, op. cit., p.2.
[26] Arts Council of England tabulations, supplied by the Arts Council.

the Assessment also looked in detail at 74 theatres - all of which were recipients of the £25m uplift - which did submit in every year of the period.[27]

2.4 Contrary to the heartening picture described in 2.2 above, the Assessment's conclusion was that the £25m uplift brought about not a transformation but a period of stabilisation in the theatre in England.[28] Despite national surveys which claimed to find a substantial increase in the number of adults attending plays in England, actual and estimated attendances at theatres in the Assessment's 'constant sample' of 74 theatres remained remarkably constant, at around five million in 2001-2, just over that figure in 2004-5, and a little below it in 2006-7.[29] As the period also saw a rise in the number of performances (increasing by nearly 2,000 during the Assessment period[30]), attendances per performance reduced during the 2001-2006 period, from 270 to just over 230. The figures for all the Arts Council's regularly funded theatres saw a less dramatic decline in attendance per performance, from the low 280s to just under 275, with a peak in 2005-6 of over 290.[31]

2.5 Another noteworthy feature of the report is the increase in the number of touring productions, which exceeded home-grown productions in the constant sample theatres in every year covered by the Assessment. But the most dramatic finding revealed by the RFO submissions was a remarkable change in the shape of the English

[27] Millman and Myers, op. cit., pp.4-5.
[28] Ibid., p.12.
[29] Ibid., p.44.
[30] Ibid., p.38.
[31] Ibid., p.45.

theatre repertoire between the latter years of the 20th century and the first decade of the 21st.

3 Theatre Assessment: the repertoire

3.1 The Theatre Assessment undertook a detailed analysis of the work of 32 producing houses, including 18 regional reps, four new writing theatres, four general repertoire London theatres and two children's theatre companies, between 2001 and 2007.

3.2 From these companies' RFO reports, it was able to aggregate the number of new commissions performed by the companies, the number of non-commissioned new works, the number of plays from the established repertoire presented, the total number of new productions (the previous three categories added together), the number of revived productions and the number of brought-in productions by visitors. The survey also listed total performances, known attendances and estimated attendances.

3.3 These attendances were unattributed to particular kinds of production. There is no distinction between main house and studio performances, and no indication of the number of performances given to the different kinds of production.

3.4 All of that said, the figures are extraordinary. As stated, between 1982 and 1987, new plays made up 17.8% of the repertoire; in the late 90s, the Boyden report calculated the figure at 14%. Adding together new commissions and other new work in the 32-company sample, the percentage of commissioned and non-commissioned new work

increases from 51.7% of the repertoire in 2001-02 to 72.5% of the repertoire in 2005-6 (with a dip down to 65% the following year.

3.5 The figures are even more striking the other way round. It is possible - indeed very likely - that there is some category confusion in the commissioned and other new work categories. However, even assuming that *all* children's plays and musicals were new, between 1971 and 1985, over two thirds (69%) of the repertoire of building-based theatres consisted of the established repertoire (post-war, classics, Shakespeare and Ayckbourn).[32] According to the Assessment's 32-company sample figures, the established repertoire never even reached half of the productions presented between 2001 and 2007. Further, the proportion of the established repertoire in theatres' programmes declines between 2001-2 and 2005-6, from 48% to 28%.[33]

3.6 The picture is the same for the 'constant sample' of 74 theatres which submitted reports in all six years. In 2001-2, productions of new commissions and other new work represented 67% of the repertoire of the 74, in 2002-3 66%, in 2003-4 and 2004-5 71%, in 2005-6 70% and in 2006-7 75%.[34]

3.7 The other notable finding is the very high number of 'other new works' presented by theatres, a category that includes new translations and adaptations but must also include non-commissioned original plays. (Though, as argued below, the definition of both commissioned and 'other' new work is problematic). Cork didn't keep

[32] Cork Report, op. cit., p.89.
[33] Theatre Assessment data, 2008.
[34] Ibid.

figures on the production of non-commissioned plays, but it has always been assumed that the overwhelming majority of new play productions in the English theatre are of commissions, and that the presentation of an unsolicited script is the rarest of occurrences. In the 32-company sample, nearly half the new work falls into the 'other' category (and in two of the six years, it is over half). In the 74-theatre constant group, 'other new work' actually exceeds commissioned work by 16%.[35] There may well be category confusion; but unless there has been an unprecedented upsurge in new translations and adaptations, or a frankly unbelievable growth in the production of unsolicited scripts, it seemed from the RFO reports that theatres are presenting plays that they've developed but haven't commissioned.

3.8 Unlike with the Cork figures, it is not possible to isolate box office figures for particular types of work from the RFO returns. However, the Assessment did analyse the returns of a group of seven new writing theatres (the Bush, the Royal Court, Newcastle's Live Theatre, Out of Joint, Paines Plough, Soho Theatre and Tamasha)[36], which presented 219 new productions between 2002 and 2007, of which only eight were from the established repertoire. So while their total attendances include (for instance) those for Out of Joint's *She Stoops to Conquer* and the Royal Court's *Seagull,* their figures do give some indication of the audience for new work in the 2000s. The audience numbers ranged from 252,597 (in 2002-3) to 417,434 (in 2006-7), and the attendances per performance from 131 (in 2005-6) to 171 (again, in 2006-7).[37]

[35] Ibid.
[36] Theatre Assessment, op. cit., p.68.
[37] Theatre Assessment data, 2008.

3.9 Taking out the exceptional 2006-7 (the year of the 50th anniversary of Look Back in Anger, during which the Royal Court's audience more than doubled), a picture emerges of between 250,000 and 350,000 annual attendances at productions produced by the new writing companies.

3.10 Not surprisingly for new writing theatres, most of the new work produced by these companies was commissioned. But, even so, there were a substantial number of 'other works' presented (91 out of 219). In one year, 2004-5, the number of 'other works' produced exceeded the number of commissioned works, albeit by a tiny margin.[38]

3.11 Two other interesting facts emerge from the *Theatre Assessment* and the statistics on which it was based. The Assessment isolated and studied the output of regularly funded touring organisations, and found that here, too, a combination of new commissions and other new work exceeded new productions of the established repertoire throughout the 2001-2007 period, in four years by more than 100%.[39] Touring attendances fluctuated between 700,000 and 800,000; again, increased numbers of performances did not lead to increased attendances, but merely spread an existing or even reducing audience more thinly.[40]

3.12 Finally, there were two important sources of funding for new writing initiatives (and indeed writers) on top of earnings from commissions and productions. In 2003-4, the Arts Council's Drama Department

[38] Ibid.
[39] Theatre Assessment, op. cit., p.92.
[40] Ibid., p.93.

Managed Funds gave £270,000 to new writing initiatives in 2003-4 and £100,000 in subsequent years. New Writing was also the largest single category for investment from the Grants for the Arts scheme (to which individuals as well as companies can apply). From 2003-4 to 2007-8, new writing received nearly £12m from GfA, nearly double the funds allocated to young people's theatre, more than double the funds given for contemporary plays, street arts or 'contemporary theatre' and more than three times the funds devoted to theatre in education, puppetry or youth theatre.[41]

3.13 Assessed for what they can tell us about the production of new plays, the statistics assembled from the RFO reports for the *Theatre Assessment* pointed to a massively changed theatrical scene. The traditional theatre programme - in which post-war theatre formed roughly half of a repertoire and new plays less than 20% - changed radically in the 2000s. As a proportion of both home-grown and toured-in productions, new work of various kinds (including translations and adaptations) now exceeded plays from the canon, in some years by a considerable margin. In addition, the statistics might suggest that an unexpected number of produced new plays have been unsolicited.

4 Theatre Assessment: consultation

4.1 In addition to their desk research, Anne Millman and Jodi Myers set up a number of consultations with individuals and focus groups. One focus group was devoted to new writing. In combination, the new writing focus group and the individual consultations paint a radically

[41] Ibid., p. 67.

different picture of the state of new writing in the English theatre to that culled from the statistics.

4.2 Writers, literary managers and dramaturgs acknowledge that new work has spread out from new writing theatres, that there is 'increased support and encouragement for new writers', and that there are 'more opportunities to present the work of unknown writers in flagship venues'. However, in view of the (undoubted) move towards 'multimedia events and the incorporation of music and dance', writers feel 'some confusion, particularly around the issues of the "well-made play" and the role of the writer'.[42]

4.3 Those consulted note other major developments in the last decade, including a marked increase in training for playwrights in higher education, and in literary and dramaturgical departments in theatres. Possibly as a result of the latter, playwrights detect an increasing interventionism by dramaturgs and indeed producers. Some playwrights are also concerned that the move towards collaboration and 'more multilayered processes' might marginalise rather than support the writer.[43]

4.4 These opinions are not in direct contradiction with the statistical picture. But others are. It is striking that, during a period when the production of new work appears to have increased massively, writers feel that there has been a decline in the chance for writers to pursue a career in the theatre. In addition to new fears about being edged out by collaborative work, playwrights are expressing a number of concerns which have exercised them since the 1970s: the continued

[42] Ibid., p.64.
[43] Ibid., p.65.

lack of female playwrights, the difficulty of getting new plays presented outside London or on main stages, and a paucity of second and subsequent productions of their work.[44] Finally, the 'widespread view among practitioners' is that, while there has been a growth in the development of writers, 'there has been a reduction in the amount of work commissioned and produced'. This view stands in stark contrast to what the RFO report figures appear to indicate.

5 Difficulties with the Theatre Assessment Analysis

5.1 There are several possible reasons for this disjuncture. It is conceivable that the consultations with writers gave a partial picture (there were only three writers out of the 16 members of the new writing focus group). Another possible conclusion is that the RFO reports don't really show what they appear to show.

5.2 Only a small proportion of the statistical section of the RFO returns is devoted to repertoire and attendances. In the notes for the completion of the form, there is no definition of commissions, except that it excludes new productions of the established repertoire and new translations and adaptations. It is stated that, where one grant has been given to commission more than one piece of work, 'and there is a strong possibility that a discrete part of that work may be performed separately in the future', then this should be counted as more than one commission. But it is not clear whether commissioning, for example, a new design or score for an existing stage piece would render the production as a whole a 'new

[44] Ibid., p.65.

commission', except insofar that the piece was not 'other new work' or part of the 'established repertoire'.[45]

5.3 The definition of 'other new work' is also vague. The only guidance given to theatres is that '"other" new work relates to translations and adaptations for sole and co-productions only (excluding visiting productions)', which may be meant to set a limitation on the applicable translations and adaptations within the new work category but may equally well imply that the category consists entirely of translations and adaptations (in which case, where might theatres enter productions of non-commissioned new plays?). Certainly, the Royal Court didn't present nine new translations or adaptations in 2004-5, as Paines Plough didn't present three new translations or adaptations in the following year. It seems unlikely that the 74 constant sample presented 206 new translations or adaptations in 2001-2 (or 407 in 2006-7). All that is certain is that new translations and adaptations fall under this heading and thus (for instance) a new translation of *Antigone*, *The Miser* or *The Cherry Orchard* would not be listed under the established repertoire.[46]

5.4 In addition, the annual RFO forms ask theatres to list the number of productions, and theatres are not required to specify the length of the run, the size of the space in which the play was performed, or a production's individual box office performance. The raw numbers of particular types of production may (almost certainly does) conceal huge differences in their scale and box office performance.

[45] Arts Council of England, Regularly funded organisations: notes for completing Section 3, the statistical section of the annual submission 2006/7, p.13.
[46] Ibid., p.14.

5.5 For all these reasons, it was opportune that the Arts Council decided to commission new research into new writing in the English theatre in this decade.

6 Dunton, Nelson and Shand

6.1 Concurrent with the research and production of this report, the Arts Council commissioned Emma Dunton, Roger Nelson and Hetty Shand to produce an assessment of new writing in theatre since 2003. Although there was some overlap with the theatres we studied, the Dunton report (as we henceforward call it) dealt largely with non-building-based, small-scale companies working in collaborative and innovative ways, while our work was on building-based theatres which (we expected) would present a more traditional picture. Dunton et al. took a qualitative approach, based around focus groups, face-to-face or telephone interviews, and e-surveys.

6.2 The Dunton report noted that there was felt to be not only an increase in the amount of new work presented, but a wider variety of work produced under the banner of new writing than there was six years ago.[47] In particular, theatre writers were emerging from other areas of the performing arts, such as spoken word, music, comedy, cabaret and dance.[48] In the non-venue-based sector, writing for children appears to have increased and diversified (though many felt it was easier for venues to sell adaptations than original new writing for children).[49] However, some of those consulted expressed concerns

[47] Emma Dunton, Roger Nelson and Hetty Shand, *An assessment of new writing in theatre since 2003*, Arts Council of England, 2009, p. 6.
[48] Ibid., p. 10.
[49] Ibid., p. 22.

that performance-based, devised work was siphoning money and favour away from the development and production of traditional plays.[50]

6.3 A resultant and particular problem appears to be establishing 'progression routes' for writers seeking to pursue independent careers.[51] The focus on younger writers had made it harder for older writers at the beginning or even further into their careers to get commissioned.[52] The emphasis on first plays by new writers made it harder to sell a second or third play[53]. For all these reasons, writers perceive that (in the words of the questionnaire to playwrights jointly issued by Dunton et al. and us) 'sustaining a play-writing career has become more difficult than it was five years ago'.[54]

6.4 The Dunton report identified much positive practice, particularly in its case-studies of Contact Theatre and Pentabus, who have developed innovative ways to develop new writing, from Contact's Pitch Parties attended by BBC representatives and monthly 'Flip the Script' slam nights to Pentabus's annual writers' week, which led to the group-written White Open Spaces.[55] Dunton et al. found a majority approving the emergence of dramaturgy but some expressed concerns about its intrusiveness and an erosion of the writer-centred approach,[56] the dangers of plays remaining in permanent

[50] Ibid., p. 7-8
[51] Ibid., p. 10.
[52] Ibid., p. 11.
[53] Ibid., p. 13.
[54] Ibid., p. 19.
[55] Ibid., p. 33-4
[56] Ibid., p. 15.

development and never being actually produced,[57] and also an unevenness in the quality of dramaturgy across the sector.[58]

6.5 Beyond theatre companies themselves, Dunton et al. emphasise the importance of writers networking with each other and, in particular, the role of the independent writers' agencies, including several which have recently suffered cuts and/or (in the case of Writernet) closed down. One suggested explanation for these cuts is that new writing development is now going on in theatres themselves and that the agencies no longer have a role.[59]

6.6 Finally, Dunton et al. imply an interesting historical analogy. The report reveals a much wider variety of theatrical experience, site, time and format than existed in the 1980s and 1990s. For those with long memories, the expansion of festivals and of late night and lunchtime performances echoes the early 1970s, when a new generation of playwrights learnt their craft through productions in non-theatre environments, often performed in festival contexts at strange times of day. It's worth noting that, in that period, the barriers between performance and text-based theatre appeared much less opaque than they were to become later. As noted above, however, this generation of writers was quickly embraced by established mainstream theatres, whose commitment to their work allowed them to sustain playwriting careers.

7 Our research

[57] Ibid., p. 13.
[58] Ibid., p. 28.
[59] Ibid., p. 14-5.

7.1 The likely imprecision of the RFO report categories, the limitation of the questions even when precise, and the marked contrast between what they appear to show about new writing and the experience of writers had led us to conclude that new research was needed. The aim of this research was - in part - to check whether a decline in the existing repertoire, an increase in collaborative ways of working, an upsurge of new work and a significant growth in new translations and adaptations had actually occured. If it had, we were interested in any negative aspects of these phenomena which might lead writers to articulate the concerns that they expressed both to Millman and Myers and to Dunton, Nelson and Shand.

7.2 Accordingly, we drew up, distributed, received and collated the results from detailed questionnaires for RFOs and playwrights (the latter was drawn up in collaboration with Dunton et al.). We also conducted a number of in-depth interviews with theatre companies with distinct policies and programmes of new writing, with one writing agency, and with a group of playwrights from the Writers' Guild theatre committee.

5: Statistical analysis

1 Introduction

1.1 Since the late 1990s, detailed figures have not been available for the individual productions and performances undertaken by the Arts Council's RFOs. This decision was taken in the spirit of 'light touch' supervision, but has made it impossible to make accurate judgments about the success of the Arts Council's policies in a number of key areas, including those set out in the Theatre Policy.

1.2 To conduct a full assessment of the Council's new writing policy, we thought it vital to gather the missing statistics. We asked all Regularly Funded theatre Organisations which regularly offer new writing to give us details of all performances that they produced or presented across the six years from 2003 to 2009, broken down into types of production, and including audience figures (headcount and percentages) and some basic information (title, author if appropriate, company, co-producer). The information we sought was much more detailed and comprehensive than the Cork figures, though our production categories are structured so that broad-brush conclusions about trends can also be drawn.

1.3 We received replies from 65 theatres and companies, which included all of the national companies, most of the major repertory theatres and several touring and community theatres.

The number of individual items of data returned by all the responding theatres is **5,714**. It includes straight plays, musicals, revivals, stand-up shows, poetry readings, play readings, jazz performances,

workshops, day-conferences and more. It includes 222 performances of *The History Boys* at the National Theatre and a single evening with David Frost at the Mercury Colchester, and everything in between.

1.4 This data is by no means complete, but it represents a very substantial slice of Arts Council-funded theatre in this country. The information that this data discloses is very striking in the way it allows us to provide evidence for widely-shared intuitions and impressions about patterns in theatre-making this decade; it also reveals that many of the assumptions made about the performance of new plays are very wide of the mark.

2 Plays

2.1 We asked all theatres to identify every performance from a number of categories:

- Plays
- Devised work
- New writing
- Classical revivals (before 1850)
- Modern revivals (1850-1945)
- Post-war revivals (since 1945)
- Translation
- Adaptation
- Physical theatre
- Pantomime
- Music theatre
- Children or young people's theatre

Theatres were encouraged to report their performances under as many of these categories as they felt appropriate. A new translation of *Hedda Gabler* would be a play, new writing, a translation and a modern revival. A revival of *The Gruffalo* might be a children or young people's theatre show, a post-war revival, and an adaptation. Most theatres were able to place their productions in these options (though we have some revised proposals for categorising theatre events).

2.2 We found no theatre events that would not come under at least one of these categories. This enabled us easily to exclude all events like poetry readings, jazz performances, stand-up comedy, which do not come under these categories, and we were left with **2,535** individual performances.[60]

2.3 Of all of these theatrical performances, 1,957 are plays. In other words

- ***plays* make up 77% of all theatre shows** in the reporting theatres across the years of the survey.

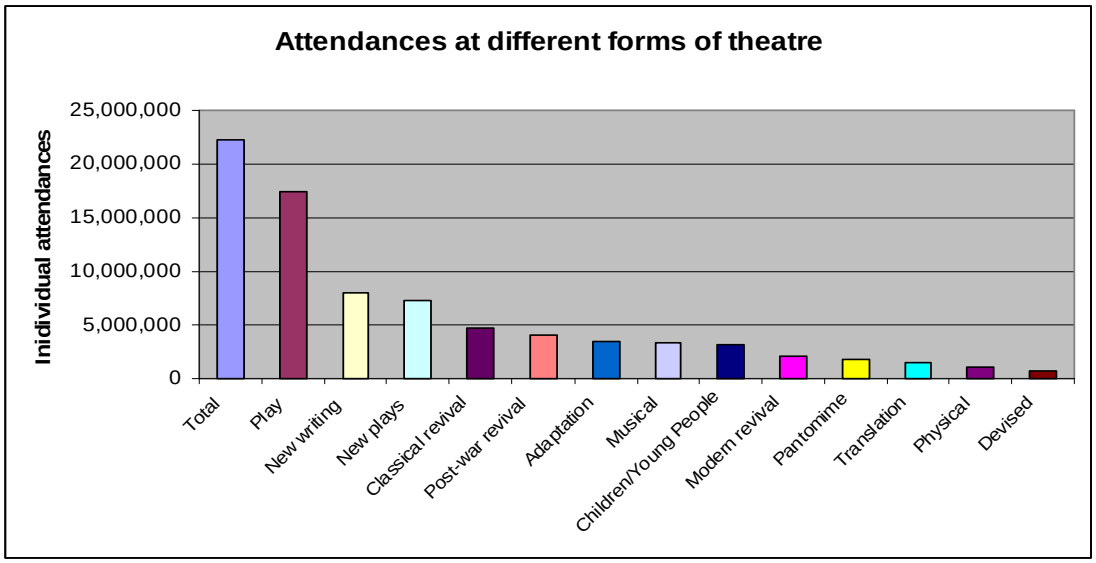
2.4 Of these, 1,053 shows contain new writing. In other words

- ***new plays* make up 42% of all theatre shows** in the reporting theatres across the years of the survey.

