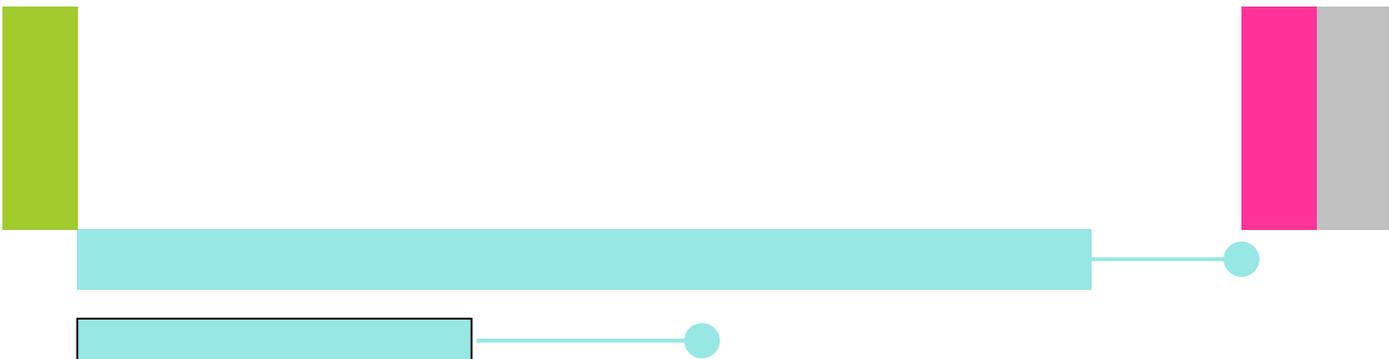


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Theatre directing in Scotland: an investigation into training and development needs

Christine Hamilton, January 2006



The Centre for Cultural Policy Research
Gilmorehill Centre
University of Glasgow
Glasgow
G12 8QQ
Tel. 0141 330 3806
Email culturalpolicy@arts.gla.ac.uk

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Introduction

Under the aegis of the Federation of Scottish Theatres (FST), two theatre directors, Graham Eatough (Suspect Culture) and Philip Howard (Traverse Theatre), have taken steps to tackle what is perceived to be a lack of training and career development opportunities for theatre directors in contemporary Scotland. As a result of their initiative the Centre for Cultural Policy Research at the University of Glasgow (CCPR) was commissioned by the FST, with support from the Scottish Arts Council, to undertake a short piece of work on the current situation for the training and development of theatre directors in Scotland. The commission was confirmed in November 2005 with a view to the completion of the report early in 2006.

The intention is that the findings of this report will inform a debate amongst directors to identify what action is required and, also, what kind of structure is needed to deliver better support for directors.

The aim of the research was, therefore, twofold:

- 1 to identify the opportunities that currently exist for Scottish-based directors; and,
- 2 to identify the opportunities for development in consultation with the sector and funders.

CCPR agreed to draw on information about opportunities that are in the public domain and enhance this with information gleaned from directors themselves and from key agencies to produce a report that will 'set the agenda' for a consultation meeting of directors in Scotland.

Methods

The research was carried out by Christine Hamilton with support from colleagues in CCPR. The following methods were employed.

Desk research:

The challenge of training and developing theatre directors in the UK in general and in Scotland, in particular, is not a new one. The current research, therefore, referred some earlier work into the issue. For example, drawing on earlier work by Andrew McKinnon (1996) this report considers courses offered in Higher Education Institutions and the other various schemes and opportunities for new directors entering the profession and continuous professional development for those on an already established career path. A list of these sources is given in Appendix 1.

Consultation:

Telephone and face-to face-interviews were carried out with 16 theatre directors, funders and training providers to identify the issues and to 'test' some of the assumptions about what action is required. Information on this research project was also given out via various networks – including SCOT-NITS -- and many directors, keen to contribute to the work, contacted CCPR directly. Given the constraints of time and budget it was not possible to interview all who made contact. However, many offered their comments in email and these are used as background to the report. All quotations used in the report are anonymised but come from these interviews, unless otherwise indicated. A full list of contributors is given in Appendix 2.

Of particular interest in terms of planning, the report also looked at current 'demand' for directors to assess the likely needs of the theatre sector over the next period. This was achieved by undertaking a brief e-survey of the members of the FST: thanks are due to FST staff who assisted with its distribution. A copy of the survey is given in Appendix 3.