2.5 The raw figures of individual attendances for each form of theatre are given in fig. 2. It shows a range of attendances, from the 17.4 million who attended plays to the 820,000 attendances at devised work.

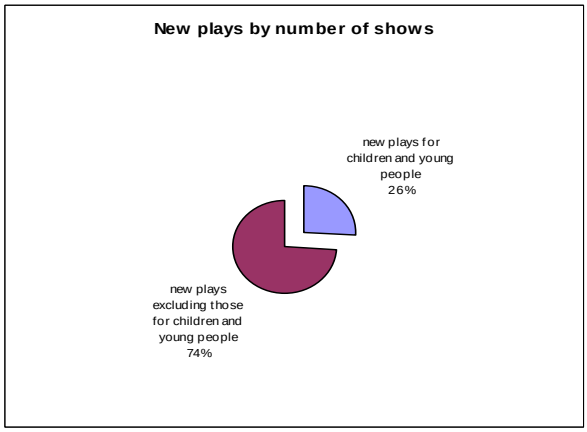
[60] The raw figure is 3,169 but some productions toured from theatre to theatre and therefore appear more than once in the spreadsheet. Working by hand through a substantial sample (1000), it seems that approximately 20% of events have also been performed elsewhere. When judging numbers of original productions, but only such figures, we therefore deduct 20% from the raw figures.

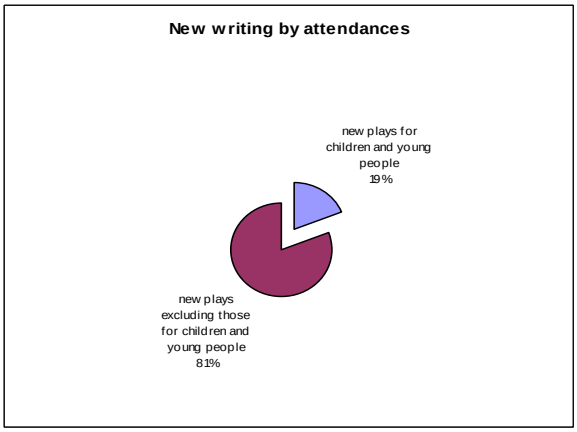
Figure 2[61]



2.6 Within the category of new plays we should note a particularly high number of plays for children and young people, which make up over one-quarter of all new plays, and just under one quarter of all attendances as illustrated in fig. 3.

Figure 3





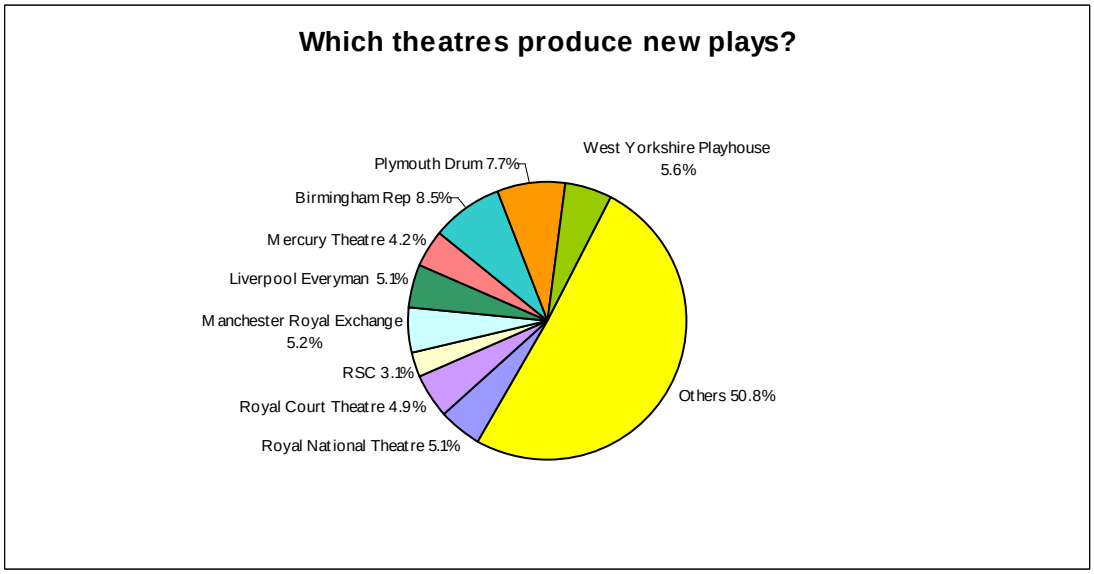
[61] Note: These categories are not mutually exclusive; most productions will be included under more than one category. Thus caution should be shown before making direct comparisons between columns.

3 Which theatres perform new plays?

3.1 As one might expect, there is a concentration of new plays in the national companies and the major regional repertory theatres. Indeed, as fig. 4 shows, nine companies produce, between them, half of all new plays in England. The five largest regional reps alone account for almost a third (32.1%) of all new plays performed nationally .

3.2 That said, the pattern is fairly well spread across the country and it is evident that there is considerable new-play-producing activity beyond the major repertory theatres, with **all but one** of the companies who responded to our survey recording new play production between 2003 and 2008.

Figure 4[62]

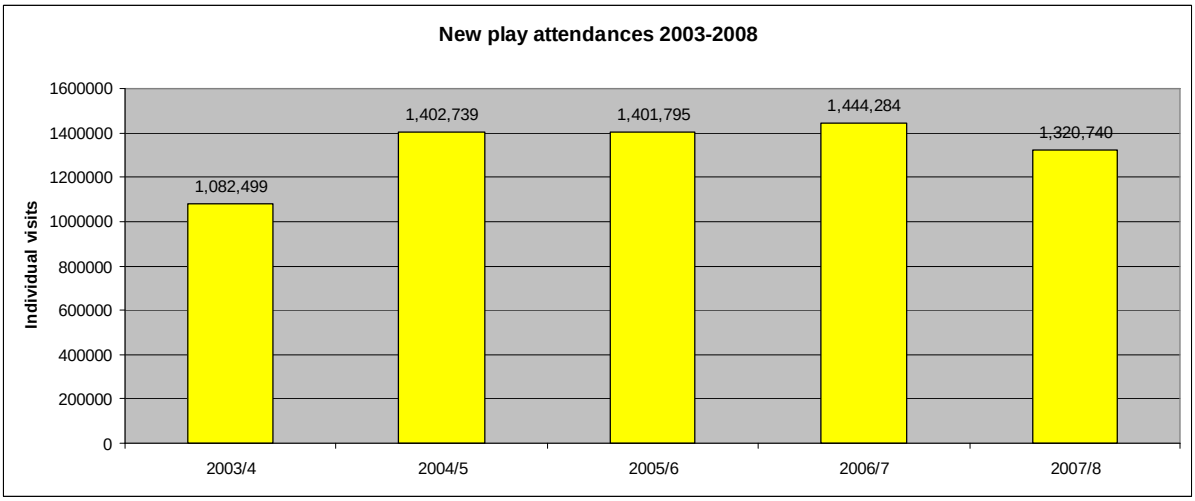


[62] The West Yorkshire Playhouse's statistical return arrived too late to be included in the other statistics but their information has been used to compile this figure.

4 How do new plays do?

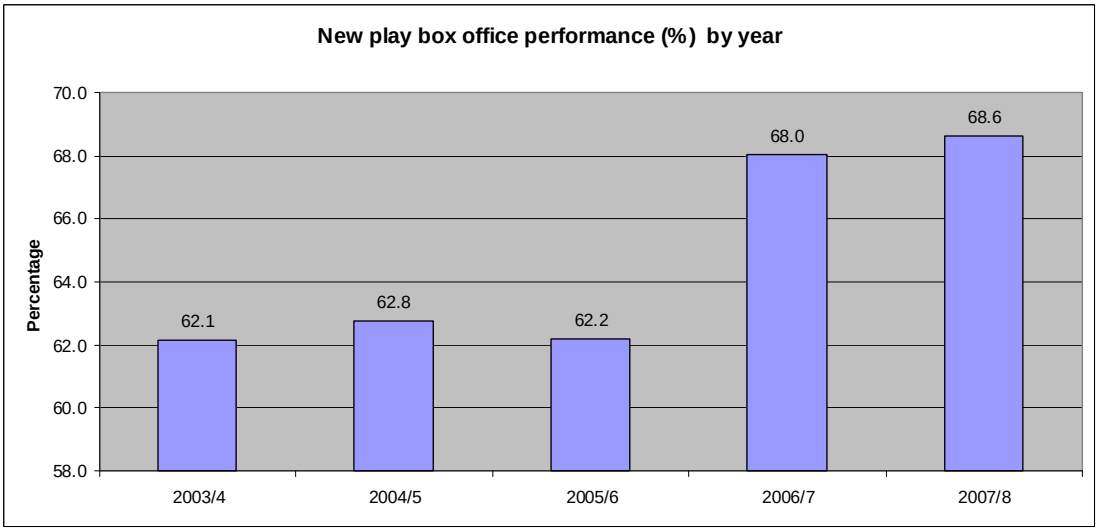
4.1 The number of individual attendances at new plays – that is performances returned as both 'play' and 'new writing' – recorded by our survey of RFOs is **7,208,864** over the period surveyed. This rises from just over 1 million attendances in the first year of this survey, peaking at almost 1.5 million in 2006/7 (see fig. 5). It should be remembered that these returns represent only a portion of all RFOs and so this is an understatement of the true value. However, this is an impressive figure in itself and constitutes 32% of all attendances *of any kind* at the reporting theatres.

Figure 5



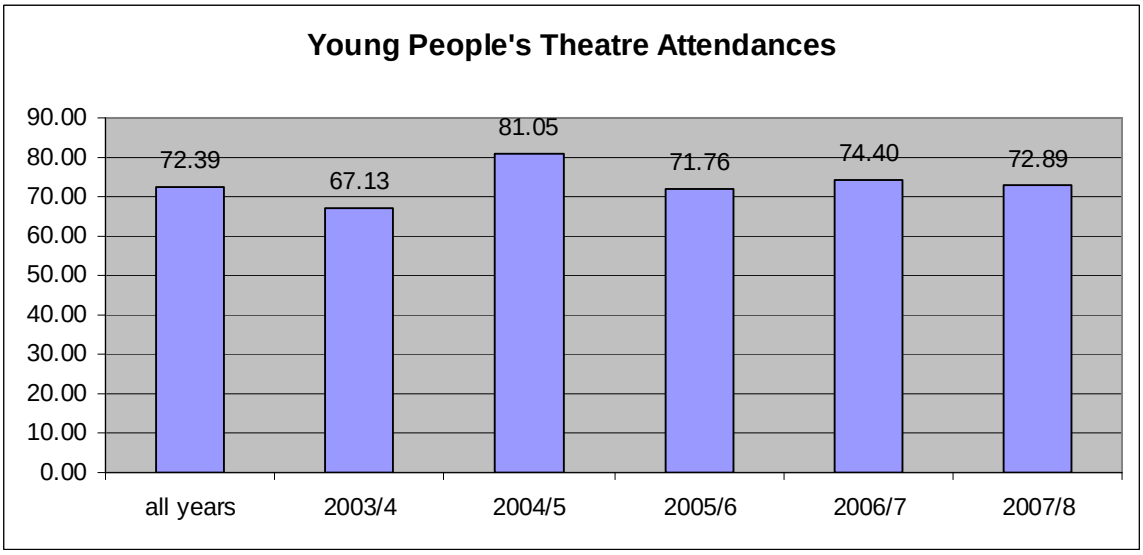
4.2 New play performance at the box office compares reasonably well with other performances. There is, in particular, a leap in attendance between 2005/6 and 2006/7, from 62-63% in the first three years to 68-69% in the latter two. The average box office across *all* performance events is 68.2%, and, as fig. 6 shows, new plays narrowly exceeded that average in the last year of the survey.

Figure 6



4.3 Again, we should note the particular success within this period of young people's theatre, much of which involves new writing, and which regularly records attendances above 70% and in 2004/5 saw 81% attendances, see fig. 7.

Figure 7

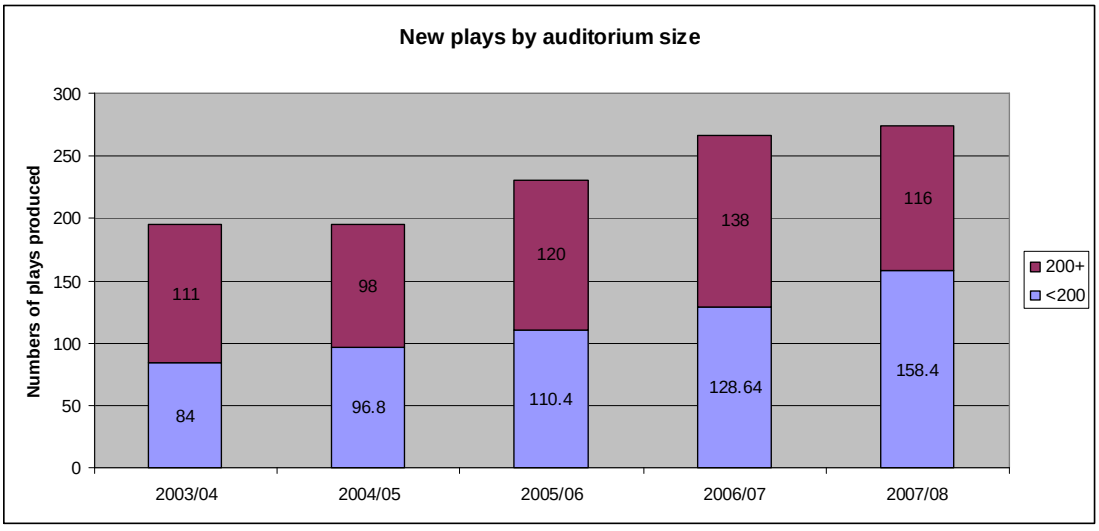


5 Auditorium size

5.1 It is frequently lamented that new plays are relegated to studio spaces while classics, musicals and adaptations dominate the main stages. Our research shows this perception to be mistaken in several ways.

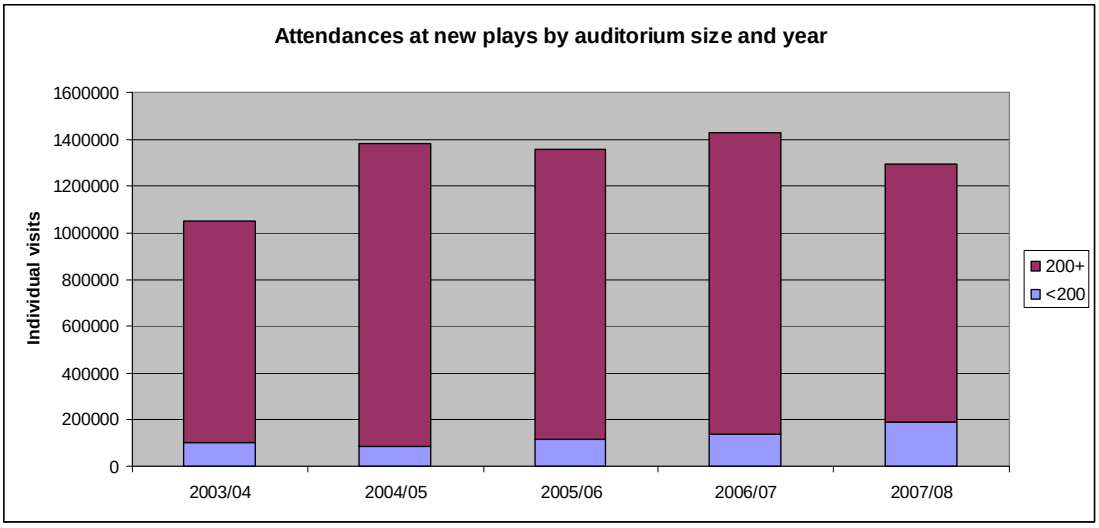
5.2 First, of those productions in reporting companies where the capacity could be determined, new plays are **evenly divided** between theatres with capacities above and below 200. This figure has fluctuated only slightly, with a majority of new plays being performed on main stages every year except 2006/7 (see fig. 8). On this basis, in the major RFOs we surveyed, there is no sign of the much-rumoured ghettoising of new plays in smaller houses.

Figure 8



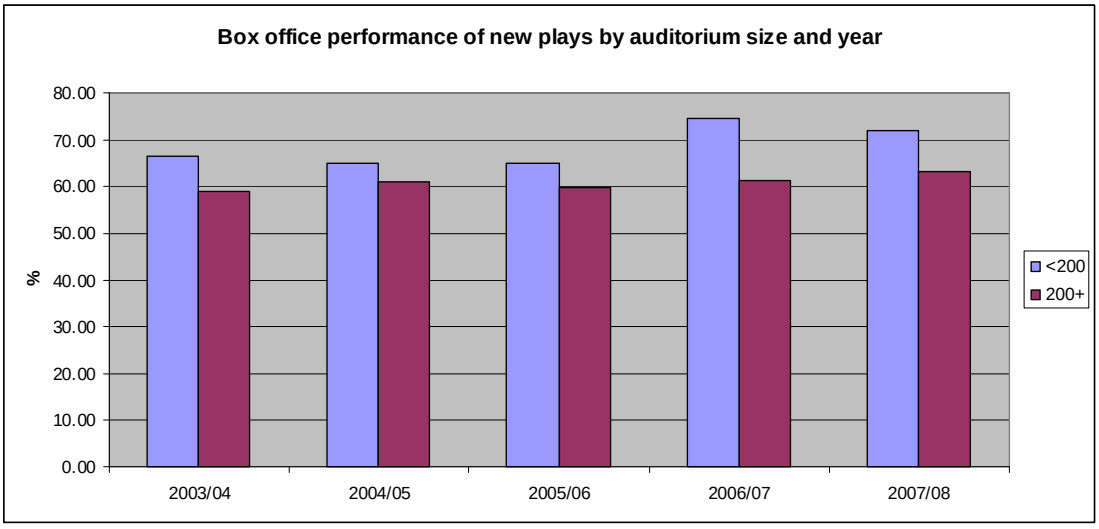
5.3 Looking at raw attendances, the picture is even more starkly counter to the received wisdom. **New plays are overwhelmingly watched on main stages**, as fig. 9 shows. On average, across the five years of the sample, if you saw a new play, nine times out of ten, you would have seen it on a main stage.

Figure 9



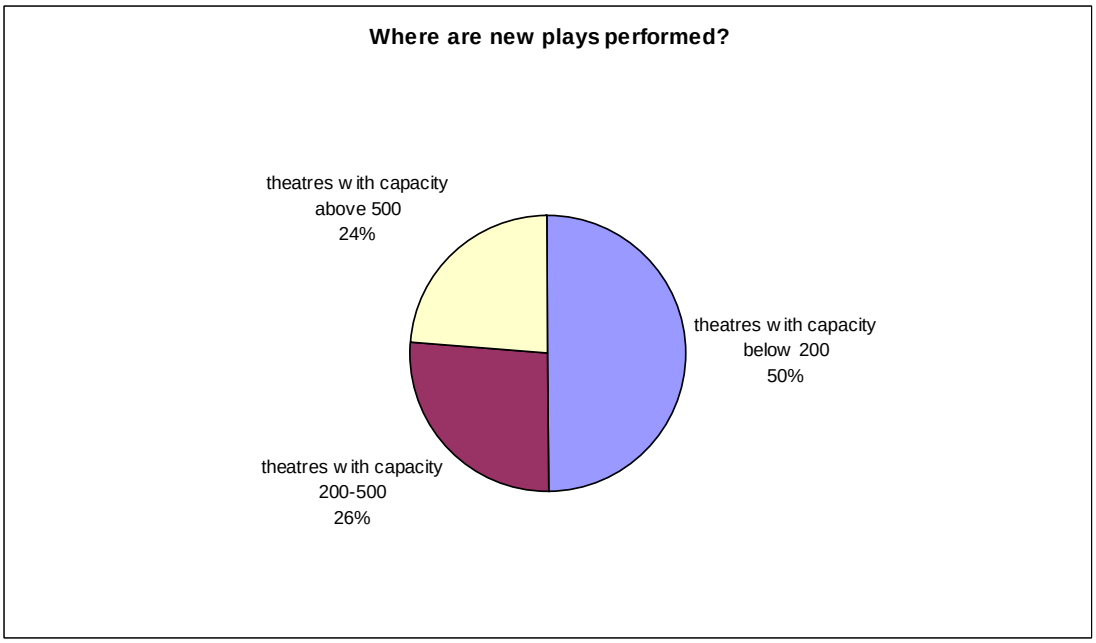
5.4 New plays also hold their own in box office terms on larger stages. The average box office performance of a new play on a main stage is 64.7%. The average box office performance of a new play in a studio is higher, at 68.5%, but the difference is relatively small. There is also a slight but significant rising pattern of attendance at new plays on main stages, while on studios the figure is more uneven (see fig. 10)

Figure 10



5.5 Even if we draw the dividing line higher up, new plays have a strong showing on the largest stages. If we subdivide the larger category into theatres with a capacity of 200-500 and theatres with a capacity above 500, the number of productions of new plays does not diminish at the higher level (see fig. 11).