Report:

This report was produced having analysed and synthesised the data gathered through the desk research and consultation. It starts by considering the 'problem' and tries to identify what it is that needs to be tackled. This informs the next stage of the report which looks at some of the specific issues including existing opportunities for training and for work in the theatre. The original brief asks for a report which suggests gaps/areas for development, and some reflections on possible approaches to future activity. This is outlined in the final section.

Finally, this report is focused on theatre directing. Although it has to be acknowledged that those who work in theatre may also work in opera or in film and television, the scope of this work is only theatre. Additionally, it should also be noted that it was not part of the brief to consider the role of the artistic director as the chief executive of a theatre company. However, this issue did emerge on several occasions in the consultation and, therefore, a brief reference to this is made in the report.

What is the problem to which we are seeking a solution?

No one in Germany is saying 'We've got this show to do, let's call up one of those fantastic Scottish directors.' What they *are* saying is, 'Hey, let's do this fantastic Scottish play, but let's get one of our German directors to direct it.'

Over the last two decades there have been detailed and extensive pieces of work done at a UK level on the training of theatre directors – the first by Kenneth Rea for the Gulbenkian Foundation in 1989 and the second by Andrew McKinnon, as a follow up, in 1996. Both made important recommendations about the training of directors – particularly postgraduate training – which, as we will see later, are now being implemented in England. It is not the intention of this report to re-visit work which has already been thoroughly done.

What this report *is* concerned to explore is: what has changed to encourage those involved to look again at training for and development in directors in Scotland; and, are there specific issues for Scotland which need to be understood? Two key events immediately present themselves.

First, and most obvious, is the arrival of the National Theatre of Scotland (NTS). The development of the NTS, and the financial investment that accompanies it, marks a new point of departure for theatre in Scotland and offers fresh opportunities for theatre makers from all disciplines. Challengingly there is a fear within theatre circles that a lack of directing talent based in Scotland specifically will undermine the ambitions of NTS, as well as theatre more broadly. This is explored further below.

There is a second issue of significance in scoping this issue that is particular to Scotland. That is the rise of the playwright and the current profile and status of Scottish plays and playwrights. Although reference is made to playwrights alongside other theatre artists this is a new issue and not an issue highlighted in any of the earlier reports. In Scotland, it could be reasonably argued that writers have become a benchmark in everything from pay to international recognition. This presents a particular challenge to Scottish-based theatre directors.

Throughout this consultation there was an emerging view that the situation for theatre directors in Scotland stands in marked contrast to that of writers. It is widely recognised that, over several years, there has been a coordinated effort to develop new writing in Scotland. Examples include decades of work by the Scottish Society of Playwrights, the establishment of the Playwrights' Studio Scotland and, the ongoing and high-profile production of new writing by theatre companies, especially the Traverse Theatre. This has led to a very strong profile for Scottish playwrights and Scottish plays both at home and abroad. It is argued, by some, that the result of this development is that writers are better valued, and better rewarded, for their endeavours.

In contrast, directing in Scotland does not share this level of coordinated support. There are few opportunities for the development of new and diverse talent and the opportunities that exist are *ad hoc*. There is also a concern from directors themselves that unfair comparisons are made with writers; while writers are at the heart of the debate and the culture, directors see that their own role is not valued and that their contribution is little acknowledged. Some we consulted, including directors, are very critical of theatre directing in Scotland and say so; others expressed the view

that there has been much unfair criticism, which is undermining, and there has been a lack of encouragement. Either way it is neither true nor helpful to adopt a position which assumes all playwriting in Scotland is accomplished and world class and all directing is pedestrian and lacks vision. Nevertheless, there is a useful comparison to be drawn.

One event in summer 2005 crystallised the issue: the Edinburgh International Festival's presented David Harrower's new play, *Blackbird* in a production directed by Peter Stein. Here was a mature and powerful work by a Scottish playwright, who has developed his writing using the opportunities open to him here in Scotland, being directed by one of Europe's most acclaimed directors at the world's greatest arts festival.

As the quote at the opening of this section implies, there is an assumption that writers like Harrower can, and do, produce internationally remarked work. This is the result of individual talent. But it has also happened because of the leadership coming from the sector itself, the lobbying for more opportunities, and the structures which flowed from that.