Figure 11

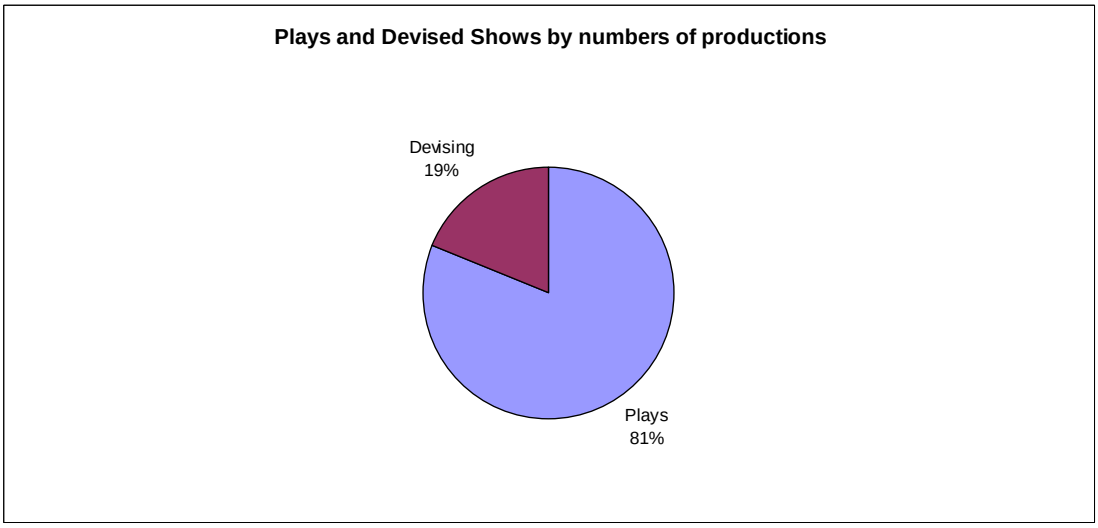


5.6 On the largest stages, new plays average a box office of 58.4%, a respectable figure, given that the average box office of all forms of performance on the largest stages is 64% (62.9% if you exclude musicals and Christmas shows). In other words, new plays are widely performed on the largest stages, where they perform more than respectably – and comparably to their performance in studios.

6 Devising

6.1 Devised performance has clearly been a growth area in this decade and has been supported by subsidy as well as critical attention. It is worth paying attention to the fortunes of devised work across the period under investigation.

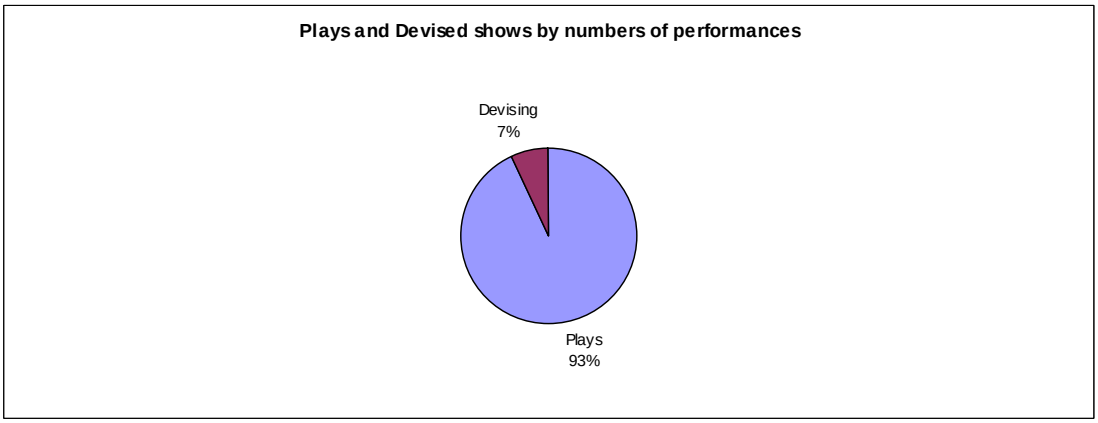
Figure 12



6.2 In terms of raw numbers of productions, devising and plays are performed in the proportion set out in fig. 12. Note that these are neither mutually exclusive nor exhaustive categories, and it should not be inferred that they have a competing or contrary status. Nonetheless 'the play', as we have seen, is well-established in British theatrical culture and offers a valuable point of comparison.

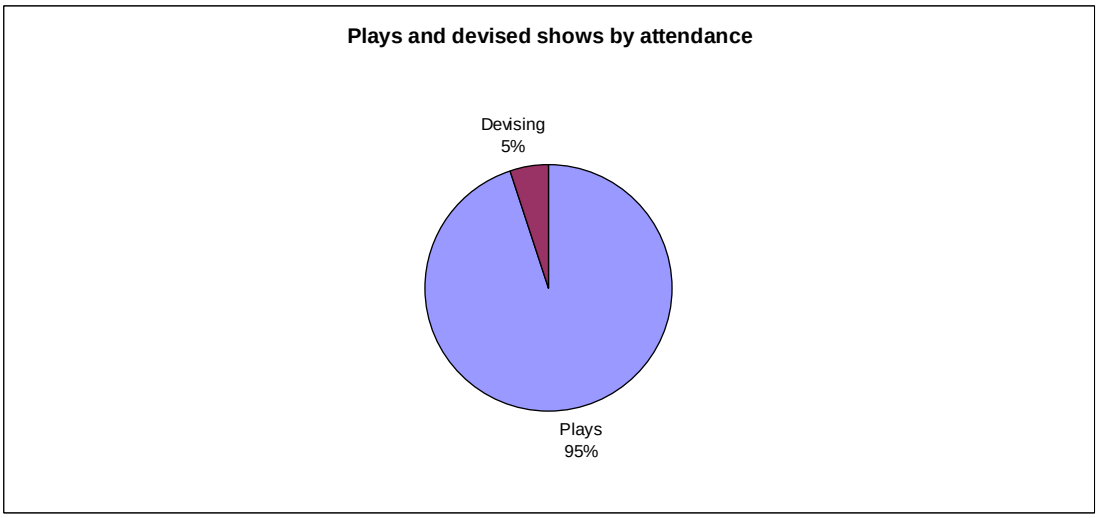
6.3 However, we can press a little harder on these figures. Numbers of productions is a rather blunt figure, giving parity to a one-off performance and a six-month run. Looking at numbers of performances, the ratio between plays and devising productions is shown in fig. 13.

Figure 13



6.4 If we then look at attendances, the figure changes still further, as shown by fig. 14.

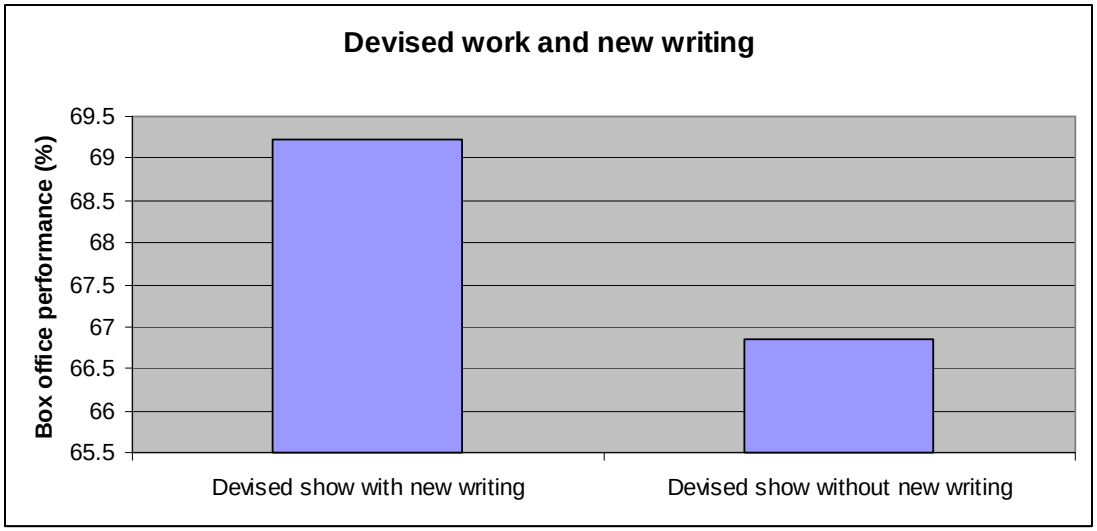
Figure 14



6.5 It should be noted that figs. 12-14 cannot be directly correlated with each other since each uses slightly different data sets. Nonetheless, it is clear that while devised work has established itself within the theatrical ecology, but has yet to find a broad audience.

6.6 We might also make the observation that devised shows with a 'new writing' component are on average 2.4 percentage points more successful at the box office than devised shows without a 'new writing' component (see fig. 15). The difference is slight but it might suggest that audiences still respond more readily to work with a recognisably 'writerly' quality. It also emphasises that devising and new writing are overlapping categories and many contemporary playwrights will pass more or less easily between the single-authored play and collaborative devised work in the course of their career.

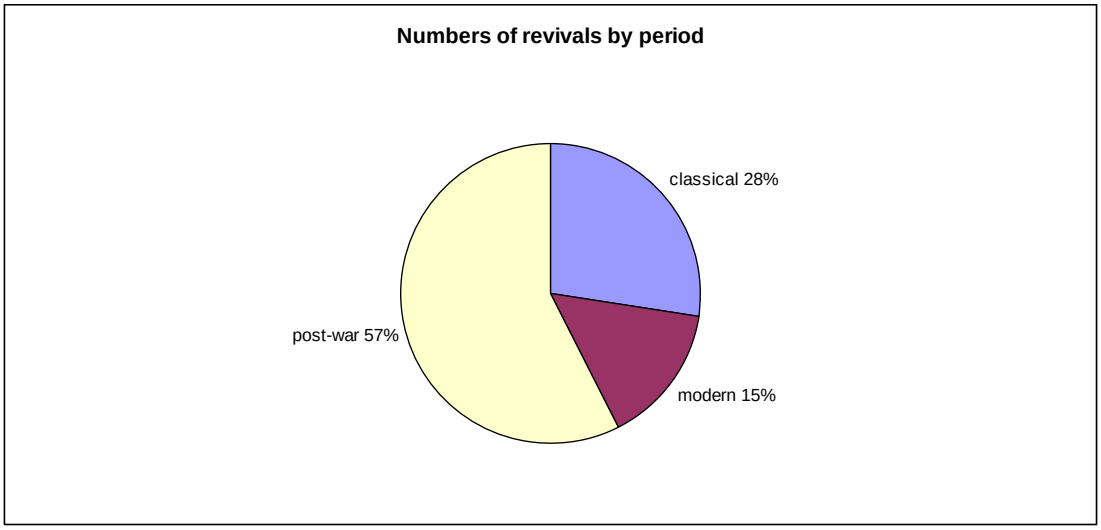
Figure 15



7 The Repertoire

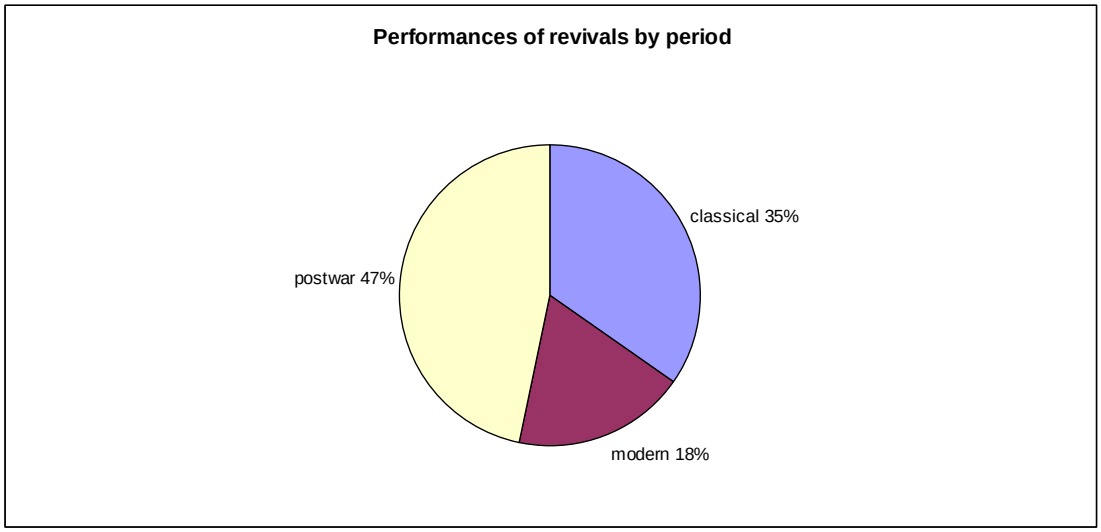
7.1 These figures also give us an opportunity to consider the health or otherwise of the world repertoire on English stages. Of all theatrical productions, 949 were revivals of one kind or another, which broke down in the proportions shown in fig. 16. We define classical productions as revivals of plays written before 1850, a modern revival as the revival of a play written between 1850 and 1945, and a post-war revival as the revival of a play written after 1945.

Figure 16



7.2 The picture changes, however, when one digs a little deeper. As one divides them by numbers of performances, the category of modern revivals expands a little and classical revivals a little more, eating into the post-war category (see fig. 17).

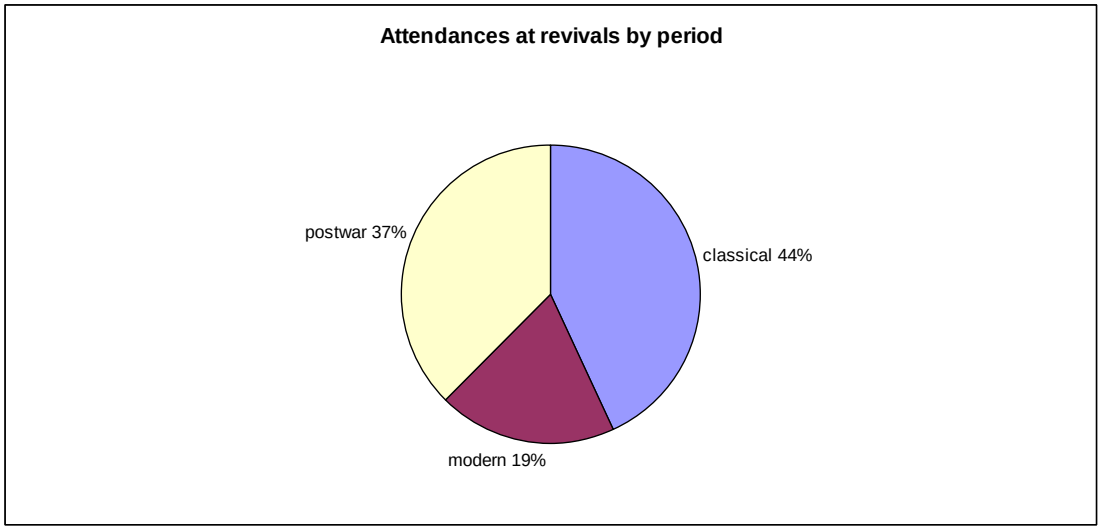
Figure 17



7.3 And this process continues when one looks at attendances at revivals (see fig. 18), almost half of which are now for classical revivals and

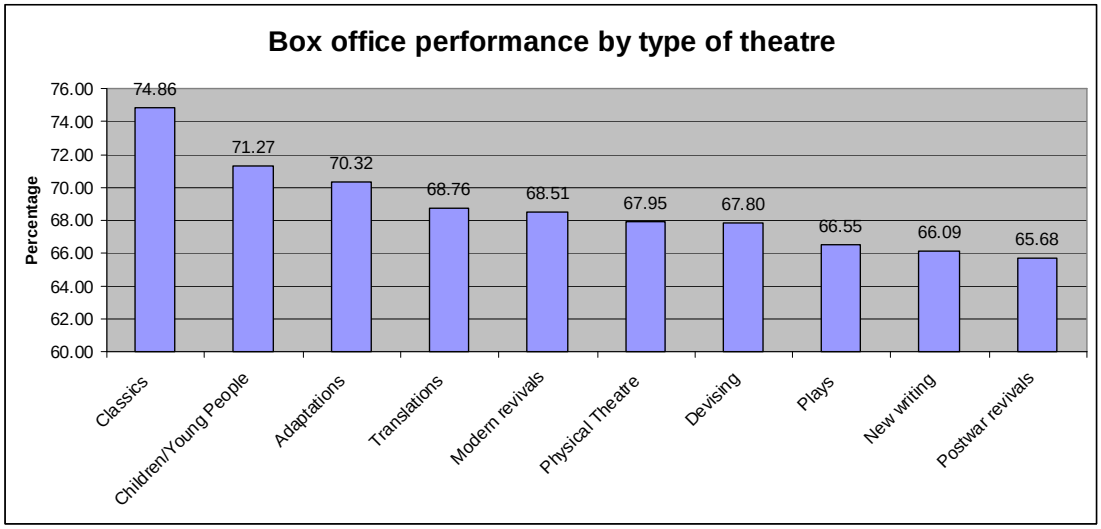
only 37% are for post-war revivals (despite post-war revivals making up 57% of produced revivals).

Figure 18



7.4 Indeed, of the various categories identified in our survey, the classical revival is by far the most successful in box office terms, while the post-war revival is the least, as seen in fig. 19.

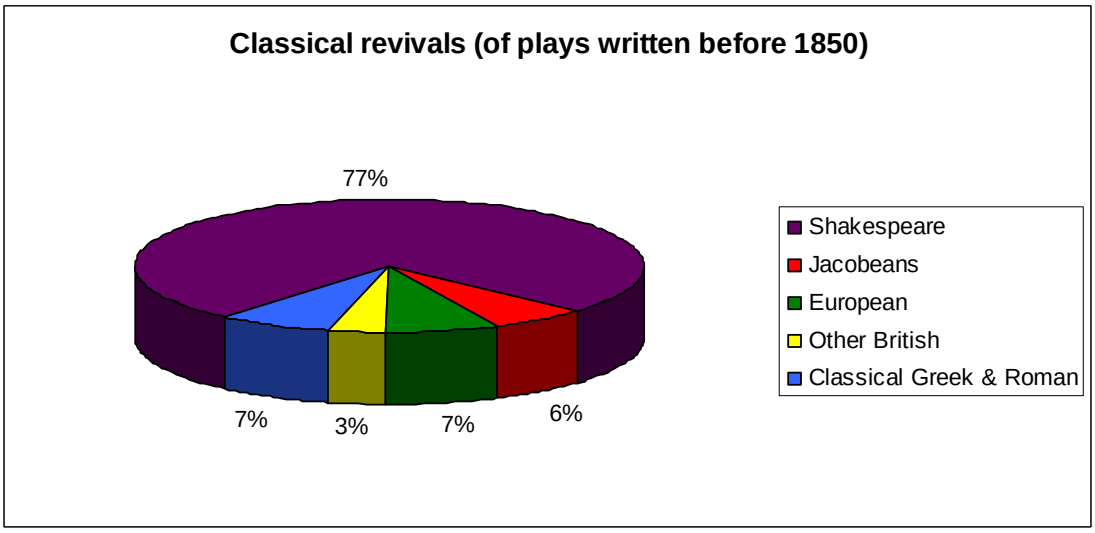
Figure 19[63]



[63] See footnote 61.

7.5 The classical revival is dominated by one figure: Shakespeare. The evidence is very clear that Shakespeare continues to be excellent box office. There are, however, good showings for a range of different plays from the classical repertoire and an indication of trends and preferences is given in fig. 20.

Figure 20



8 Summary

8.1 These statistics by themselves demonstrate the value of gathering this kind of detailed information. We have only begun to use the wealth of information available from this database. We strongly urge the Arts Council to make this kind of detailed statistical gathering an annual exercise.

8.2 Plays in general, and new plays in particular, continue to form the bedrock of the repertoire across the country.

8.3 New plays perform, in general, very well, with 7.2 million individual visits to new plays in the five years 2003 to 2008, almost 1.5 million of which were in 2006/7 alone.

8.4 Despite widespread beliefs to the contrary, new plays are produced on main stages about half the time, where they are seen by 90% of the new-play-going audience. There has been a clear pattern of growing success for new plays on main stages through the decade.

8.5 New plays are significantly produced by the national companies and major repertory theatres but certainly not exclusively so. We saw no evidence that London dominated the new play scene.

8.6 There are no real signs that devised work, despite its artistic merits, has broken through to a wider audience. It remains the taste of a very small fraction of the theatregoing audience.

8.7 Theatre for children and young people is a major success story over the period. It constitutes a very significant portion of the new work being produced and performs much better than average at the box office.

8.8 Classical revivals are the most commercially successful form of theatre in our survey.

8.9 Revivals of post-war plays are the least successful and, given their importance to sustaining a writer's long-term career, may need additional support.

6: In-depth company interviews

1 Introduction

1.1 Based on our qualitative and quantitative exploration of theatre policy and practice, this chapter offers an account of some fascinating and innovative practices emerging within the period 2003-9. What is most notable and striking is the explosion of dramaturgical activity in English theatre during this period, not least in terms of the ubiquity of literary departments at all levels of theatrical activity.

1.2 This pattern emerges from our larger company qualitative questionnaire returns; out of 60 respondents, 36 had a new writing policy, 23 had a literary department (although some of these offered a narrower definition of 'undertaking the activities of a literary department in some form'), 43 read unsolicited scripts (which has an interesting bearing on the fate of the unsolicited script in general), 54 engaged in development activities (script in hand performances, mentoring, attachments, workshops, rehearsed readings, residencies, writers' groups, other) and 31 worked with writing agencies.

1.3 In addition to the information compiled through the company surveys and offered on the spreadsheet, we decided to conduct twelve in-depth interviews to expand upon and enhance some of the aspects of the raw data. This chapter presents our findings and analyses of these interviews. All citations are drawn from the interviews.

2 Theatres interviewed

2.1 All the theatres interviewed are RFOs across the spectrum of institutions producing new work. They fall into the following categories:

1. National institutions which present new writing as part of a mixed repertoire:

National Theatre

Royal Shakespeare Company

2. Regional theatres which present new writing as part of a mixed repertoire:

Birmingham Repertory Theatre

Liverpool Everyman and Playhouse

Northern Stage

West Yorkshire Playhouse

3. Theatre buildings dedicated to new writing:

The Bush Theatre

Hampstead Theatre

Royal Court Theatre

4. Touring theatre companies dedicated to new writing:

Out of Joint

Paines Plough

5. Theatre company dedicated to new writing for young people:

Theatre Centre

2.2 In addition to the information drawn from company interviews, pertinent comments from an interview with representatives of the Writer's Guild of Great Britain feature in the discussion below. Although we were not able to represent all geographic areas, we

would like to note that the South West and the Eastern regions both have very specific issues in terms of a lack of provision with regard to the development of new writing. The East lacks a building-based company which has new writing at the core of its policy. It is also relevant to Chapter 7 of our report that in both regions there is no designated writers' agency.[64]

2.3 We were not able to examine fully the activities of non-building-based theatre companies. Partially this is because such companies fall within the remit of the Dunton report which looks specifically at provision from companies such as Graeae and Pentabus, as well as considering festival-based producers such as High Tide. We interviewed two touring theatre companies, Out of Joint and Paines Plough, in our twelve in-depth examples.

3 Changes in new writing policies

3.1 While most of the theatres interviewed had a specific policy of emphasis and attention to new writing (these varied from detailed written policies and aims such as Paines Plough through to the National Theatre's 'rule of thumb' aspiration to 50% of its programming), we also found that a number of the theatres interviewed are modifying or extending their policy. Birmingham

[64] The South West has seen some fascinating developments in this period, not least the more proactive role of theatres such as Hall for Cornwall in Truro, which has piloted a number of exciting developmental initiatives for playwrights across the South West ('Responses' 2006, 'Bricks and Mortar' 2008). In the East, Menagerie, a company which has lost its Arts Council grant in this period, has kept alive new writing through festivals such as Hotbed; otherwise only another threatened endeavour, touring company Eastern Angles, has offered literary development in any sustained form in this region, although the Colchester Mercury and the Wolsey in Ipswich have raised new writing within their profile.

Repertory Theatre (BRT), the RSC, Hampstead, Paines Plough, West Yorkshire Playhouse (WYP), Theatre Centre, and the Bush are all either in transition with regard to their policies or have recently changed policy. Few would disagree with the Royal Court's stated aim 'to defend and acknowledge the role of the playwright as the primary theatre artist'.

3.2 The nature of these changes varies with the type of theatre, but in general the direction of change is to provide more opportunities for successful production of new work. For Paines Plough, this change has to do with economics: they deem their old remit, 'the traditional model of small scale touring', no longer affordable and they are moving toward many more collaborations and co-productions, and endeavouring to build on-going relationships with venues such as the Plymouth Drum or the Traverse. For the RSC and Birmingham Rep, the development and refurbishment of spaces has driven certain aspects of their programming, complemented by new emphases such as 'embedding writers' in sustained ensemble work at the RSC or seeking to integrate new writing into all aspects of its work in all (soon-to-be three) spaces at BRT. Hampstead is also opting for more co-productions to extend the run of a new play, and they are also 'moving towards' a new policy that will challenge writers to consider diversity of their cast and content. Theatre Centre has recently re-written its policy to make explicit an emphasis 'on making and doing' and its advocacy role in promoting the quality of new writing for young audiences. The Bush has moved to emphasise increasing the capacity of the theatre to identify, advocate for, and ultimately produce new work (see below).

3.3 In contrast, West Yorkshire Playhouse is having financial problems and so cutbacks will diminish readings and workshops. This is less a change of policy than a forced adjustment to the financial times.

3.4 One constant that appeared in many of the discussions about policy was the decision now or in the recent past to expand new writing throughout the various stages available. The NT, RSC, and BRT especially noted this feature. Companies without permanent homes such as Paines Plough and Out of Joint remarked on the increasing practice of theatres to programme new plays into the repertoire of their theatres, making co-productions and sustained ongoing relationships with particular venues desirable. Theatre Centre is doing less school touring and more performing in regional venues for similar economic reasons as those remarked on by Paines Plough (see above).

4 New programmes or revisions to standard practices

4.1 In the course of discussing their policies on new writing, a number of the companies commented on new or changing ways of featuring new programmes or practices (discussed in more detail below). The direction of these changes in general seems to reflect a desire to sustain support for particular writers and projects and bring them to production, rather than to commission or invite a less defined number of projects. For example, Liverpool Everyman and Playhouse has involved its writers in many aspects of the theatre's operations. It aspires to make the Everyman 'a home for writers' by designing a space for them called a 'Writers' Hub', including them in administrative meetings, providing attachments and bursaries.

Hampstead has also started offering attachments. The Bush has an ambitious new digital plan to link playwrights through a website and data base that will provide networking as well as feedback on new work. BRT has replaced its attachment scheme with a 'Core New Writing Programme' which asks writers to submit a full-length script and an idea for a project under one of nine categories that span all the different possibilities at the Rep. BRT defines its purpose as 'to enable a more diverse approach to development and enable writers and artists the chance to explore new ways of working'. It also, however, provides more classification through their categories and better control for the theatre in their planning of new work because of the specificity of the new guidelines and procedures.

4.2 While some theatres have stopped reading unsolicited scripts (see below), many have tried to improve what they see as a key responsibility of their work. The Bush, which receives over 1,000 submissions a year, wanted to streamline its reading process and get responses back to authors in a more timely fashion, so they have revised their reading policy to give quicker but sparser feedback.

5 Change in subject matter and style of new plays

5.1 We asked about the subject matter of the plays that these theatres commissioned and produced, whether any special characteristics prevailed or any 'niche' plays could be seen to draw particular audiences. We also asked about style—whether in their experience any particular styles prevailed, whether naturalism was dead, whether audiences still favour 'linear narratives'. There was a good

deal of consensus across the board on these topics, from companies and theatres which are very different to each other.

5.2 Many, even most, responded that plays that connected with contemporary reality (even if they were history plays) and that were involved with public life were the overwhelming subject-matter of choice: from the Royal Court, 'working out where we are in the world'; from Out of Joint, 'contemporary situations of interest or concern—that's the driver'; from the National: 'plays that have some connection to public life'. The regional theatres all affirmed that it mattered that many of the plays were either about the region or by writers from the region: West Yorkshire Playhouse audiences prefer plays with a clear Leeds connection, Birmingham Rep programmes a lot of plays about Birmingham-based subjects. Suzanne Bell at the Liverpool Everyman confessed, with reference to work generally within Liverpool, 'if I'm honest . . . .there is an appetite in the city for Liverpool stereotypes and lowest common denominator comedy'—not that the theatre caters to this taste. But she also celebrated the enthusiasm for theatre in the city and its support for its writers. 'Diversity and range of content are important too.' The theatre is in dialogue with the city's idea of itself. As an example, they produced *Intemperance* by Lizzie Nunnery, set in 1854 in Liverpool slums, concerning an Irish family and a Norwegian man—but in fact the play was also about the city's bid to be Capital of Culture, and about class division and immigration; so it combined history, locality, topicality.

5.3 On the question of style, again we received overwhelmingly similar responses: people like a story, but will respond to experiments with form if the subject matter is compelling, and are more likely to be interested in something new and lively than simply in narrative itself.

The Royal Court suggests that, 'naturalism isn't dead but it finds its most complete expression in film and television…the theatre is a place for story-telling'. Several interviewees observed that frequently contemporary theatre involves a strong aspect of theatricality (high production values and support), making naturalism less evident, while at the same time an ear for realistic dialogue remains an important feature, coupled with other aspects that may be non-linear or experimental in other ways. Liverpool stressed that its audiences 'will respond well to adventurous work' and the RSC said its audiences were 'more open to experiment than is generally assumed'. Hampstead risked 'brand suicide' because of its eclecticism and has survived, while the Bush thinks its audience comes to its plays 'expecting to see new work that will give an idea of what is new and fresh', and that these are people who like to keep up with what's happening in the theatre scene.

5.4 Theatre Centre has a unique answer to this set of questions because of its role in relation to educational institutions. Natalie Wilson says she can't say to writers 'write about anything you want', because bookers are cautious. The 'Shakespeare factor' sells, as it's safe if it's inspired by *Romeo and Juliet* or *The Tempest*. The National Curriculum influences what's possible. On the other hand, stylistically, with a one hour remit, naturalism 'can't tell a big enough story'. The writing needs to be fast-paced, 'short, sharp, robust, punchy'. Movement and music are often key; most shows have a choreographer.

6 Does celebrity casting matter?

6.1 We asked if casting or the name of the playwright had an effect at the box office. The heavily subsidised companies (National, RSC, Royal Court) agreed that well-known actors in title roles appealed to audiences, although the RSC pointed out that with an ensemble repertoire 'so-called star casting cannot be an option'. The Court also noted that 'younger actors on the cusp of success' (e.g. Matt Smith, Danny Mays, Sophie Okonedo) 'have a beneficial effect on sales'. The regional theatres largely felt that local actors drew audiences, Erica Whyman at Northern Stage saying 'sometimes a local actor in the cast is a badge of trust and encourages audiences to come'. Caroline Jester, however, felt that casting at Birmingham Rep had not made 'any particular difference to the appeal of shows at the Door [the theatre's studio space]'. A number were sceptical about casting celebrities—Roxana Silbert at Paines Plough 'resists name casting' and Erica Whyman 'rather belligerently refuses to cast celebrities'. Others such as Graham Crowley at Out of Joint stress that the ensemble is the most important aspect of most of their shows, not name actors.

6.2 As for playwrights, almost all the theatres named particular writers as drawing audiences to the box office. Most commonly mentioned were Tom Stoppard and Alan Bennett, but some companies such as the Bush said they didn't think it mattered much since most of their writers were getting a first production. The Liverpool's Suzanne Bell first said she didn't think it mattered very much, then thought about and amended her answer: 'On reflection, there are some writers who attract audiences, Bleasdale, Russell, McGovern, and to some extent Tim Firth'. Both the Royal Court and Paines Plough cite Mark Ravenhill as a magnet for audiences; in the Court's view (alluding to

Anthony Neilson too), such writers are appealing because they are 'distinctive, eccentric and often formally original…[and that their] work at the Court attracts particular attention because it may be more provocative or challenging there than in other theatres'.

6.3 We asked whether people thought that it was harder to find an audience for straight plays than for musicals, but nobody we spoke to took this up. Many mentioned that music is now a part of a lot of shows that might have been thought of as 'straight'; others just said there was little difference; and Kate Horton at the Royal Court thinks it is less difficult to find an audience for straight plays within the context of the theatre's identity.

7 Adaptations, translations and second productions.

7.1 The majority of our respondents do not do much work with translation—most of them are doing British or American work. The exceptions are where British authors are commissioned to make translations of classics, which are common at the regional theatres and the RSC and National venues, and some translations done by companies interested in international work such as the Royal Court and the National. Northern Stage is working with the NT Studio on their 'Paris Calling' season. The RSC is preparing two new versions of Russian classics, so both adaptations and translations in a manner of speaking. As might be expected, Paines Plough and the Bush don't do either, while Out of Joint does some adaptations but not translations. It's difficult to see a clear statement that characterises this kind of work across the sector—except perhaps that the British theatre continues to be rather insular in its choices of works, preferring home-grown writing to European or other international works, hardly

a new observation. The Royal Court's translation policy is interestingly opposed to working from literal translations: 'New translations of international plays are commissioned from fluent speakers of the original language'. However the theatre is inclined not to stage adaptations as their 'commitment is to ideas first and deliberately expressed in theatre'.

7.2 One overwhelmingly clear trend is against second productions. Of the theatres we interviewed, only Birmingham Rep has consistently produced successful second productions (mainly of well-known works by mainstream writers such as the David Hare trilogy, Caryl Churchill's *Serious Money*, Terry Johnson's *Hysteria*). Northern Stage has also produced several successful second productions. West Yorkshire Playhouse has done several 'disappointing' (in terms of box office) second productions, although interestingly enough Amanda Whittington interviewed at the Writer's Guild countered that a second production at the WYP of a play of hers was very successful. Liverpool notes its reluctance too, despite reviving plays such as Simon Block's *Chimps*: 'It is difficult to get national critics to review second productions. Audiences respond negatively to lack of national press coverage. It is difficult to cast second productions and to find directors who want to do them.' Nevertheless these regional theatres are the most likely venues for second productions; the National Theatre, Royal Court, RSC, Out of Joint, Paines Plough, and the Bush do not do any second productions. Sebastian Born of the National might have been speaking for all of them when he explained, 'it's not really our thing'.

7.3 The lack of second productions is bad for playwrights seeking to pursue a life-long career; it is also ultimately bad for theatres

producing new writing. There is much anecdotal evidence that theatre audiences who have not had access to contemporary plays have thereby lost touch with contemporary writing styles and techniques, and thus have difficulty with new writing which makes similar formal demands. Audiences unfamiliar with Churchill, Ravenhill, Kane, Crimp or Stephens may find it harder to relate to new writing by emergent writers.

8 The changing role and nature of the 'literary department'.

8.1 One of the key changes apparent from the interviews is evident in two crucial shifts that occurred within the time frame of the survey. The first, and perhaps the most telling, is that all the institutions surveyed, bar Northern Stage (and this was owing to their complex relationship with Live Theatre in Newcastle), stated that new writing was 'core' to their work. This is not surprising obviously in terms of theatres in our category 3, but it is perhaps more so with reference to those in all the other categories, and this is perhaps the clearest outcome of the impact of the Theatre Review's changed priorities and spending. New writing is now written into the DNA of English theatre at all levels and is apparent in places where it was at best marginal even ten years ago.

8.2 This change is confirmed in the second shift, that is the institutional provision accorded to the development of new writing in the theatres interviewed. Every one of the theatres interviewed, bar Theatre Centre and Northern Stage, in the first case for financial reasons, the second for reasons mentioned above, has what might be loosely described as a literary department of some sort with a combination of a permanent member of staff overseeing a larger team. In the RSC

that means two members of staff, the Production Dramaturg (Jeanie O'Hare) and the Literary Manager (Pippa Ellis), but also the Literary Associate (currently Anthony Neilson) and at least one of the Artistic Associates (Roxana Silbert) with a brief for new writing. Likewise at the National, Sebastian Born as Associate Director (Literary) has a team of three working with him. The picture in regional theatres that don't specialise in new writing is more complex; Caroline Jester at the Birmingham Rep is dubbed their Dramaturg with Catherine Edwards designated the Literary Manager; Suzanne Bell at Liverpool is a Literary Manager/Dramaturg with only freelance support at a part time level. Alex Roberts performs that role with Out of Joint, Tessa Walker with Paines Plough. Interestingly enough, at new writing theatres such as Hampstead there is only one designated member of the literary department (Neil Grutchfield), although he has a colleague shared with 'Creative Learning' (a similar idea at the Rep). West Yorkshire Playhouse is also instructive, as before 2001 it had no literary department at all and since then Alex Chisholm as Associate Director (Literary) has forged one from scratch.

8.3 This trawl through personnel reveals with clarity the expansion of staffing of those working with new writing within our theatre companies. What it also reveals is a subtle shift in focus in response to the previous model of development. While few, if any, of the theatres surveyed believed that new writing was tending to more collaborative modes of origin, the arrival of the dramaturg in earnest reveals a more interventionist notion of the role of the literary department.

8.4 This could be seen as a very healthy sign of, as the RSC puts it, 'embedding' writing at the heart of the theatre. Indeed the RSC is a

good place to observe this shift. Firstly, since Michael Boyd arrived in 2003 and appointed Dominic Cooke as Associate for new work, the installation of writing at the heart of a theatre hitherto tending to revival is striking. These changes were taken further by Jeanie O'Hare after her arrival in 2005, and what they amount to is a shift from the more passive model of the theatre receiving or commissioning plays but not necessarily shaping the nature of that work in advance, to a more proactive model of developing new plays.

9 The role of the unsolicited script

9.1 In the last five years, the notion that theatres should be accessible to playwrights through informal means such as receiving and reading unsolicited scripts has come under challenge. This has happened partially (as the Royal Court - which receives and reads 3,000 of them - indicates), as a result of theatres taking a hard look at the realities of the work that goes into processing these scripts (the employment of readers, holding script meetings, writing reports), and also partially derives from the fact that only one theatre we interviewed could claim to have directly produced a script that reached them through this route (WYP). For the Court, this task threatens to overwhelm the literary department: 'Human and financial resources are under constant and increasing strain as the number of unsolicited submissions rise; while at the same time, fewer theatre companies guarantee to read or respond to unsolicited material, increasing the pressure on the Court.'

9.2 The burden of reading is of course highly variable; the designated new writing venues bear the brunt for obvious reasons: The Bush (1,000-

1,500), Hampstead (1,500+), NT (1,500), Soho (2,500) and even Out of Joint (800-1,000) are shouldering the burden in particular; while regional producing theatres such as WYP (500), Liverpool Everyman and Playhouse (650), the Nuffield Theatre in Southampton (250-300), or touring companies such as Paines Plough (500+) are also notable for their carrying capacity.

9.3 While it's clear from our data that more theatres and theatre companies are reading unsolicited scripts than ever before, there's also an interesting trend towards reviewing that commitment in some theatres who have hitherto taken it on. The RSC and the Birmingham Rep have certainly shifted in their policy: on paper at least they no longer receive and read such scripts (although both theatres noted that in practice they often do). The Bush still read scripts but has radically revised its practice since the arrival of Josie Rourke as Artistic Director. It now seeks to react more swiftly to such scripts through rapid reads and telephone or email interaction with the writer; and intends in the near future by means of its proposed 'BushGreen' website to enable on-line publishing if the writers grant it permission – potentially thereby offering a mechanism that might centralise the reading work of a whole host of theatres. So, as David James from the Writer's Guild notes, theatres that don't ostensibly receive scripts offer 'other ways in'.

9.4 Hampstead, the Royal Court and the National still offer an open door but none consider this method to be the most productive way for writers to make their work known to the theatre. The Royal Court indeed proposes the idea of attempting to centralise this task, in the manner of the BBC's 'Writer's Room'. Suzanne Bell at Liverpool, which does receive scripts, notes that with playwrights coming from

playwriting courses, expectations concerning the handling of unsolicited plays often exceed what can actually be delivered. Paines Plough, despite its modest size, also reads up to 500 unsolicited scripts a year, and while none have directly achieved production, two writers, Tom Morton Smith and Levi David Addai, graduated into 'Future Perfect' by that means, thereby becoming produced with other work. WYP reads 300 a year, whittling them down during an intensive reading day where its readers engage in a 'triage' process, reading the first ten pages of a play and then selecting those which merit a full reading and a two paragraph report. As noted above, this process has yielded at least one production of an unsolicited script during the period of our research. But the conclusion of the Royal Court perhaps indicates the future of this route, 'the far more successful and direct route to commissioning…is through the writers' groups or direct approach by the artistic director'.