The challenge for the current generation of theatre directors and funders is to provide the kind of leadership which will develop a future for directing in Scotland which will benefit them and the generations to come. The challenge in this report, therefore, is to map out the opportunities which exist for directors. What are the steps needed to develop and coordinate these opportunities? And, what can be learnt from the experience of playwrights?

What's the job?

[A theatre director needs an] instinctive understanding of what theatre means to an audience; an intellectual desire to challenge that; and, the organisational skills to create an environment for work to flourish.

Before identifying what opportunities exist for directors, and what the gaps might be, it was necessary to consider the role of the modern theatre director. We encountered some interesting views:

My view is a director is the primary creator. But you are also a manager and a leader and I believe in running a good company. Every member of that company has input and experience and I am responsible for a happy company. Especially when devising: the people you are working with are your foot soldiers and they have got to feel ownership.

In the course of the consultation a consensus emerged around two closely linked issues. First, that the theatre director is a creative artist in his/her own right; and, second, in relation to the generic skill of leadership.

Craft/art

In relation to the craft/art of the director there are, as you might expect, a wide range of views of what that means – particularly in terms of the kinds of education and training required to develop a good directors. For some the successful communication of ideas means an understanding of the history and theory of theatre making. For others it is about understanding text, or, if not text-based, then having a vision or idea to explore and communicate.

When examining the skills required, discussions often centred around moving beyond the text:

I think [that directing] is as much visual communication as anything else, and I think what lets down about 90% of directors is that they don't have visual communication skills. I don't mean design and set. Instead it's to do with body language. It's to do with how you compose a picture on the stage. It's about the way people relate to each other visually and communicate in that way too.

Many directors – but particularly those whose experience is primarily with new writing – did assert that dramaturgical skills were particularly important when it came to new texts – or to newly devised work. Many argued that this was a skill essential to all kinds of directing. One of our consultees argued that:

I think all plays should be treated as if they are new plays and not as a finished product. So, in terms of delivering to an audience, directors must always work dramaturgically to communicate with an audience its [the text's] ideas and the ideas you want to represent.

In fact there was a widely expressed view that there was too little attention paid to developing dramaturgical skills. Some of our interviewees went so far as to suggest that *this* was the central problem with directing in Scotland. Some of this was put down to lack of opportunities to train;

while other saw it as part of the problems with the structure of the business in Scotland and the way directors are able to work. This point is a subtle but interesting one. One consultee argued that:

To me one of the skills of a director is having a kernel of something which needs to be solved in order to make the production work – and the need to answer or crack that question is the need to specialise. I think when people do not have that kernel to crack [the result is that], there are just people putting on plays, which I think is unforgivable. [...] The thing about the rep system in Britain – and specifically in Scotland – [...] is that it is very hard for anyone [...] to become a specialist at anything -- or to find something they are absolutely brilliant at. There is generality to the work which means it can never be brilliant.

This idea of the director having to turn his/her hand to everything and anything was seen by this interviewee and by other as militating against the director building real expertise in one particular area. It was a view challenged by those who work in a freelance capacity where a broad-based experience was valued.

One other aspect of this balance between generalism and specialism is around career development/progression. One of our interviewees reflected that:

Ten years ago, when I started directing, the assumed career trajectory was that you would end up running a building. That is what you did. Now, I think, it is different. [...] You need to look at [NTS] and say why did they come up with that model? And, when you look at a building, is that necessarily the way? Is that the way directors flourish?

Of course, as was also recognised, those who are artistic directors of theatres have a salary and, at least in theory, more scope to develop their own ideas, but the idea of the liberated freelancer did work for some – even if the financial rewards are uncertain. And, of course, in relation to the theme of this report, each type of career – freelance and linked to a traditional theatre institution – might required different types of support.

In passing, but none the less intriguing, one area of specialism where theatre in Scotland was identified by some of our consultees as excelling is in the field of variety and pantomime. As one interviewee commented:

We are very good at playfulness in performance – although we lose it when going into ‘straight plays’.

Considering that this sector is one of the most lucrative of all areas of theatre, it is, perhaps, surprising that relatively little regard is given to the issue of training in this genre.

Leadership

The second crucial skill required by a director is the generic skill of leadership. The dominant view was that you had to be ‘in charge’ and ‘clear about your role’. In this no one was suggesting an autocratic approach, but rather being confident in one’s own ideas and encouraging and developing others. In the case of a theatre director this does mean communicating to a wide range of different people, not just the actors – although, as discussed later, learning to communicate with

actors is a key skill. The kinds of skills required for directing were expressed in terms of communication and confidence-building: and these same skills underpinned the role of artistic director.