10 The growth of attachments

10.1 Another notable development apparent from the interviews is the flourishing of novel ways that theatres can engage with writers other than commissioning and production. At the start of the period surveyed, being under commission or a 'writer-in-residence' were perhaps the two most common modes of connecting writers to theatres. Indeed the Writers Guild laments what it sees as the decline of those residencies; as Lisa Evans commented, 'some companies don't trust writers and, by not working in residency, we don't get to trust them'. However, despite this perceived decline, our survey reveals a notable growth of other modes of 'writer development', which attempt to find a way of involving and integrating a broader

range of writers in theatres, to get, as Neil Grutchfield at Hampstead comments, 'more artists into the building'.

10.2 An 'attachment' is an example of this. The model derives from the practice of the National Theatre Studio where the writer is offered a two month relationship to the theatre with no pressure to deliver a play and the chance to engage in the work of the studio (which often results in a payment of roughly a third of what a standard commission offers – but then the writer is not expected to produce a play). Through the period surveyed, this type of 'lower commitment' engagement (as opposed to full commissions) has appeared in other theatres, notably the Birmingham Rep, Liverpool Everyman, and now Hampstead. To a certain extent it is evident in the RSC's notion of its 'writers' academy'. Theatre Centre has long pursued what it calls a 'try out' of its writers' work, but is increasingly using the analogous notion of the 'seed commission'. The Dunton report details Contact Theatre's Pitch Parties and Flip the Script nights.

10.3 What is notable about this trend is that despite the generally accepted notion of the 'open brief' for writers under commission, some theatres are moving towards a model where playwrights' ideas might be examined in advance of writing. While this is by no means comparable to the spread of 'treatment' culture in film and television, it does again indicate a shift towards theatres being in the driving seat as to what gets written rather than simply responding to writers.

10.4 The Birmingham Rep, which pioneered the attachment process at the start of the period under review, has taken the approach further than most. Within the last year through its core New Writing Programme, it may ask the writer to offer an idea for nine categories of project:

larger stage work, collaborative working, writing for different age ranges, site specific work, responding to a brief, adaptation, working for the Young Rep, community plays, work incorporating digital technology. Certainly a considerable proportion of their new work has the hallmark of being producer- as much as writer- driven; e.g. the 'Rep on Tour' with its schools brief, includes shows such as *These Four Streets* (2009) a multi-authored piece about the Lozells 'disturbances', and *8Sixteen32* (2007) developed over three years with Grime artists. Often it seems multi-authored shows are functioning as ways of bringing a range of new writing to the stage in one show (e.g. the Bush's *Fifty Ways to Leave your Lover* (2008), Liverpool's *Unprotected* (2006), Royal Court's *Catch* (2006), Hampstead's on-going 'Daring Pairings'). While many of the theatres interviewed down-played collaboration as being more prevalent in their development of new work, there are numerous examples of it being used as a way of producing more writers than might otherwise see their work onstage.

10.5 Other examples of attachment include Paines Plough's 'Future Perfect' scheme in partnership with Channel 4, with six unproduced writers placed on attachment for a year with the promise of ensuing productions. WYP has a similar partnership with the BBC, namely the 'Northern Exposure', an initiative designed to discover and develop writers within the North, which in fact set in motion the theatre's literary department. That comprises an interesting example of the intermingling of development with new writing activity, as writers involved are offered courses ('So You want to be a Writer?'), for which they are selected on the basis of a letter rather than a script, or through 'Lock Ins' (an idea favoured by Paines Plough too) where they are literally locked in a room to write a forty minute play. Out of the community of writers thereby created by the WYP, some will go on to

be fully commissioned and many of the writers through this route over the last five years have then been fully produced.

11 Other modes of writer development

11.1 All the companies interviewed concur that writer development is best achieved through experience of production, but inevitably this can't always be squared with the available production slots. One intriguing solution to this dilemma, that has emerged during this period, is the use of what the Royal Court designates as a 'rough cut' night, or Hampstead calls 'Start Night'. Such modes of presenting new writing without incurring the commitment and cost of full production inform Paines Plough's 'Later' seasons and tradition of 'Wild Lunches', where short plays are presented script-in-hand in front of paying audiences. Such events are designed to be interactive, expose the writer's work to audiences while it's still in progress, and enable 'arranged marriages' between writers and directors. A trade-off is thereby achieved between the writer's own solitary progress on work and their being embedding into the theatre. In addition, while most theatres now consider 'rehearsed readings' not tied to productions as a misuse of resources, 'rough cuts' bring in the public and offer the writer some of the dividends of having work fully staged.

11.2 The notion of the 'lab' or studio, derived from the model of the National Theatre Studio, crops up in a number of places as a systematised version of this mode of working with writers. The RSC, for instance, intends to establish a London-based space for exactly this type of work and therein to effect novel collaborations. Since the arrival of Ruth Little at the Royal Court in 2007, there has been a new

emphasis on this interim stage between writing and full production, something that she pioneered at the Young Vic. This can extend to housing writers: the Court has its system of offering writer's 'cells', i.e. rooms to work in, and has a 'virtual' idea of a 'studio' in which collaborations and interactions between theatre artists can take place in a 'physical space which houses writers in residence, young writers' groups and play development work'. Liverpool also has a 'writer's room' with a free computer and seeks to be a 'hub' for creativity, bringing writers to administrative meetings, and ensuring in turn that all levels of theatre department are invited to read each draft of their commissions. Hampstead began its Start Nights in 2006 and has also used its new writing festival as a place to unleash such experiments. Nicholas Hytner's much-noted expansion of the new play repertoire of the National Theatre's two larger stages has often been enabled by workshops (e.g. David Eldridge's *Market Boy* emerged through four workshops at the Studio under the aegis of Eldridge and director Rufus Norris). Out of Joint and Theatre Centre also adopt this model of developing work; but this is specifically linked in OOJ's case to the research process for the writer and for Theatre Centre, to the tailoring of work to the educational context.

11.3 These kinds of initiatives are evidently fruitful for writers and theatres. In the context of changes overall they do represent, however, another attempt at source to shift the development of the writer to accommodate the theatre's given aesthetic, whether in the case of the RSC to achieve that 'epic' mode it detects in Shakespeare's work or as in the forthcoming Hampstead writing policy to get writers to work with an ensemble of ethnically diverse actors and think for a main stage. However it should be acknowledged that in their case and often in other such side-steppings of full productions, such initiatives

are making virtues of necessities; for Paines Plough in particular, it was a question of maintaining its profile at a point when its annual touring work was in financial question.

11.4 The unarguable pay-off of this increased dramaturgical activity is that five years on, the campaign of the 'Monsterists' to move new writing out of the studio ghetto and on to main stages, is being realised. The National offers a striking example of this trend. The RSC this coming year will for the first time in its history open two new Russian plays on its main stage. The Birmingham Rep has attempted to abolish the distinction between its studio and main stage with its Dramaturg programming work across its two (and ultimately three spaces). Likewise in the vast Quarry theatre of the WYP, endeavours such as 'Eclipse' have brought plays such as Roy Williams's *Angelhouse* in 2008 to the main stage. While the growth of these multifarious forms of in-house development might irk some writers, the trade-off seems to be the installation of new plays at the heart of some of the larger spaces of English theatre with all the prestige and increased revenue for writers that entails.

12 The commissioning process

12.1 A number of interviewees expressed their frustrations and doubts about the standard model of commissioning new work. Certainly our survey of theatres revealed a widely variant ratio of commissions to productions. For the large nationally subsidised theatres this ratio was unsurprisingly larger than elsewhere – the National operates a 1:5 production to commission ratio, with Sebastian Born admitting that despite the increase in the fees for the NT, RSC and the Royal

Court, this money still isn't adequate to 'support (writers) for more than a very short period of time' forcing them to load up commissions and possibly causing work of a lesser quality to emerge. In the main, however, no-one considered 'over-commissioning' to be a problem. Indeed David James at the Writers' Guild considered it to be 'an urban myth'; he did note however an increasing tendency for plays to be co-commissioned by two theatres, although he suggested that in the majority of cases one theatre leads this process to avoid the danger of 'contradictory comments'.

12.2 At the RSC the commission to production ratio is approximately 1:4, a figure exacerbated by the on-going problem of the closure of the Other Place and the lack of a secure London home for such work. The Bush claimed to have had a culture earlier in this period of commissions on the books going dormant and has consequently written off a great deal of work with the intention to commission less but produce more. Hampstead claims that nearly all its commissioned work is produced (but not necessarily in its theatre, which is thus similar to the National's comment about contributing to 'the wider ecology' of the theatre). The Royal Court produces less than 50% of its commissions. This unproduced 50% might be considered as 'natural wastage'. It is hard to know exactly how many go on to be produced elsewhere since tracking the progress of plays commissioned in one theatre and then staged in another is complex (although the so-called new fringe venues such as the Arcola and Theatre 503 often are reported as the beneficiaries of these extra plays). Smaller companies have a better strike rate. Roxana Silbert from Paines Plough argues that, 'commissioning that doesn't lead to production is useless'; her company commissions and presents two to four plays a year on this basis, sometimes programming without the script being

ready. However, despite such individual differences most respondents noted a tension in the 'one-size fits all' model of commissioning, as it is described by Sebastian Born at the National.

12.3 Nearly all the theatres interviewed note a tendency for commissions not to be delivered on time (perhaps because—as has been mentioned—writers subsidise one under-paid project with another). Suzanne Bell at Liverpool observes that writers respond to the terms of an ITC or Writers Guild of Great Britain standard commission contract (which generally indicates that the decision to commit to production arises at the stage of the second draft), by endlessly burnishing their first draft, in order to defer that moment. Also, she notes from the other end that some writers may have their work written off at the first draft stage when their art often kicks in during the second draft. Similarly, Roxana Silbert at Paines Plough notes an increasing tendency, which she sees as deriving from television culture, of writers not seeing the point in 'developing a complete script' as they are anticipating interventions: 'they find it difficult to write independently'. WYP indicates that the fact that only a minority of its commissions fail to be staged is because 'projects will have gone a long way before reaching the stage of being commissioned'.

12.4 There is a diversity of comments in this survey about the degree of intervention that accompanies the writer under commission. Jeanie O'Hare at the RSC is reluctant to intervene other than by asking questions that 'unblock' the writer and help them 'heal their own play'. However, with her role as production dramaturg, interventionism within the rehearsal process seems much more written into that relationship, through a three-way conversation with writer, director and herself. Sebastian Born notes that 'plays are

organic entities' and dramaturgical work must be done 'delicately and with caution'; but notes his role as Associate means that in rehearsal and production, the task is through discussion and questioning to enable plays to 'deliver […] what they have in them'. This is also a notable change at the Royal Court since Dominic Cooke's arrival, where each show now has a 'production dramaturg' attached working 'from first draft right through to previews'; although the theatre notes, 'the role is not prescriptive or institutional' rather it 'aims to guide them through the complex process of play production'. Suzanne Bell at Liverpool notes that the development process is negotiated individually with each writer. Graham Cowley at Out of Joint takes a more robust view in defence of the traditional commissioning process: 'There is a structure, you sign something and get a sum of money and you have a kind of timeline, and then you deliver it and get another sum of money. You can't really muck around with that structure.' Interestingly enough during the period of the survey Out of Joint turned down only two of its commissioned plays.

Theatre Centre is frank about its role in co-generating the work, as it 'won't commission an idea that (isn't) appropriate to the theatre's needs' and that while it is a 'writer-led' process, a 'try-out' reading is built in. The Birmingham Rep sees itself as moving forward from a position of a much higher 'write-off rate' for commissions to a more targeted approach (e.g. this year there are 12-13 commissions in development, with the majority already allotted production slots – but with the new multi-stranded approach to modes of commissioning, this might mean Tanika Gupta writing a play for young people or Jenny Stephens a site-specific piece). Paines Plough commissions 'the playwright rather than the play' and believes that 'you can't teach playwrights how to write dialogue or come up with…a strong idea [but you] can help them craft a story'.

12.5 In a number of places, despite this palpable shift towards a more structured process of intervention, interviewees disavowed the approach they note in companies such as Kneehigh where the author is part of a team, credited with 'text' and not deemed primary. And nowhere is devising seen as the way in which such text is developed. On the other hand, Kneehigh was frequently mentioned as representing another stream of work, and together with Punchdrunk and Frantic Assembly, it is clear there are a number of high profile groups which work through devising and which have had co-productions with major venues such as the NT, RSC, or the Lyric Hammersmith. While surveying this type of work was not part of our brief, its existence certainly 'ghosted' our own interview questions about collaboration and devised work.

13 Creative learning and new writing.

13.1 One striking development within the last five years, which mirrors the Government's priorities for the arts, is the convergence of theatre's role in out-reach and building new audiences through educational initiatives, and its role in nurturing new writing. Hampstead Theatre is a useful example of this, given that its outstanding work in Creative Learning frequently overlaps with its literary policies, generating work that rarely features on critical antennae but which is central to its identity since the opening of its new theatre in 2003. The Michael Frayn space, which is in effect its studio space, rarely hosts professional productions and generally is turned over to the work of its 'Heat and Light' theatre company, an endeavour aimed at 12-25 year old actors, directors and writers. It has featured new plays

during the period under discussion by Tanika Gupta, Fin Kennedy and others, but it also offers an interesting model of this fusion of the two branches of the theatre, in terms of the three annual productions staged by the company, from a process whereby the young people select one of Hampstead's short-listed writers to create a new play in a short period through interaction with the company. In this way, within the five year period, 15 commissions have been available to writers connected to the theatre, with a strike rate of production much higher than on the main stage.

13.2 This also helps make sense of the move away from reading unsolicited scripts, since increasingly theatres are offering initiatives to find and develop their own writers in-house. Taking their cue from the successful and ever-expanding Royal Court Young Writers group, the Soho now has its own equivalent scheme, as does Hampstead through its Heat and Light activities, and The Birmingham Rep retains its long-standing Transmissions Scheme, albeit now embedded in schools and from which it is even devising core curriculum work on playwriting. The Royal Court has launched a number of initiatives to find voices from within specified communities such as 'Critical Mass' for the BAME community, 'Unheard Voices' for the Muslim community, and 'Recently Arrived' for migrant communities.

13.3 With the exponential increase in playwriting courses in Higher Education, which most interviewees thought was having a positive impact, increasingly writer development and education are overlapping; partially perhaps reflecting the different income streams that might come in through these routes, partially as a way of developing audience and 'participation', and partially as a way of

giving writers ways of working beyond the high risk, one-shot of the main stage production.

14 Diversity

14.1 Diversity here is defined in terms both of the content of plays and in terms of the profile of writers, and it is apparent that theatres vary in their approach to 'monitoring' such matters. Only the RSC and the Birmingham Rep out of our list of interviewees formally engaged in acts of monitoring, and in the case of the RSC this involved monitoring staff across the theatre rather than playwrights as such. The choice of the word 'monitor' in our interview questions inspired a number of qualified demurs, perhaps because the word itself is too close to 'surveillance' in its associations. We found most theatres respond more indirectly to the issue, while still noting its importance and paying attention to it. The Artistic Director of Hampstead, Anthony Clark, noting the impact of the 1980s policy of quotas, wondered if something equally tough might be necessary again.

14.2 Still, from our interviews and also as noted in the Dunton report, the perception is of a positive change in the number of BAME writers emerging and produced during the period studied (Dunton et al, p. 8). The Birmingham Rep is clearly a leader in its proactive stance in making its writers more ethnically diverse. However, all the theatres in the survey felt that the content of theatre in the last five years had become more diverse and that, for instance, inter-racial casting was more common. Theatre Centre takes this idea further, in often making that approach intrinsic to its work; Hampstead is planning to push its writers into a broader sense of how such casting procedures

might influence their work. Both Liverpool and Birmingham are seeking ways of integrating BAME writers through extending their notion of what a playwright might be and working with spoken word artists and MCs. The Royal Court is perhaps most proactive in schemes such as those mentioned above ('Critical Mass', 'Unheard Voices', 'Recently Arrived'), and comments: 'These programmes and projects have been very productive in relation to BAME writers and young Muslim playwrights, several of whom have gone on to join more advanced writers groups or been commissioned (Alia Bano, Michael Bhim, Bola Agbaje)'.

14.3 On diversity of audiences, there is anecdotal evidence that plays about ethnic minority audiences can attract substantial BAME audiences. In the months following the forced closure of *Behzti*, the Birmingham Rep kept a rough head-count of its non-white audiences for all its shows. As David Edgar reported, '[At] the Door, Azma Dar's *Chaos* - set in a Muslim home, concerned with careerism, communalism and terrorism - gained a 40%, largely Asian non-white audience; about the same as Yasmin Whittaker Khan's *Bells*, about Muslim brothels in London. In the 900-seat main house, nearly a third of the audience for Kwame Kwei-Armah's *Elmina's Kitchen* was black - the largest black audience of the production's pre-West End tour. And more than 60% of the audience for Roy Williams's *Little Sweet Thing* was non-white' (*Guardian*, 18 April 2005).

14.3 Nevertheless, the inability to quantify these gains has been troubling, especially in light of serious indications that something more needs to be done about this matter. Mark Lawson (journalist and media commentator for BBC and the *Guardian*), in his address to a recent conference at Warwick University, 'All Together Now: British Theatre

After Multiculturalism', shared his changed judgment about what was necessary to realise ethnic diversity in broadcasting and the arts.[65] Mark Lawson said that he had become quite militant about diversity in contrast to five years ago when he was 'more relaxed' and thought things would gradually improve. Now he agrees with the comment that the BBC and broadcasting in general are 'hideously white'. He surveyed programming at BBC4 and found weeks in which there was no non-white contributor. He also recounted several incidents of 'very violent and offensive threads' of audience comments on websites; one concerning Lenny Henry's *Othello* was characterised by Lawson as 'horrendous and upsetting stuff'. His experiences have led him to 'the conclusion that without monitoring, without targets, it never happens. There is this terrible tendency to return to the historical default'. His view was quite adamant:

'It's very easy to think that we live in this wonderful world where none of this stuff will happen anymore, and we're all colour-blind, and historically things will develop. The experience in broadcasting is that unless you set targets, and unless you make them do it, people will not do it.'[66]

14.4 On gender, some theatres such as the Bush are proud of their track record on commissioning woman and gay writers; others such as Liverpool note also the high engagement of women, as does the RSC where half of its commissions are by women. However, we heard anxiety expressed that perhaps the strike rate of achieving

[65] Sponsored by the British Theatre Consortium in collaboration with the University of Warwick, Warwick Arts Centre and Royal Holloway University of London, 13-14 June 2009. see http://britishtheatreconference.co.uk/

[66] Mark Lawson, presentation on the panel 'Access schmaccess?' *All Together Now? British Theatre After Multiculturalism*, British Theatre Consortium & University of Warwick, 13 June 2009.

productions was less sure. Paines Plough notes the continued lack of women playwrights; for instance, when it offers open submissions, only 20% of submissions are from women. It also notes a 'higher attrition rate' in commissions, with women less likely to deliver and less likely to be put on. Roxana Silbert suggests that this is a confidence issue as well as critical hostility to the aspects which women value in playwriting. Alex Chisholm at WYP notes that during her time at the theatre the only plays commissioned which have not been delivered have been by women writers, but also notes that the subject matter of plays by women are accused of being less 'dramatic' than those by male writers (e.g. family-centric, 'emotion-based'). The Royal Court is aggressive in suggesting that equitable gendered programming is achievable, asserting that 'almost 50% of commissions in both spaces are with female playwrights'. Of all the theatres interviewed, the National was perhaps most questioning about the notion of monitoring as such: in response to the question 'Do you feel you work with enough female writers?', Sebastian Born commented, 'I think that's a ridiculous question to be frank. Because of course we work with as many women writers as we can, but is that enough?' The Dunton report also mentions the difficulty for women writers to find sustaining infrastructures, and again highlights the confidence factor (Dunton et al, p.12). The difficult thing about the evidence of these findings is that no systematic analysis is available of the extent of the problems or the efficacy of particular measures in providing and sustaining access.

15 Overall views of change.

15.1 At the end of our interviews, we did an 'attitude survey' to get a direct comparison/contrast on seven points. The most exciting finding

was that all the theatres but one agreed that 'the subject matter of new theatre writing has become more diversified since 2003'. The voting split between a lot [6] and a little [5], and furthermore they agreed that 'audiences for new plays have become more diversified since 2003' a lot [8], with a little [2] and abstain [1]. (A dissenting voice: Out of Joint's Graham Crowley said he really thought that 'not at all' was his answer to both questions).

15.2 The results of the rest of the attitude survey affirmed that all twelve of the companies thought new writing was a core part of their mission. A small majority thought that it was difficult to market new plays; that new theatre writing is becoming increasingly collaborative—at least a little; that gaining audiences for new plays is becoming a little easier; and that commissioned new plays are generally of a higher standard than they were five years ago.