This is only a summary of some of the views on the task of the director expressed during the consultation phase. What it points to is that a director needs to develop his/her role as an artist, and in so doing gain the ability and confidence to question and explore ideas. This has to come alongside an understanding of other roles in the theatre and is predicated on having the skills and techniques to communicate with all involved. While not all consultees went as far one – who suggested that Scottish theatre directing lacked ‘intellectual clout, risk-taking and artistry’ – there is a shared understanding in the sector of what the required skills are, and there is consensus that there is a lack of opportunity to develop these skills.

Where can you learn?

If you are 15 years old and you want to write a play there is somewhere for you to go – and, I think, most people in the theatre could direct you where to go. [...] If someone of 15 came to me and said 'I am really interested in this thing called directing', I would not know where to send them.

In 1996 Andrew McKinnon produced a report on the training of theatre directors and a companion publication on a brief guide to courses. These documents provided important background for this report. McKinnon's brief covered the whole of the UK; was concerned to update a piece of work undertaken in 1989; and, focused on training provided via higher education and what we now understand as continuous professional development. Andrew McKinnon also generously gave of his time to the current consultation process.

Those earlier reports took the firm view that the most effective way of educating and training directors was through higher education.

While not a scientific sample, it is interesting to note the backgrounds of those involved in the consultation for this report were drawn from different aspects of theatre making in Scotland and had different training and educational backgrounds: some had done (the traditional) English Literature course as undergraduates; some drama courses; and, some had first trained in other theatre disciplines such as acting or design.

There are those who might argue that a university course is not the only approach to training directors, but it is the case that many of those involved in the consultation for this report did regard theatre directing as a *graduate profession*, that is, as something you came to after undertaking an undergraduate degree in something else. As one commented:

The best directors come from academic drama courses: they are not afraid of tackling texts and feel confident with it. It [directing] is about people assuming the right to discuss ideas and that is what a good university education gives you, if nothing else. You have to be confident of *that* skill to be a good director.

One issue all directors agree about is the need, in the training context, to provide opportunities to work with professional actors:

You learn most when you first work with professional actors and the questions they ask you. You cannot learn working with non-professional actors: it is impossible.

This was a point echoed by many of those who were consulted. Some went so far as to suggest that that directors should not be allowed to direct until they had trained as actors or in another discipline in theatre. Another suggested that there were many actors who felt that directors often did not really know what they were doing and the actor felt they had to 'carry the show'. Others argued that part of being a director is bringing life experience to bear on text or work and that this implies a level of maturity.

What all of this underlines is the generally held view that director training be at postgraduate level. How this was to be achieved, though, was a matter of debate.

Solutions

I would say offer opportunities to work alongside existing directors. [There is a] definite role for post graduate [opportunity] and this can be allied with practice.

Both the 1989 and 1996 reports site director training in and through higher education and advocate a tripartite approach to the training of directors which might be summarised as 'craft, culture and experience' or, more precisely, 'practical tuition, theoretical education and professional experience'. For us, this implies partnership and, in particular, the involvement of the conservatoire for practical tuition, the university or academic course for theoretical education and the wider theatre community for professional experience.

It seems that a postgraduate course (MFA/MA) at Birkbeck, University of London, most closely mirrors this approach. In fact it was established directly as a result of the McKinnon report, and as a consequence of lobbying by the theatre community, particularly Equity, and support from academic and other funding. The course offers a two-year programme which includes teaching at Birkbeck, a secondment at a drama college, and a placement with a theatre company in England. (For links to all courses mentioned, see Appendix 1.)

The course can accommodate up to ten students, although there has been some attrition due to financial pressures on students, and each year has seen one or two drop out. The first cohort of a final group of eight students has just completed the two year course and Equity has undertaken a report on how it has operated, making recommendations for some changes to how it is managed. Overall, however, it is considered to be a success. Particularly important is the contact the students have had with those working in the profession including visiting speakers and guest sessions, and the six months 'placement' in a theatre which is considered invaluable. Interestingly Birkbeck has linked its directors course with the Motley Theatre Design Course and this has opened up collaborations across theatre discipline.

The Higher Education Funding Council (HEFC) awards Birkbeck £5028 per home/EU student and each student also pays a fee of £3,700. Other non-EU students are charged a fee of £12,000. Around 10% of students is from overseas. EU students are entitled to apply to the key funding agency, the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC), for a grant in their second year. They apply to a highly competitive fund although one from the first cohort of directing students and two from the second did receive a grant as well.

Birkbeck also works on raising funding for scholarships from a variety of other sources. In addition to HEFC and AHRC funding, the Arts Council England makes a contribution of £80,000 towards production costs of the studio production which each student undertakes.

There is also a postgraduate course specifically in theatre directing (again MA/MFA) offered at Middlesex University which is run on a modular basis and has a strong international element: it is run in partnership with the GITIS Academy in Moscow. Other postgraduate courses in England include an MA in Cultural Performance at Bristol (run in collaboration with Welfare State) and at

Goldsmiths, University of London, which offers an MA in Performance Making.

Turning to specifically Scottish opportunities, there have been attempts, led by Equity, to create bursaries for Scottish-based students to attend the course at Birkbeck. The union has been a great champion of directors' training on a UK wide basis. The Scottish Arts Council has been approached to fund places at Birkbeck but, under some gentle pressure from higher education in Scotland, now wishes to look at opportunities nearer home.

To date, then, the initiatives undertaken in Scotland are quite limited.

Queen Margaret University College (QMUC) offers an undergraduate course -- the BA Acting and Performance -- which includes directing options. At a postgraduate level QMUC also offers an MFA in Advanced Stage and Screen Practice which, as the title suggests, included training for film and television as well as theatre. Although both have produced graduates who have gone to enjoy success in theatre, neither course fulfils completely the format of 'craft, culture and experience'. Similarly undergraduate curriculum in Theatre Studies at the University of Glasgow does include opportunities for students to begin to explore directing but is not a training course in itself. Whilst Glasgow does offer a Masters-level degree in Dramaturgy there is not an equivalent in directing. The Royal Scottish Academy of Music and Drama (RSAMD) has a more developed approach to directing at undergraduate and even at postgraduate level but it not, in itself, the solution.

In order to create a 'Scottish Birkbeck', as someone described it, we see that there needs to be a partnership between the conservatoire, the university, and the theatre community.

On the positive side, there is growing collaboration, on many fronts, between RSAMD, QMUC and the University of Glasgow's Department of Theatre, Film and Television Studies. With the arrival of the NTS -- and its commitment to training and development, discussed below -- it is possible to see the development of some very new opportunities, combining higher education and the theatre sector.

However, any kind of course in directing is expensive to run, and, as the case of Birkbeck shows often expensive to the student too.¹ It is, of course, the case that the cost of running any well-supported postgraduate course is high but, in this case, the technical needs of such a course, including costs incurred engaging professional actors, pushes costs up even higher. The way to make a course economical to both the institution and the student is to attract a large number of students and spread the expense. But economies of scale do not apply quite so successfully in this case.

Although there is a consensus around the need for some kind of higher education course in Scotland, the reality is that professional opportunities on graduating remain limited. The Scottish Arts Council, for example, projects the requirement of just two directing graduates per annum for a country the size of Scotland. For some this is regarded as being over-cautious in predicting the needs of the sector -- for others it is a sensible prediction but it is hardly a viable pool for HEI planners. Similarly, there are both practical and academic reasons why such a course would have a smaller intake than other PGT modules with the university-sector.

¹ Cost to the students was one of the reasons a course run previously at RSAMD had to be suspended.

In short, running a course for two home students makes neither economic nor pedagogical sense – and, of course, too many students would also present problems in terms of theatre placements. So, the challenge is to take another tack.

Broadening such a course to include film and television training is one option – although that would require some detailed consultation with the screen industry. Another approach might be to attract students to the course from beyond the EU – and, of course, non-EU students will play higher fees. However, the overseas market place is hugely competitive and would, in any case, take some time to develop. Birkbeck's experience certainly points to strains for overseas (and also for non-UK EU students) from different theatre traditions having to work primarily within a UK theatre set-up. Cultural differences have emerged which have not always been resolved creatively or positively.

Another possibility is to create a much more modular course, that is, one with different options each separately costed and offered as either continuous professional development (CPD) or as building towards a qualification. The advantage of this option is that it can be linked with existing courses or modules and/or attract a wider range of participants than just those who can afford – the money and the time – to undertake a full-time course.