15.3 Overall, these twelve interviews demonstrate the deep level of engagement of a representative sample of theatres with new writing—its promotion and development, its production and nurture. The larger findings of our statistical data are born out here with regard to the spread of new writing across all the venues of multi-spaced theatres, and with regard to the growth and expansion of specially targeted development activities. The single bleak spot seems to be the declining support for mid-career writers both through the attraction of new writing by new writers, as well as because of the dearth of second productions or schemes focusing on this constituency. Also, as less opportunities to submit unsolicited scripts exist, some routes into the theatrical process are closing.

7: Playwrights, playwriting agencies & dramaturgy.

1 Introduction

1.1 This chapter addresses the experience of playwrights themselves over the period 2003 - 2008, the role of playwriting agencies, and playwrights' responses to the effects on their lives of policy and practice, including responses to dramaturgy. We gathered both quantitative and qualitative evidence from writers, from agencies funded by the Arts Council to provide dramaturgical support for both theatres and writers, from the Writer's Guild Theatre Committee and from our own collective experience of writing for the stage.

1.2 A writer noted in the margin of his questionnaire, 'How many dramaturgs does it take to change a light bulb?', and answered, 'Does it have to be a light bulb?' He captures the equivocal response we discovered to what seems to be a trend towards increasing intervention in the script. In the response to the playwright's questionnaires we circulated, writers sent in extra unsolicited contributions, in covering letters, in the margins of the questionnaires, and often in dialogue with the (quantitative) statements they were grading.

The marginalia are at least as revealing as any other contribution we gathered and they have a special quality. Attitudes range from the self-deprecatory, 'I apologize in advance for the way in which I've filled in the questionnaire', to thoughtful, 'I have been brooding on it and there are things I would like to add which don't fit into the boxes', to downright critical, 'My goodness these questions are simplistic!' One playwright sealed her contribution with real wax and insignia.

1.3 Some of the findings from the quantitative assessment, as we will show, are opaque and resist analysis; but the wit and insight that writers offered to this process indicate not only commitment to its aims, but perhaps also something of the sense of imaginative isolation that derives from the working conditions of a fragmented professional community. In response to the question, 'Following your first production with a company, were you helped/ encouraged by that particular company to write another piece for them?' one widely produced writer comments, 'Yes, yes – vital, the most important thing any playwright needs is the consistent, loyal support of a theatre and its artistic director – invaluable.' Another who now mainly teaches, says, 'I'm sorry to say that if you don't have contacts and weren't born into this world it remains an uphill and depressing struggle that most of us cannot afford to continue', and yet another, 'Most playwrights don't really have a voice at all within the industry'.

2 The playwrights' questionnaire

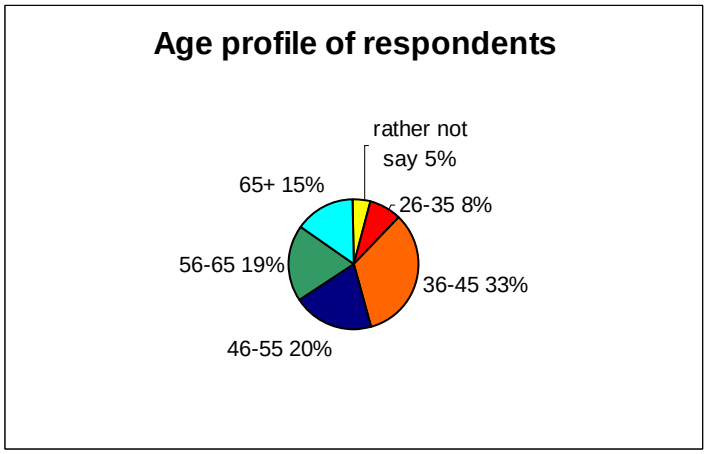
2.1 We distributed our questionnaire to around 300-400 writers who we had contacts for, and to many others through writing organisations. We received 106 replies. The blank questionnaire can be found at the end of the document in the Appendices.

2.2 Demographics

2.2.1 Our respondents range widely in age, experience, location and identity. We have very well-established writers represented in our findings and new and emergent writers. (Our most senior writer

received his first commission in 1963. At the other end is a writer whose first commission was in 2009.)

Figure 21



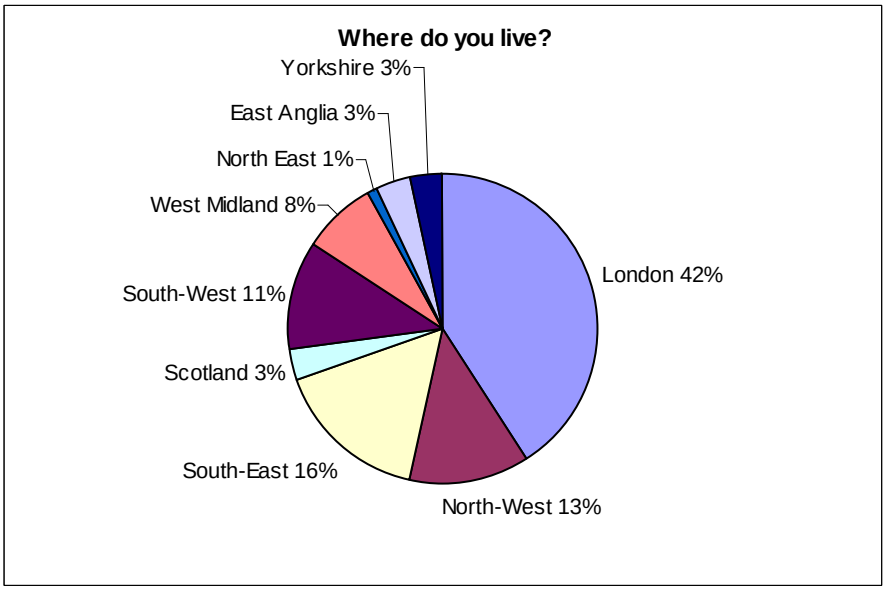
2.2.2 We are slightly under-represented by women (40% of our sample) and by BAME writers (4%), compared to national statistical averages; 9% of our sample considers themselves to have a disability. The modal age group is 36-45 and 88% of the sample are over 26 (see fig. 21).

2.2.3 In relation to the gender balance of our sample, The Writer's Guild confirmed that on 22nd July 2009 membership totalled 2,215, of which 837 are female. Of all writers who are members of the Guild (including playwrights) the proportion of male to female is 62% to 38%, suggesting therefore that the proportion in our sample is not significantly out of line with this comparable group.

2.2.4 As fig. 22 demonstrates, over two-fifths of our surveyed playwrights live in London and almost three-fifths live in London or the South-East. There is substantial representation from the North West, South West and West Midlands. There is much smaller

representation from the East and Yorkshire. Response from writers in the North East however, is particularly scant in our survey and does not reflect writing activity in that area.

Figure 22

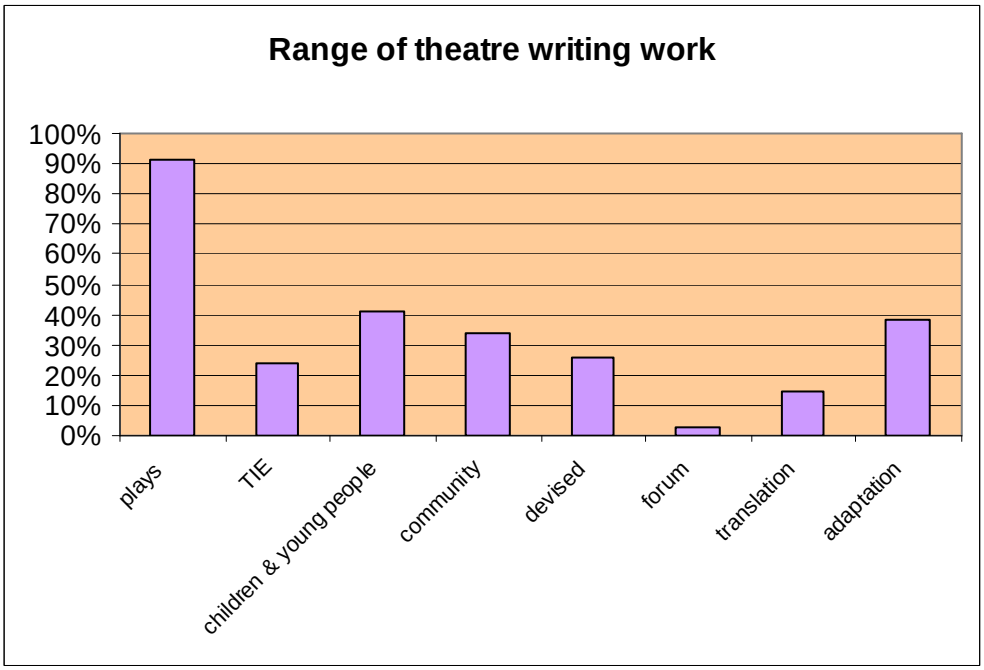


2.3 We asked playwrights to give the date of their first commission, first professional production and first revival. We were interested to see if it had become less likely or slower for a playwright to get a second production. Our data shows the opposite. If we divide writers into the decades in which they received their first professional production, it seems that revivals are happening more quickly (see fig. 23). (That said, playwrights further into their writing lives have had more time in which to have a second production. A playwright who started writing in the 2000s cannot have waited 15 years for a revival.)

Figure 23

2.4 91% of the writers surveyed had written at least one play (rather than any other kind of writing). The data also reveals a broad spread of different theatre writing work (see fig. 24).

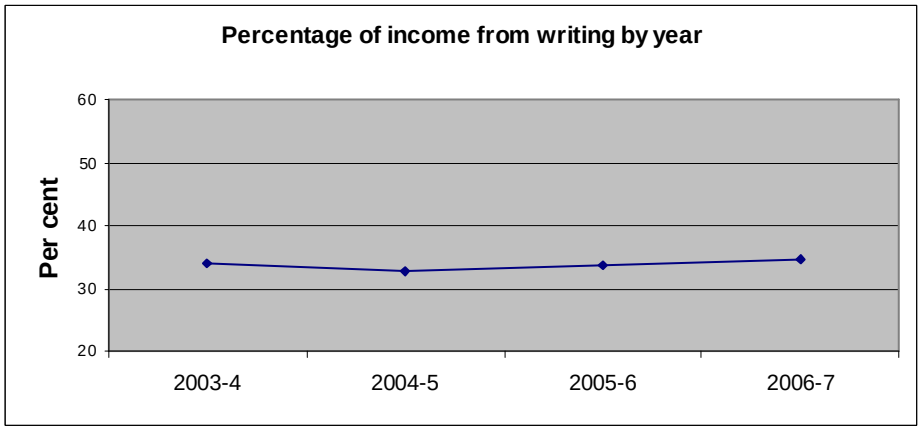
Figure 24



2.5 Most writers surveyed have also worked in radio, with a little over a third working in TV and a little over a quarter working in film (see fig

25). Our data also indicates that 42% of the writers surveyed have worked in at least one of: opera, music theatre, dance, musicals, live art, or storytelling.

Figure 25



2.6 The writers surveyed earn fractionally over a third of their income from writing and these figures have not significantly changed over the five years surveyed, as may be seen in fig. 25. Although figures for income are not detailed or verified from external sources, the information about change in proportion of income from writing is more reliable.

2.7 If we correlate this finding with the information in our earlier chapters indicating the numbers of people buying tickets for new plays, and the numbers of performances of new plays, the indication from our sample is that there is no commensurate uplift in writers' incomes over the same period. Since a change in income most relates to those writers who already had a production history in 2003, this finding tends to support the suggestion that while an uplift in funding for and production of new plays has been successfully targeted at new writers, it has had no appreciable effect on the income from stage writing – already marginal – of a large number of working playwrights. Writers in fact report deterioration in income, not just a lack of

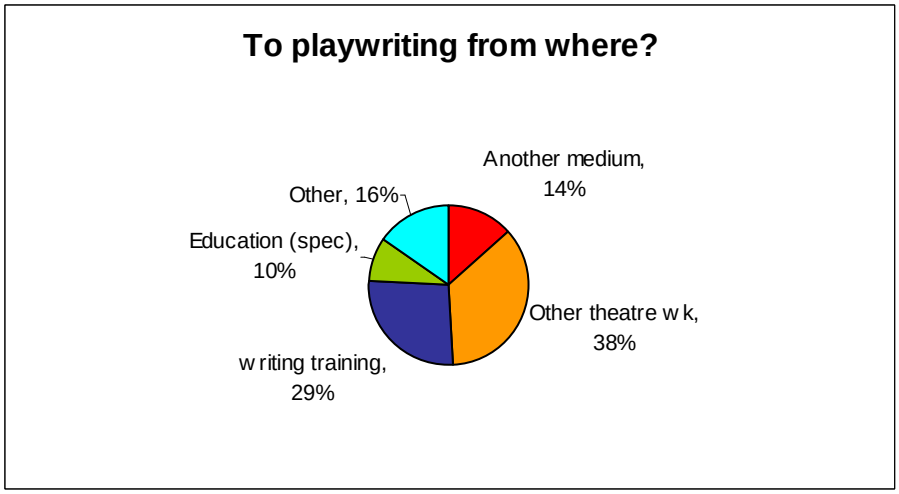
improvement: 'everyone agreed it was harder to live off writing' (Writer's Guild interview).

2.8 There is likely to be a connection between second and subsequent productions and levels of income, although this observation is complicated by the evidence that for this sample group, revivals happen more quickly than in the past. (One writer criticised the questionnaire for being 'Little Englander' in outlook, since there was no separate question relating to productions outside the UK, from which he derived the majority of his income.)

2.9 The consequences for stage writing are significant, since it seems that despite subsidy the form itself remains a poor cousin in relation to the broadcast media, and that under current policy and funding arrangements only a tiny proportion of playwrights are able to specialise in writing for the stage. For most writers who write at least one play that is produced and finds an audience, it is nevertheless unlikely to be economically viable to prioritise stage writing in working time. In response to our question about the first revival of a play, one writer adds in the margin, 'Hahahahahaha. No revivals.' Another comments, 'I just fancied an ordinary life where I could have money to spend on things like food.'

2.10 In such a context the stage becomes a recruiting ground for broadcast media, including commercial media which give nothing back to the nursery of talent they plunder. The question of what would make a working life in the theatre sustainable should be addressed in the drawing up of arts policy.

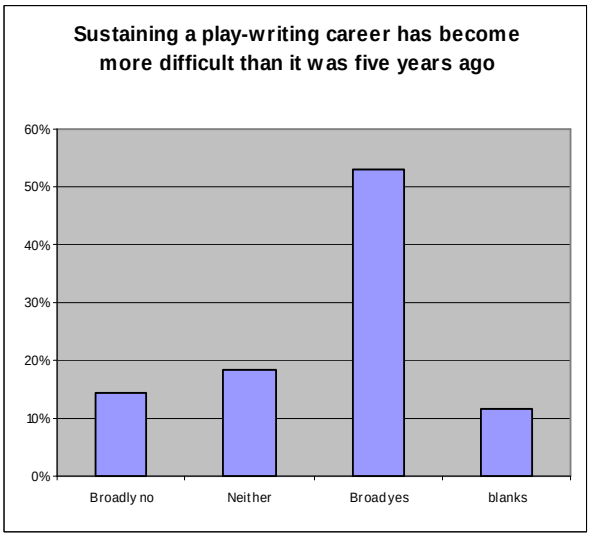
Figure 26

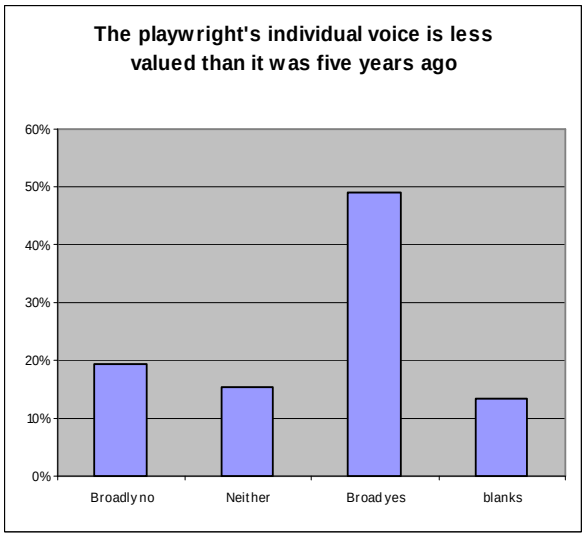


2.11 The most common route to playwriting is from another kind of theatre work, often acting or directing, as fig. 26 indicates. Writer training accounts for nearly 30% of those surveyed, which marks the growing influence of playwriting MAs and other courses. Of those playwrights whose first professional production was in the 2000s, 52% of them come from writing courses. This is a striking development, pointing to the increased influence of the Higher Education sector in theatre.

2.12 Our playwrights generally feel that sustaining a career has been more difficult; that their individual voice is less valued than it was (see figs. ; and are unhappy with what they see as a drift towards 'new work' rather than 'new writing' in Arts Council priorities. This is partly balanced by the view that writers are treated better in theatre than in television. No consensus emerges on the virtue of the new kinds of work in themselves, and there is no predominant view about whether the playwright is at the centre of the theatre, though this question provoked plenty of discussion in additional contributions.

Figure 27[67]





2.13 44% of playwrights answering our survey – against many of our statistical indicators – believe that the climate for new writing is less good than it was five years ago and the same proportion, 44%, believe that they are less likely to see a new play on a main stage than they were five years ago. It is striking that writers do not remark on the increase in new writing which the statistical evidence indicates. However, writers at all levels of experience do speak of their isolation from theatre management, a sense of exclusion reinforced by the emphasis in the plea of the Writer's Guild group for the return of the writer's residency, which 'involves writers with the building' and can create a feeling of community.

3 Playwriting agencies

3.1 As part of this study we agreed to look at the role of Arts-Council-subsidised writing agencies concerned with playwriting as it relates to

[67] Respondents were asked to indicate on a scale of 1 to 7 their level of agreement with a series of statements, with 1 representing complete disagreement and 7 full agreement. To compile these charts, we grouped answers 1-3 as a 'broad no', 5-7 as a 'broad yes' and 4 as 'neither'.

our central research questions. Funding of this work, revenue or project, represents significant indirect subsidy of the development of new writing in the theatre in the period under consideration.

3.2 In addition to evidence from our questionnaires and in-depth interviews, we conducted an interview with Chris Bridgman, Director of North West Playwrights.

3.3 We were aware of a study undertaken by John Hampson on behalf of the Arts Council due to report in April 2008 to feed into the development of 'a proper strategic approach to the future development of this important sector'. (Arts Council 'Writing Agencies' research brief) This study involved interviews with a list of agencies including several which deal either wholly or in part with playwrights. However this research was not made available to us due to the confidential nature of the interviews.

3.4 Another important source of information is an extensive piece of research written by Liz Ryan of Script Yorkshire, *A Comparative Study of New Writing Support in the UK*, unpublished, but submitted to Arts Council officers in the summer of 2008. This study provides in-depth statistical and descriptive information about funding, governance and activity of 12 new writing agencies, members of the Playwrights Network, between 2006 and 2007. It was commissioned by Arts Council England (Yorkshire) as part of a 'Routes to Sustainability' grant awarded to Script Yorkshire. We were also able to have a telephone conversation with Liz Ryan (Friday 10th July, 2009).

3.5 Writing agencies are supporting large numbers of both emerging and practising dramatic writers with a wide range of activities. Using

Ryan's survey as a basis, in the year 2007-8 between 47 and 62 commissions were awarded through the intervention of Playwrights Network agencies. The figure is approximate because New Writing North, the largest English agency, does not distinguish in its return between all writers and playwrights specifically. These figures include Tinderbox in Northern Ireland and Sherman Cyrus in Wales, but exclude Playwrights Studio Scotland for which detailed figures were not submitted. Even more approximate, but still noteworthy, are the figures for the number of playwrights helped in some form or another, including mentoring schemes, 'seed' commissions and workshops. Excluding newsletters, but including responses to requests for information, this figure falls between 3,500 and 4,900 writers helped. The larger number includes the New Writing North data which does not separate out playwrights.

3.6 This statistical information, our own playwrights' questionnaires, and feedback from theatres all indicate that the sector provides a significant range and amount of service and opportunity, sometimes delivered in partnership with producing companies, Higher Education Institutions or other third parties, with varying degrees of independence from partners and producers. Some agencies are also producers; others comprise networks of writers. In formal structure agencies are usually writer-oriented and sometimes writer-led.