In summary, the development of a full-time postgraduate-level course may remain some way off and will certainly require some imaginative thinking in terms of how it might be supported and delivered to ensure it is robust in itself, affordable to students and cost effective for the delivery agencies.

Placements and training opportunities

Many of our consultees commented that a key aspect of learning to be a director is to work with others and, particularly, to get an opportunity to assist an experienced director. They also noted that the role of (paid as opposed to volunteer or intern) associate director had all-but disappeared. Most theatres do not have the resources from existing budgets to create trainee directorships, to have an assistant on every show or to have an associate and so the opportunities are *ad hoc*.

A notable exception is the Channel Four (previously Thames Television) Theatre Director Scheme which was celebrated by both those who have been trainees on the scheme and those who have had placements from it. Beginning with a 12-month training attachment, a participating theatre offers the trainee director a six-month contract with a view to directing a production – either main-house or studio. Many Scottish theatres have benefited from this scheme, and many are run by those who have come through it. Currently the Citizens' Theatre has a trainee funded through this scheme.

Many of our consultees lamented the ending of the trainee, assistant and associate director schemes previously offered by the Scottish Arts Council. One commented on how important it had been for the development of her career – not only because of the importance of what was learnt in the rehearsal room but also the learning about how to run a company, sitting beside the Artistic Director in all his/her roles. A recent initiative which the Scottish Arts Council took with the Esmee

Fairbairn allowed for a trainee associate post at Dundee Rep but this proved a one-off initiative and has not been continued.

The recent approach taken by the Arches Theatre is also regarded as an excellent opportunity for young emerging directors to 'just do it'. The Arches Award for Stage Directors commissions two emerging young directors/artists to direct a production each. The project now involves NTS which sponsors a workshop week for the two directors in advance of rehearsals. Each production is staged as part of the Arches Theatre Festival before running for a week at the Traverse Theatre. This partnership model is expanding this year with the Tron also providing a space for one of the productions. A mentoring service is provided for the two directors.

Trainee directors are not short of initiative and two of those we consulted admitted to creating their own assistant directing opportunities by accessing other professional development funds offered by the Scottish Arts Council. One was able to assist two directors and to undertake some of that work abroad.

The Scottish Arts Council is currently reviewing all its funding and, as a consequence, is prepared to look again at the training of directors. No major changes will come into effect until April 2007. It will be up to the theatre community to highlight what is required and lobby for what they want particularly in the way of funding for trainee-ships and professional development later in a director's career.

Continuous Professional Development

As argued above, theatre directors are creative artists and, as such, need to be able continue to develop their experience and skills and to engage with new ideas and experiences. Several of our consultees talked about the importance to the Scottish Arts Council's *Creative Scotland* awards which are open to all artists and which crucially offer opportunities to explore new ideas or ways of working.

Another resource open to all artists is the facility at Cove Park in Argyll. Some theatre artists have already used this residential facility to take time out to explore and reflect upon their work. Others have taken advantage of the Federation of Scottish Theatre's Critical Exchange Programme which includes residential time at Cove Park to explore ideas and practice. On a more individual level, the Scottish Arts Council offers funds for professional development and several have taken advantage of travel grants to go and see others' work.

While these opportunities are not for everyone, and *Creative Scotland* is particularly competitive, it is important to recognise what already exists.

In discussion many raise the issue of being able to see others' work in the rehearsal room – not as an assistant but as a way of gaining insight from others. This is particularly raised by younger directors starting out in their career. The idea of sharing experience, discussing ideas and seeing each others' work were all raised as being opportunities which are *ad hoc* and might benefit from being better coordinated. (In passing, we did hear more on the age-old issue of 'seeing others' work'. There is a widely held view that directors in Scotland do not see enough of each others'

work or the work of directors beyond Scotland and, therefore, become isolated intellectually as well as geographically.)

All of these initiatives have their advocates and detractors. Some argue that it is difficult, if not impossible, to get into the rehearsal room of a well-known director. Some suggested that you have to be careful who you chose to visit: picking up someone else's bad habits is not the way ahead. There are also those who argue against the idea of what is perceived to be 'foreign jaunts':

They go off the Latvia and come back and tell everyone they do it better there. [There is] value in obscurism.

Another, who responded to the survey did ask, ruefully, why so few directors felt the need to undertake continuous professional development.

Of course, it depends on the individual and not all directors feel that the best way for them is to work with other directors but rather want to gain mentoring support from those not involved in directing but engaged in other parts of theatre practice. The overwhelming view, however, is that creating some kind of coordinated approach would be welcomed by many and the individual can then make the choice.

Doing it

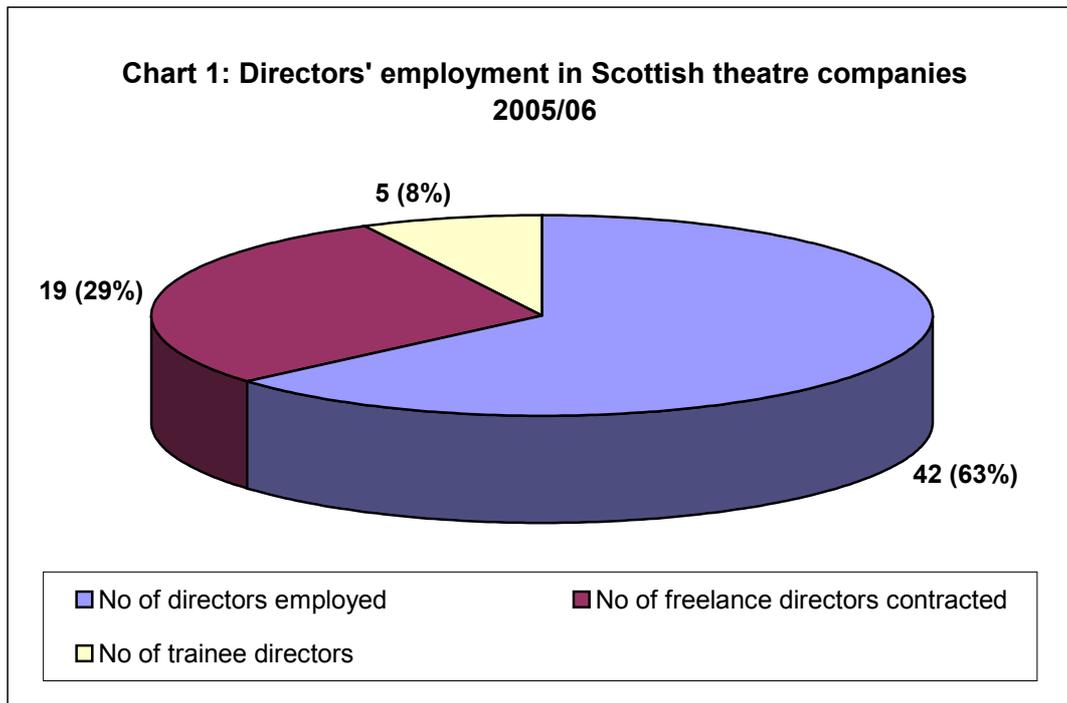
At the end of the day the way for any artist to test their work is to put it out there. However, there are very real problems and barriers for aspiring theatre directors. In a nutshell, there are not enough opportunities offered by existing companies: in order for companies to survive they need to get their 'home' directors to direct.

For this report we undertook a short e-survey – see Appendix 3 for a copy of the survey. The questionnaire was sent to all FST members – with the exception of the NTS – who were identified by the FST as engaging or employing directors. The intention was to establish a 'baseline' for opportunities before the impact of the NTS took effect.

Table X – Survey response

Total number in sample	78
Total number of responses	35
Number of analysed responses	30
% of valid responses	38%

Of the 78 sent, 35 were returned. Most came in with comments and very few took up the option of making an anonymous return. Three were found to be duplicates. This represents a 38% return from a wide range of theatres, including most, if not all, of the core funded organisations of the Scottish Arts Council. Of the 32 valid returns, one was from a receiving theatre which is closed for refurbishment so there was no current activity to report and one was from the Playwrights' Studio Scotland which was considered separately. Therefore, 30 returns were analysed.



The 30 organisations included in the analysis employed 42 directors on an ongoing basis who are directing a total of 84 shows the current financial year. This averages at exactly two shows each.

There are currently five trainee directors in Scottish theatres – some on specially funded schemes, some funded from core budgets.