3.7 Playwriting agencies' claims to be behind numerous commissions suggest that significant numbers of plays which appear in our statistics, both commissioned and apparently unsolicited, may already have been developed through workshops, shown to audiences in readings or in workshop form, and noted and edited by semi-independent dramaturgs and directors working with agencies. This is

particularly true for those regional theatres and companies who 'outsource' their literary management to Arts Council-funded agencies. Several agencies offer evidence of acting as broker between writer and producing company, including companies like Menagerie[68] and Soho which have a brief to support new writing beyond their own production capability. The role of informal dramaturgy in the commissioning and production of new work is much more widespread than the evidence from producing theatres alone suggests.

3.8 Evidence from three sources shows the value placed throughout the theatrical community on writers' access to skilled script readers: writers' comments, the statistical evidence of the popularity of script-reading offered by Playwright's Network agencies, and producers' use of agencies as 'outsourced' script reading services. Ryan identifies script-reading as a base line for access to further development. '...the most successful model of provision seems to involve a range of targeted and open access projects which feed into invitation-only workshops, showcases, mentoring etc when talent is identified'.[69] However, whether a writer can get a play read, the cost of that reading and what might flow from it, all vary enormously between regions, with writers in some regions including both the South West and Yorkshire complaining of inequality of provision of this and other support (see financial data for agencies by region below).

3.9 Best current practice suggests that it is crucial to the potential diversity of commissioning and for equality of access to further

[68] Menagerie recently had its Arts Council subsidy withdrawn but is continuing a programme of support for new writing, funded by commercial theatre activity (corporate workshops).
[69] Ryan, Liz. *A Comparative Study of New Writing Support in the UK*. Arts Council England (Yorkshire), 2008, p. 5.

development, training and support that access to disinterested and skilled script-reading is free or affordable.

3.10 Increased interest in production of new work in theatres all over the country has clearly coincided with the development of dramaturgical work in nature and in quantity. Examples include the range of writing development activities at Birmingham Rep, integration of the literary department in planning and programming at Liverpool and the impact of strategic funding on the development of new writing in the North East. Where theatre managements are not in a financial position to develop in-house dramaturgy, theatres in the regions are working to gain access to pools of new writing and writing talent through Playwriting Agencies. This is sometimes theatre-led, as with the collaboration which established the Theatre Writing Partnership in the East Midlands, or makes use of subsidised agencies, as in the free reading service available through North West Playwrights to theatres in the North West. Other agencies either already enjoy or are seeking to develop close and strategic relationships with producers. (The work of Playwrights Studio Scotland is a shining example for many writers, agencies and producers, not least because of the ability of that organisation to link writers with theatre companies throughout Scotland.)

4 The case of North West Playwrights

4.1 North West Playwrights [NWP] is an example of an organisation developed as a 'self-help' group by playwrights in response to writers'

lack of access to producing theatres after the cuts of the 1980's.[70] According to *A Comparative Study*, in 2006/7 NWP was in the middle of the range of both funding and income, alongside Script, serving the West Midlands.[71] Many of the activities NWP undertakes have become typical of literary departments and other agencies.

4.2 NWP provides an open-access script-reading service to all writers living or working in the North West; the minimum service, for a small fee (£10) is a reading with reports for both NWP and for the writer, from two readers. Readers are experienced practitioners, working to guidelines. On the basis of the readers' recommendations, a range of further support is available from meetings with NWP staff, through mentoring, to workshops with professional companies leading to public readings in regional theatres. The agency has built contacts with a growing number of actors in the region who have developed expertise in working with new writers. As with other agencies, NWP offers advice, disseminates information and functions as a broker, bringing writers, groups of writers and companies together. Over the

[70] North West Playwrights (NWP) is funded through and in the past by the Arts Council's North West Office, formerly the North West Arts Association. It is a non-profit making registered charity. Formed by members of the Theatre Writers' Union in 1982 its board was required to appoint a majority of writers. When TWU amalgamated with the Writers' Guild, NWP dissolved formal relationships with writers' organisations, but still includes two writers on a board of six, the rest being practitioners and two members from Business and the Arts.

[71] To tabulate funding to writing agencies per head of population based on Ryan's statistics to some extent compares like with unlike, as Menagerie, covering the East is also a producing company, and New Writing North and New Writing South support all types of creative writing. In order to give some approximate sense of relative funding levels however, using the North West as a base, in 2006 – 7, the North East received ten times as much, the East Midlands four times as much, the East about two and half times as much, Scotland twice as much, the West Midlands just a little less; the South East about a third less, Yorkshire a quarter as much, and the South West nothing at all. The relative proportions change when other income is added into the equation, but the 'league table' positions remain the same. The amounts ranged from funding of £206,561 for the North East to £11,030 for Yorkshire and Humberside, and for total income of £605,789 in the North East to £17,601 in Yorkshire. Script West Midlands has also now lost its funding.

period of this study the agency developed a broader educational role, providing specialist classes for writers at all levels of experience, often in collaboration with theatres and regional universities; a recent example was a workshop for experienced writers with a company of disabled performers, to explore the representation of disability on the stage. NWP collaborated with Manchester Metropolitan University (MMU) to provide a major international conference on dramaturgy. The agency also commissioned and co-produced new plays as part of its anniversary season. And it is one of the first arts organisations in the North West to implement a diversity action plan.

4.3 The organisation's origins are reflected in the character of its dramaturgy, so that workshops focus on the needs of the writer and the play. The approach to the process differs from that taken in a rehearsal room with a commissioned work, being more exploratory in nature. Other working relationships are also fostered through the workshops.

4.4 The aim of NWP is to encourage 'a creative and dynamic ecology of dramatic writers'. To describe the context of the work of this agency gives a picture of the positive wider effects of increased funding security. Since 2003, in Manchester and its immediate surrounding network of theatres, Oldham Coliseum, Bolton Octagon and the Lowry in Salford, new writing activity has intensified. One writer's marginal comment points out: 'The climate for new writing depends a lot on the amount of people putting in unpaid time and creating unpaid opportunities on the fringe...' Fringe activities are both part of and instrumental in what NWP characterise as an ecology of new writing. In 2004 the 24.7 festival of new stage writing was started and this year, in July 2009, 21 new short plays are being presented in profit-

share productions during one week in non-theatre venues in Manchester. Pub theatre and profit-share companies have flourished, including Studio Salford, founded by Salford writing and acting graduates, and this year a two-week pub theatre season of short stage plays written by experienced local television writers. There are now annual showcases of work by writing graduates of Manchester Metropolitan University, Bolton University, the Arden School of Theatre and Salford University, often facilitated by NWP.

4.5 A groundswell of new writing is both reflected in and encouraged by the programming of the local theatres. Contact Theatre has promoted innovative black writers. The Library Theatre's youth and community group have staged new plays; Oldham Coliseum set up writing groups including one specifically aimed at older new dramatic writers, facilitated by a professional playwright. M6, the young people's theatre company in collaboration with NWP have twice run a competition for new monologues for young people, which have gone on to be toured into schools. The Lowry has commissioned and staged new work by local writers, alongside its touring product. NWP recently started a writing group for young Asian women, with support from Kali Theatre.

4.6 The Royal Exchange, Manchester's most generously funded theatre, now has an active literary department. The theatre has its own new writing group consisting of invited members. They run a major new writing prize and stage both winning play and runner-up. In the studio, in addition to taking in tours of new work including a substantial amount of new writing for young people, the theatre tried out new commissions which have then gone on to be presented in the main house. The company have not only staged new writing from

Canada and the States, but at least one local new writer on the main stage, Simon Stephens, who has had simultaneous production in London, and others whose work has been commissioned and shown in the studio.

4.7 The Library, the Royal Exchange and Bolton Octagon have all presented seasons re-staging work which began on the local fringe. In the case of the Library Theatre the Re-play festival has become an integral part of the company's programme.

4.8 Commenting on the effect of the Boyden uplift, Chris Bridgman felt 'a more secure and generous funding environment, has meant that producing companies are much more adventurous and willing to engage with, and develop and produce, writers and to focus more on new work. The cultural climate has shifted and it is now understood that there is an enthusiasm for new work amongst audiences.'

4.9 Since its foundation in 1982, North West Playwrights has had the most sustained record in encouraging new playwriting of any agency in Britain. Inspired by the Scottish Society of Playwrights and Northern Playwrights (the North East), NWP stimulated two Birmingham playwrights to set up a collectively-run playwriting development agency, Stagecoach, ten years later. Like the founders of NWP, Sarah Woods and Rod Dungate were Theatre Writers Union members, had studied on the University of Birmingham's MA in Playwriting Studies, and were to have work produced both at the Birmingham Rep and by BBC Radio in Birmingham. Many other MA graduates became involved in Stagecoach (later rebranded Script), wrote for BBC Radio in Birmingham, and had work presented at the Birmingham Rep or other theatres in the West Midlands. The West

Midlands now has an active branch of the Writers' Guild. As in the North West, a matrix of interlocking institutions, allied with theatres and broadcasting companies producing new work, created a critical mass of work which created and sustained a playwriting community. Although the Birmingham University MA (now MPhil) and the Birmingham Rep's new writing policy remain healthy, Script has lost its Arts Council funding and the radio drama production in Birmingham has been cut back.

4.10 In at least two areas, the North East and the North West, growth in artistic activity is in the context of regional development strategies explicitly acknowledging the economic importance of cultural industries. Arts Council increase in funding to North West Playwrights coincided with funding from regional development agencies allowing the development of arts-related projects.[72] New Writing North also operates in the context of broader political support for the arts as part of a strategy of economic regeneration. This beneficial coincidence supports the point made by Ryan that partnership is crucial to the sustainability of writing agencies. The contrast between Yorkshire and the North East is instructive: in Yorkshire, Script Yorkshire is funded by project grants from the Arts Council which mean that long term planning is circumscribed. The Arts Council has an important role to play as advocates at a national level for the value of original, new writing in economic strategy.

[72] For example, in 2007 Greater Manchester Strategic Authority funded through its Higher Education Initiative a project enabling Manchester Metropolitan University to work with North West Playwrights and Bolton University recruiting a professional acting company to develop 12 new scripts by recent graduates of both Universities over a week's workshop with professional directors.

5 Dramaturgy

5.1 Subsidy to playwriting agencies and their relative independence from particular producing houses has allowed the development amongst these organisations of strategies of intervention to increase the diversity of work shown on our stages. Both funded and subscription agencies are supporting young writers, writers from backgrounds currently under-represented amongst produced playwrights and dramatic writing in community contexts. This is particularly important in the regions, where a network of agencies offers opportunities for access to the stage and therefore to cultural and democratic participation, to a wide range of potential writers. Some agencies and theatres with literary managers (e.g. New Writing North; Liverpool Everyman and Playhouse) offer statistical evidence of increased theatre audience attributed both to dramaturgical initiatives and to production of new plays.

5.2 The lack of explicit Arts Council policy in relation to the development of new dramatic writing is a matter of considerable frustration to literary managers, independent writing agencies and writers. (e.g. comments from Suzanne Bell, Chris Bridgman, Liz Ryan in phone conversation, 10/7/09 and several tart notes to this effect in the margins of the questionnaires.)

5.3 Dramaturgy which emphasises the quality of the craft and the development of the writer has arisen from organisations constituted to further writers' own professional interests. There are strategic implications for the development of the quality and nature of dramaturgy as a nascent professional practice. The withdrawal of

Arts Council funding to Writernet[73] has hindered early moves within the Playwriting Network to develop mechanisms to address geographical unevenness, to offer collaborative economies of scale in services to writers and to further best practice in dramaturgical relationships between regions, producers and writers.

5.4 Theatres' responses to the question in our survey about the effect of increased funding on the quality and inventiveness of new writing indicate a sense that there is much further to go in both areas. Chris Bridgman however identifies a 'virtuous loop of development', with 'emerging writers watching a broader range of work feed back into the imaginative possibilities of new writing'. One indicator of this effect is perhaps the increase in the amount of new writing being professionally staged which is written by younger playwrights.

5.5 Theatres and agencies report widespread use of 'seed commissions', a form of commissioning unrecognised in Writers' Guild agreements, which seems to be functioning along the lines of treatments in film and television, and, since the introduction of 'Producer Choice' in the early 1990s by John Birt at the BBC, in radio drama commissioning. (The Independent Theatre Council/Writers Guild contract does contain provision for a treatment fee.)

5.6 Writers contributing to our Writer's Guild interview indicated the need for produced and experienced playwrights to continue to develop their skills. Agencies also play a role in supplementing writing income for experienced writers by brokering the transfer of skills in a variety of contexts. In addition, playwriting agencies offer at least two services to writers which are not freely available otherwise;

[73] See Dunton et al, pp. 14-15.

access to international collaboration and access to publishers. This support is particularly important for stage writers for whom getting an agent is often difficult or impossible, even when they are commissioned and produced, since income from stage writing alone is only rarely attractive to commercial agents. (See the results of our question about playwrights' income above.)

5.7 What is not being provided by playwriting agencies is the bursary. Writers report that Arts Council bursaries are difficult to get and fraught with complication once achieved. One writer had applied for money to write a play, but was advised that in addition he should mount a workshop himself on the finished draft. He did not want the added responsibility of production. Only 3% of the writers who responded to our questionnaire had had G4A funding for their work, although the Writers' Guild told us that the Arts Council first told it that lots of writers had applied for G4A funding but then that bursaries were no longer part of their remit. The Guild meeting noted that if a writer gets a grant for his/her own writing s/he is not taxed, whereas if s/he produces something, s/he will be.

5.8 It is important to note that funding from playwriting agencies does not and often cannot allow for the equivalent in academia of pure research – experimental work conducted independently of immediate commercial pressure; work that used to be supported by the Arts Council's writer's bursary.

6 Writers' responses to dramaturgy.

6.1 Playwrights have equivocal responses to workshops and development activity, whether carried out within or outside theatres. One

playwright wrote to us: 'There should also be distinction between 'better' as in more development opportunities like residencies, attachments, workshop and readings. Most theatres develop far more plays and playwrights than they could ever hope to produce, which is a bit of a double edged sword.[74] Do these activities make it a 'better' climate for new writing? Or would it be 'better' if this money was channelled into commissions and productions?' Another writer comments, 'Personally, I'd like to see most new writing funding going to assisting companies (large and small) to put new work on stage.'

6.2 The evidence of our statistical research suggests however that the growth in development work and an increase in commissioning have happened simultaneously. There is no indication of a pull away from commissioning as a result of investment in writers' workshops and writing agencies. However, there is some indication that the level of reward to individual writers has not kept pace with the expansion of work opportunities.

6.3 Some writers doubt the value of workshops altogether, especially more experienced writers. One much produced writer says, 'I have found the process of actually seeing a production through to performance easily the most valuable in terms of learning and developing my skills. Be it Rep., where I've had 15 or so productions, fringe or commercial.' Another writes: 'The workshop ... was an interesting and informative 3 days. In terms of moving the play forward or developing relationships it was less than useless.' The word 'useless' is also applied to a third writer's mentor.

[74] In fact there is no evidence in our research to support the impression that theatres over-commission. The Chair of the Theatre Committee of the Writers Guild (David James) said that 'over-commissioning might be an urban myth.'

6.4 However, there is also a range of responses to directors. Many writers list directors as 'sources of dramaturgical support you find useful'. One writer adds, 'I have worked usefully with directors.' Other comments though include, 'Directors think they can improve on anything and do not explore texts as they once did', 'some directors don't know (how to) deal well with text!', and theatres 'intervene too often to tell you the play's weaknesses, but not enough prior to that point to support you to make sure the weaknesses are eradicated.'

6.5 There is also strong support for some dramaturgical interventions. Three writers took the trouble to send fulsome and detailed praise of their writers' group. 'I'd like to praise the Nuffield Theatre, and in particular John Burgess, who runs the Writers Group, for not discriminating against people on the grounds of age. John runs the Group in an exemplary fashion – it's consistent, rigorous and lean, and makes a huge difference to me, and I appreciate the still-open door there...'

6.6 Beyond lamenting theatres' inaccessibility, writers commented to some extent on ways into the profession. Comments included: 'Training: the only way a writer does become a writer, in whatever form – I couldn't do anything else and I couldn't stop', and praise for a scriptwriting course at Goldsmith's. A writer from the Nuffield group says, 'My writing has improved immeasurably since attending the Writers Group and for me, it's the best training I could ever hope to have.'

6.7 Neatly summarising the nature of the response, the writer who made the joke about dramaturgy and light bulbs adds, 'They usually take

your play to pieces and you're left to put the bits back together. I have worked as a dramaturg myself so I am also guilty of this.'

Another writer gives us her perfect prescription for dramaturgy. 'A workshop with experienced professional actors and an experienced and sympathetic director, who is genuinely working in the interests of the play and not for their own 'vision' is, for me, always the best way of developing a script. Usually between early ideas and complete first draft stage, so that stylistic 'hunches' can be worked on. A chance to see whether the 'feel' you're after as a writer is likely to be realised by the audience. After first draft a rehearsed reading with experienced actors is also useful.'

6.8 Writers also offer a detailed discussion of devising and the role of devising. For some respondents, working collaboratively is integrated into long-established artistic practice. 'I have never worked in any other way.' For others it is relatively new. 'I have worked three times in the last year as 'co-devisor with special responsibility for script' which is the nearest I can get to describing my role.... I enjoyed it.'

The Writers Guild group offered one example of a company which had attempted to use devising in order to avoid paying a commission fee, a case currently being followed up by the Guild. However, there were also cases where companies had begun with the intention of setting up a devising process and ended up with a writer producing a script. This had apparently happened recently at the Young Vic in three separate instances. Fears that the Young Vic's policy of allowing projects to be initiated by directors rather than writers would lead to remuneration and copyright problems for writers, were somewhat assuaged since the projects concerned were less numerous, less achieved and less problematic than expected. In addition, one member of this group quoted Equity's Malcolm Sinclair, demanding to

know, 'Where's the mandate for the move away from text-based theatre?'

6.9 One writer responding to the questionnaires set the idea of a renaissance of devised and director-led work into historical context. 'Joan Littlewood and Peter Brook were the dominant directors when I entered the theatre – both making great theatre by effectively downgrading the writer – no comparably commanding, innovative figures are making theatre today.' And the last word from the margins; '...as a writer I like working with other theatre practitioners who are as open and respectful of my work as I am of theirs.'

8: Recommendations

1 **Overall policy**

1.1 The dramatic success of new writing in the English theatre gives the lie to the idea that the individually-written play is dying or dead. The performance of new plays on main stages is particularly noteworthy. This considerable achievement is the result of prioritising new writing in the past. We do not see evidence for a substantial shift in taste towards devised theatre or work in which the writer is not the initiating artist. Aware that it is always vulnerable, we **recommend** that new writing be reinstated as a priority in the Arts Council's Theatre Policy.

1.2 While theatres have achieved great success in developing emergent writers, the position of the mid-career writer remains precarious. In order to avoid the risk that talented emergent writers abandon theatre for other media, we **recommend** that the Arts Council implements policies to support the mid-career playwright. These should include a national bursary scheme, providing funds for mid-career writers to write independently of a specific theatre commission. We also **recommend** that in all theatre budgets which the Arts Council specifies, requires, approves, controls or encourages, 'new writing' as a spending category should embrace new translations, adaptations, Christmas shows, and second or subsequent productions of contemporary plays. We particularly **recommend** that theatres be encouraged to mount work from the contemporary canon.

1.3 In order to break down unhelpful divisions between different forms and traditions of theatre-making, we **recommend** building on existing programmes (such as the Dark Room project in the West Midlands) to provide opportunities for companies which have traditionally not worked with independent, individual writers, to do so.

2 **Funding**

2.1 We are aware that in current hard times, some dramaturgs, literary managers and literary departments are facing cuts. We **recommend** that theatres receive targeted help from the Sustain fund to preserve and develop their literary departments and dramaturgical activity.

2.2 We note that several writers' agencies have lost Arts Council funding. We consider that such agencies perform a vital role in developing work that is subsequently taken up by theatres, in brokering relationships between writers and companies, and providing developmental services independent of theatres. We **recommend** that it become a matter of policy to maintain and develop an effective, nationwide network of writers' agencies.

2.3 We **recommend** that the burden theatres such as the Royal Court take on themselves in handling and responding to unsolicited scripts be recognised in increased financial support relative to those theatres which do not offer such services.

3 Diversity

3.1 We are aware of the efforts that theatres and funders have made to increase diversity both of producers (actors, writers, directors) and of audiences. We acknowledge an increase in BAME playwrights presented, but note the lack of BAME directors and managers. We **recommend** that the Arts Council investigates and circulates best practice in this area. We also **recommend** that the Arts Council ensures more forcefully that all funded organisations actively monitor the diversity of writers they commission and produce as well as the diversity of all theatrical staff, with a view to continuing current progress towards a theatre that fully reflects the diversity of the society it serves and seeks to reflect.

3.2 Noting that women playwrights remain under-represented in production, we **recommend** that the Arts Council mounts an in-depth investigation of the position and prospects of the woman playwright in the English theatre.

4 Contractual issues

4.1 Although there is less non-traditionally developed work than is sometimes presumed, there remain contractual issues when writers are part of a devising team or write work for which they are not the initiating artist. We **recommend** the development of clear guidelines to protect writers' copyright and income in such cases, compliance with which should be a condition of subsidy.

4.2 Although there is precedent for so doing, most playwrights' contracts do not contain provision for seed money schemes, attachments, treatments and other pre-commission fees. We **recommend** the development of clear guidelines on best practice in the implementation of such schemes, and their incorporation into playwrights' agreements where possible.

5 Further research

5.1 Our quantitative research has revealed a very different picture of English theatre repertoire and box office performance than has been traditionally presumed to be the case. We **recommend** that the Arts Council collects more detailed statistics from its theatre RFOs annually.

5.1.1 Each show should be returned as a separate item, detailing: title, place performed, capacity of venue, writer (if appropriate), company name, number of performances, total number attending, box office percentage, whether it is a production, co-production or presentation, whether the show was commissioned.

5.1.2 Runs in different venues should be returned as separate items (exclusively touring companies could provide aggregated estimates).

5.1.3 In addition, companies should be asked to identify the production under the following categories.

1. Play (please specify)

- **a.** New Play
- **b.** Classical revival (pre-1850)
- **c.** Modern revival (1850-1945)

   d. Post-war revival (1945-)

2. Other new writing (please specify)

   a. Devised show with writer

   b. New translation/version

   c. New adaptation

3. Devised show

4. First production

5. First British production

6. Physical theatre or dance

7. Music theatre, musical, or opera

8. Young people's theatre

9. Other (please specify)

5.2 Our qualitative research has revealed a range of innovative practice that should be analysed, evaluated and shared widely in the theatre. We **recommend** that the Arts Council commissions a research project on the work of literary departments (complementing John Hampson's report on writers' agencies), ideally involving all such departments in England, not least to provide a sound basis for defining the best use of Arts Council investment in this area.

9: Sources

Arts Council of England. Regularly-funded organisations: notes for completing Section 3, the statistical section of the annual submission 2006/7.

Arts Council of England. *The Arts Council of England's National Policy for Theatre in England*. July 2000.

Arts Council of England. *The Next Stage: Towards a National Policy for Theatre in England*. May 2000.

Arts Council of England. *Theatre Policy*. 2007.

Arts Council of England. *Theatre Writing Strategy*. 2003.

Cork, Kenneth. *Theatre IS for all: Report of the Enquiry into Professional Theatre in England.* Arts Council of Great Britain, 1986.

Dunton, Emma, Roger Nelson and Hetty Shand. *An assessment of new writing in theatre since 2003*. Arts Council of England, 2009

Millman, Anne and Jodi Myers. *Theatre Assessment Findings: data and consultation*. Arts Council of England, 2009.

Peter Boyden Associates. *Roles and Functions of the English Regional Producing Theatres.* May 2000.

Playwrights: A Species Still Endangered? Theatre Writers' Union, 1987.

Ryan, Liz. *A Comparative Study of New Writing Support in the UK*. Arts Council England (Yorkshire), 2008.

Woddis, Jane. *Spear-Carriers or Speaking Parts? Arts Practitioners in the Cultural Policy Process*. Unpublished PhD thesis. University of Warwick, May 2005.

In addition to the above, we quote Arts Council 'Cork statistics' provided between 1986 and 1997.

Appendices

Appendix A: Questionnaire Respondents

Companies

Action Transport

Almeida Theatre

ATC

Belgrade Theatre

Big Brum

Birmingham Repertory Theatre

Bush Theatre

Chichester Festival Theatre

Clean Break [1]

Complicite

Contact [1]

Donmar

Dukes

Eastern Angles

English Touring Theatre

Exeter Northcott

Foursight

Foursight [1]

Frantic Assembly

Gate

Half Moon

Hampstead Theatre

Harrogate [2]

Headlong

Hull Truck [1]

Kali [1]

Leicester

Liverpool Everyman and Playhouse

Lyric, Hammersmith

M6 [2]

Mercury

New Perspectives

Northern Broadsides

Nottingham Playhouse

Nuffield Theatre

Octagon

Oldham Coliseum

Out of Joint [3]

Oxford Playhouse

Oxfordshire Touring [1]

Paines Plough

Peshkar

Red Ladder

Royal Court

Royal Exchange Theatre

Royal National Theatre

Royal Shakespeare Company

Salisbury Playhouse

Shared Experience

Sheffield Theatres

Soho Theatre

Stephen Joseph Theatre

Talawa

Tamasha

Tara Arts

Theatre Absolute

Theatre Centre

Theatre Royal Plymouth

Theatre Royal Stratford

Tricycle

Unity [1]

Watford Palace

West Yorkshire Playhouse [2]

Yellow Earth

Young Vic [1]

[1] Returned information on policy but not a spreadsheet of production data

[2] Data returned too late to be included in the main data analysis

[3] Data returned in an incompatible form so could not be included in the main data analysis.

Playwrights

Adamson, Samuel

Baines, Elizabeth

Baraitser, Marion

Bartlett, Neil

Baxter, Craig

Bean, Richard

Beaton, Alistair

Bennett, Colin

Betts, Kate

Blakeman, Helen

Buffini, Moira

Campbell, Donald

Chadderton, David

Chadwick, Paul

Chambers, John

Chambers, Stephen

Chappell, In-Sook

Chatterton, Mark

Churchill, Polly

Cooper, Mary

Cottrell, Tony

Cox, Harvey

Cregan, David

Crowley, Michael

Cullingford, Benita

Cumper, Patricia

Dear, Nick

Denye, Alexandra

Devonald, Angharad

Duffield, Neil

Duffy, Stella

Dungate, Rod

Edgar, David

Edwards, Dic

Elyot, Kevin

Everett, Richard

Farmer, Jennifer

Field, Victoria

FitzGerald, Laura

Gearing, Deborah

Goetzee, Paul

Gooch, Steve

Grochala, Sarah

Gupta, Tanika

Hallett, Janice

Hare, David

Hopkins, Suzi

Howell, Emma

Hume, Caroline

Hunter, Mark

Hutchins, Guy

Janes, Hugh

Johnson, Judith

Josephs, Alice

Kennedy, Fin

Kennedy, Gemma

Kesterton, Peter

Lane, David

Lodge, David

Mackie, Fiona

Martin, Cheryl

McCormick, Camilla

Monks, Philip

O'Brien, Maureen

Parnell, Ed

Paul, Jeremy

Payne, Emma

Pezhman, Arzhang Luke

Plater, Alan

Proctor, Terence

Quigley, Laura

Rapi, Nina

Ravenhill, Mark

Reade, Simon

Rebellato, Dan

Rodney, Carina

Rose, Ron

Shaw, Kate

Simpson, Dave

Sirett, Paul

Smith, A. C. H.

Smith, Les

Stajno, Yana

Starling, Claude

Teevan, Colin

Thomas, Carrie

Tyler, Sean

Vollmar, James

Wakefield, Colin

Wallwein, Louise

Warburton, Nick

Waters, Steve

Whelan, Peter

White, Graham

Wilkinson, Linda

Wilson, C. G.

Wilson, David Henry

Wood, Alexandra

Wood, Nick

Woods, Sarah

Woodman, Lance

Wright, Nicholas

Wyatt, Stephen

Wyllie, Rosalind

Appendix B: Interviewees

Suzanne Bell, Lindsay Rodden, Liverpool Everyman and Playhouse

Sebastian Born, Royal National Theatre

Chris Bridgman, North West Playwrights

Alex Chisholm, West Yorkshire Playhouse

Graham Crowley, Alex Yates, Out of Joint

Neil Grutchfield, Hampstead Theatre

Kate Horton, Royal Court Theatre

David James, Roy Kendall, Lisa Evans, Amanda Whittington, Writer's Guild of Great Britain

Caroline Jester, Birmingham Repertory Theatre

Jeanie O'Hare, Pippa Ellis, Royal Shakespeare Company

Josie Rourke, James Grieve, Anthea Williams, Bush Theatre

Roxana Silbert, Paines Plough

Erica Whyman, Northern Stage

Natalie Wilson, Theatre Centre

Appendix C: Questionnaires

British **Theatre** Consortium

New Writing in the English Theatre 2003-8

Playwrights Questionnaire

Your answers are confidential and you will not be individually identified to anyone outside the research group. Please leave blank any questions that do not apply or you don't wish to answer. The only required answers are in sections 1 and 2.

❶ Basic Information

Name:

Gender:

Where do you live? Please underline one: North-East, North-West, Yorkshire, East Midlands, West Midlands, East, South-East, South-West, London, Other.

❷ Your Writing

Year of your first commission:

Year of your first professional production:

Year of your first revival:

Number of works by you produced between 2003 and 2008:

In which of these forms of performance have you been produced?
drama, opera, music theatre, dance theatre, musicals, live art/experimental theatre, storytelling (*please underline*)

If you have written drama, please underline which form or forms:
plays, theatre in education, young people's theatre, community theatre, devised theatre, forum theatre, translations, adaptations, other **(*please specify*)**

In which other performance media have you worked as a writer? Please underline and put number of pieces of work produced in 2007-8 in brackets after each underlined medium:
film ( ) television ( ) radio ( )

In which other media have you worked as a writer:
poetry journalism literature other **(*please underline*)**

❸ History

How did you come to writing for performance?

Through another medium
Through other work in theatre
Through training in writing or playwriting
Through other education (*please specify*)
Other (*please specify*)

❹ Income

How much of your income (percentage) came from writing for performance in each of the following years:

2003-4 (%) 2004-5 (%) 2005-6 (%) 2006-7 (%) 2007-8 (%)

Please underline any year in which you received a bursary or other grant for writing (not a commission)

2003-4 2004-5 2005-6 2006-7 2007-8

Please estimate the proportion of your income in 2007-2008 under the following headings:

a.	**Arts-council funded organisations**	**[%]**
b.	**The Grants for the Arts scheme**	**[%]***
c.	**Commercial theatre**	**[%]**
d	**Radio, TV & Film**	**[%]**
e.	**Teaching / Workshops**	**[%]**
f.	**Other sources**	**[%]**

*** If you have applied to the G4A on your own account, please state**
a. for what purpose you applied
b. the sum applied for
c. whether the grant was awarded
d. your thoughts on the value of this form of funding

Please identify any other sources of earned income over the last five years (and give details if you wish):
Performer
Director
Teacher
Workshop leader
Other (*please specify*)

❺ Training

Between 2003 and 2008 were you involved in any of the following activities designed to develop your writing? Please underline any that apply, and asterisk any of those activities that were particularly useful to you.

Undergraduate course	Postgraduate course	Residential course
Writer's Group	Writer's residency	Rehearsed reading
Workshop	Individual mentoring	Other **(*please specify*)**

In general, if you have undertaken training, did it help your writing?

a lot a little not at all **(*please underline*)**

❻ Support

Do you have an agent? If so, do you think this has helped you to sell your work:

a lot a little not at all **(*please underline*)**

Have you worked with a theatre dramaturg/literary manager on the writing of a script? If so, did this help you:

a lot a little not at all **(*please underline*)**

Following your first production with a company, were you helped/ encouraged by that particular company to write another piece for them?

a lot a little not at all **(*please underline*)**

What other sources of dramaturgical support do you find useful? (*please underline*):

friends
directors
professional mentors
new writing organisations
other **(*please give details*)**

7 Background

For this research we are trying to get a picture of the background of writers, as this could help to indicate where policies need to be developed further in order to combat discrimination. We are aware that this can be sensitive data, and it will be kept completely confidential within the research group. We will not identify anyone individually. Please give as many answers as you feel comfortable with.

Ethnic origin (*this refers to colour and broad ethnic groups, not to nationality or citizenship). Please give the ethnic background you ascribe to yourself:*

or tick/underline:

I do not wish to state my ethnic origin

Country of birth:

If you were born in England, please underline in which region:

North-East, North-West, Yorkshire, East Midlands, West Midlands, East, South-East, South-West, London.

Disability. *Please indicate if you consider yourself to have a disability*:

YES/NO

or tick/underline:

I do not wish to indicate

Age. *Please tick/underline one of these categories.*

16-25 *26-35* *36-45* *46-55* *56-65* *Over 65*

8 Attitudes to Playwriting

To each question please indicate your response to the opinion on a scale of 1 to 7 (where 1 means 'Totally disagree' and 7 means 'Entirely agree'). Please circle/underline/highlight the corresponding answer.

In my experience, playwrights are at the centre of British theatre.
1 2 3 4 5 6 7
The climate for new writing in this country is better than it was five years ago
1 2 3 4 5 6 7
New plays are more likely to be performed on large stages than five years ago
1 2 3 4 5 6 7
The theatre industry is more open to non-traditional, collaborative ways of theatre-making
1 2 3 4 5 6 7
... and that is a good thing
1 2 3 4 5 6 7
As an individual, I have been increasingly invited to produce a text in collaboration with other theatre makers
1 2 3 4 5 6 7
... and that is a good thing

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

The Arts Council increasingly prioritises new work rather than new writing

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

… and that is a good thing

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

The playwright's individual voice is less valued than it was five years ago

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Theatres intervene more in the writing process than five years ago

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Sustaining a play-writing career has become more difficult than it was five years ago

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

It is less likely that a new play of mine will receive a second or subsequent production than it was five years ago.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

I feel more in control of my career than I did five years ago

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Thank you very much for your time.

British **Theatre** Consortium

New Writing Policy Questionnaire

Please complete as much of this questionnaire as possible. Apart from information which is already in the public domain, your answers will remain anonymous and will not be identified to anyone outside the research group without your permission.

1. **Name of your theatre / company**:

2. **Do you have a policy specifically on New Writing (either separately or as part of a wider policy)?** YES / NO
   If Yes, please attach or cut-and-paste a copy

3. **Do you anticipate any changes in policy concerning new writing in the next year?** YES / NO

4. **Does your company have a literary department?** YES / NO
   If Yes, what are the roles within it?

5. **Does your company read unsolicited scripts?** YES / NO
   If yes, how many scripts would you say you receive on average each year?

6. **Does your company undertake any of the following writers' development activities?** *(Please underline any that apply)*

   Script-in-hand performances Rehearsed readings Mentoring
   Residencies Attachments Writers' groups Workshops
   Other (*please give details*)

7. **Has your company worked with any writing development agency in the last five years (e.g. writernet, North West Playwrights)?** YES / NO

Thank you very much for your help.

Appendix D: Interview Questions

To interviewers: please remind your interviewees that, apart from information which is already in the public domain, their answers will remain anonymous and will not be identified to anyone outside the research group unless they give us permission. We are therefore now asking for permission. If they are uncertain about this beforehand, we can ask again at the end of the interview, when they will be clearer about what information they have given us, and what views they have expressed.

1. The Company

a) Name of theatre / company:

b) Name of interviewee:

c) Their position in the organisation:

d) If we've received their new writing policy, question them on any aspects you feel need clarification/you think we should follow up

f) If they've said they anticipate changes in policy concerning New Writing in their theatre company in the coming year, ask them for details of this

2. New Plays

Ask any follow-up questions that seem relevant to the information they've supplied; e.g. clarify data; ask about specific issues arising from the information.

Also:

a) Are there any lessons you draw about subject matter? (e.g. do 'niche plays' directed to particular audiences do better than plays of general interest?)

b) Do you have any theories about style? (e.g. is naturalism dead? Do audiences still favour linear narratives?)

c) Does casting matter in box office performance of new plays? – in studio or main house?

d) What is your experience of new plays in your main house?

e) Does the name of the playwright have any influence on box office performance? Are there loyalties to specific playwrights in your audiences?

f) In general, has it become more or less difficult to find an audience for straight plays (i.e. not musicals, etc)?

g) If you do a lot of new plays, do you think your writing policy has a particular character? (Note to interviewer: e.g. as the Bush does)

h) Do you find you have to intervene as a producer in the development of plays to make them acceptable for production?

3. Other New Writing

This section is about the categories: Adaptations, Translations, Musicals, Xmas shows/Pantomimes, Shows specifically for children or young people, Others.

Ask any follow-up questions that seem relevant to the information they've supplied; e.g. clarify data; ask about specific issues that you discern arising from the information. Also:

a) Do you have a policy on new translations or adaptations? E.g. under what circumstances do you commission them?

b) Have you ever commissioned a new Xmas show and how did it work?

c) In your experience, does a new translation, adaptation or Xmas show have an effect on your box office?

d) Have you used commissions of these (i.e. translations, etc) to develop your relationship with a writer?

4. Commissions

This section covers plays commissioned and co-commissioned, productions of commissions and co-commissions. Ask any follow-up questions that seem relevant to the information they've supplied in the questionnaire; e.g. clarify data; ask about specific issues that you discern arising from the information. Also:

a) How many of the plays you've commissioned have you not produced? What lessons do you draw from this?

b) Do you have experience of writers delivering late?

Are there any problems with the commissioning process?

Do all/some/few plays require re-writing?

5. Writers Working in collaboration

a) How many of the new plays produced by your company involved the writer as part of a collaborative writing team (e.g. a devising process)?

b) Have you ever invited writers to work as part of a creative team in a project for which they did not provide a primary text? If so, how did it work?

6. Writers and Professional Development

a) Diversity

i) Do you monitor the diversity of the writers that you work with?

If yes, do you have any statistics that you are able to share with us?

ii) Do you have any particular policies or specific initiatives designed to encourage writers from particular socio-demographic groups?

If yes, how have these worked?

iii) Do you feel you work with enough female writers?

If no, why not?

b) In terms of career stages, how many of the writers your company has produced between 2003 and 2008, were:

i. Having their first professional production with you?
ii. Developing writers (1 to 3 previous professional productions)?
Iii. Established writers (4 or more professional productions)?

c) Have you found any difficulties in getting writers at the level you want? If so, do you have any proposals as to how you might be able to attract more established writers?

7. Literary Policies

If they have answered yes to their company having a literary department, then ask any follow-up questions that seem relevant to the information they've supplied. Also:

a) If you have a literary manager or dramaturg, what is the reason for the title, and what do they do?

b) If they have answered yes to their company undertaking any writers' development activities, then ask any follow-up questions that seem relevant to the information they've supplied. Also:

What are the pros and cons of your writers' development activities?

c) Over the last ten years, playwriting courses have mushroomed – has this had an affect on the scripts you receive and how do you develop these scripts?

d) If you have carried out any assessments of your writers' development activities, please tell us what you have found.

(If you already have an assessment in another document which you can let us see, may we please have a copy?)

e) If they have answered yes to their company reading unsolicited scripts, then ask any follow-up questions that seem relevant to the information they've supplied; e.g. clarify data. Also:

i) What is your system for dealing with unsolicited scripts?

ii) Is there a readers' panel and how is it selected?

iii) Do you have targets on time length for responding to scripts, and do you keep to them?

iv) Do you give reports to writers?

v) Have you ever produced an unsolicited script?

f) If they have answered yes to their company working with any writing development agency in the last five years, then ask any follow-up questions that seem relevant to the information they've supplied. Also:

i) How successful would you say this was?

ii) What role should writing agencies perform, in your view?

8 Funding

a) Has your company applied to the Arts Council's Grants for the Arts at any time in the last five years for money to support new writing?

If Yes, please specify how much you applied for, how much you were awarded, and what purpose the grant was for:

b) How much money has your company given to writers' development activities?

2003/4 2004/5 2005/6 2006/7 2007/8

c) Have any of these writers' development activities been specifically funded by Arts Council England?

If yes, please specify

9 Second Productions

a) Have you, in the last five years, done any second productions?

If yes, how did they do?

If no, what was the reason?

b) Do you have a specific policy on second productions?

If yes, what is it?

10. Attitude Survey

For the following questions, please answer 'not at all', 'a little' or 'a lot':

a) The subject matter of new theatre writing has become more diversified since 2003.

b) Audiences for new plays have become more diversified since 2003.

c) It is difficult to market new plays.

d) New theatre writing is becoming increasingly collaborative.

e) New writing is a core part of our company's mission.

g) Gaining new audiences for new plays is becoming easier.

h) Commissioned new plays are generally of a higher standard than they were five years ago.

<u>To interviewers:</u> Please thank the interviewee, and ask if they are happy for us to identify any of this information as coming from them/their company, or to quote from them, in our report.

This report was researched and written by

David Edgar
Dan Rebellato
Janelle Reinelt
Steve Waters
Julie Wilkinson

With the administrative and research support of

Jane Woddis (Project Manager)
Ruth Farrar (Assistant)

We would like to thank all the theatre workers who gave up their time, often uncomplainingly, to answer our questions both in interviews and by questionnaire. We have benefitted from information provided by Anne Millman, Liz Ryan, Emma Dunton, Roger Nelson and Hetty Shand, and we're grateful to them all for their help and support.