* employed by a theatre company on a regular or ongoing basis

There are in addition 19 opportunities for freelance work: this includes main stage or studio shows or, in some cases, major outreach/youth projects. This does not include workshops, play readings, etc. The Playwrights' Studio Scotland, in common with several theatres including the Traverse Theatre, offers ten one-off directing opportunities for play readings of new plays.

This lack of 'main stage' freelance opportunities is further explained in the narrative responses to the survey. Many, in building based organisations in particular, made the point that there is so much pressure on budgets that the number of in-house productions are dropping in number in favour of buying-in work – thus reducing opportunities for them to create training opportunities or even engage experienced freelancers.

In addition, many young directors, for a variety of reasons, set up their own companies working on a project-by-project basis. This approach does not allow for the development of freelance jobs. This is explored further below.

There are also several examples of assistant director roles being created on a project-by-project basis specifically as training opportunities. One director also said that she offers student placements on her shows if she can. From responses to the survey, and through the consultation, it is clear that there are also 'trainee' opportunities being offered which do not carry any kind of remuneration.

Another issue which was raised was that of 'cronyism': why do established companies invite the same people to direct for them? On the one hand, in a tough funding climate, it is difficult to take risks and an artistic director or board may wish to maintain a 'house style' which can be got from in house directors and regular freelancers. On the other hand, there is a very obvious lack of diversity in theatre directing in Scotland. You do not have to undertake any kind of survey to see that the situation regarding the gender balance in our major companies remains as uneven as it did two decades ago and it is difficult to see how new voices can be heard particularly those from minority ethnic communities.

This is not just down to training opportunities – several women directors contacted CCPR during this study to voice concerns about this area. Some mentioned as positive developments the appointment of Vicki Featherstone to the NTS, the role of Muriel Romanes and Stellar Quines, and the decision of the Royal Lyceum to have Jemima Levick direct their Christmas show, to great acclaim, this year. It is important to note that Levick had already been working with both the Lyceum and Stellar Quines as a trainee.

But more prevalent is a perception that not only do you have to be male to get the chance to run a building, but you also have to be white and from a particular class background -- and this is not just a problem for new young directors. One consultee who has 'experience at rep level' in England, and, therefore, was not looking for entry-level work as a trainee, talked about the 'unspoken network' describing them as 'a bit like an old guard' and there being a lack of clarity about what is possible and why. Not that the artistic directors are unfriendly:

These people are lovely guys. You can have a drink with them in the bar and that is brilliant. But when it comes to there being action and [them] actually saying, 'I have a problem [in offering you freelance work]'. That's where it gets tricky.

There will, of course, always be a (perceived) establishment – and no doubt many of those relatively young artistic directors who are perceived by an even newer generation of young practitioners as ‘the establishment’ are just themselves still railing against an earlier order! None the less as an industry Scottish theatre needs to be aware of complacency and introspection.

Theatre directors themselves know that this situation in Scotland is changing too slowly – indeed that was partly the incentive behind commissioning this report. Others suggest that there is little point in training as there are no opportunities for new directors, from whatever background, in Scottish theatre. What is very clear is that it is an uncomfortable feeling for everyone: if you are sitting outside, it is difficult to ‘break in’ and to become part of the network but in the other hand, there are not the opportunities to direct and those running companies are left having to make difficult choices.

It may be the Scottish Arts Council’s role to have an overview of this issue but it is not its role to police this area of work and to tell companies whom to employ. The initiative has to come from the theatre community. However the issue of the diminishing number of opportunities overall for producing shows, is a shared one. The message coming through from the more established companies is that there is a diminishing opportunity to produce work and that inevitably will have an impact on freelance and training opportunities.

Own company

This is not a report on artistic directors and running organisations but two important points came through the consultation: the fact that many directors choose to set up their own companies; and, the role of the artistic director.

Young directors often set up their own companies to enable them to do the kinds of work they want to do. Some of these ‘apprentice-piece companies’ survive to become established in the field, for example Suspect Culture and Theatre Babel. What this does allow is an approach which focuses on one type of theatre and develops expertise in that area. But there is a downside to this. Many expressed the view that establishing a new company saw the young director move from developing their creativity to feeding the company and becoming slaves to funding agreements. A few have taken the route of the ‘mixed economy’ – using their own company, when money was available, to explore new ideas, and working as a freelance in others’ companies at other times. This was seen as being both sustainable and artistically liberating. Examples of practitioners working in this way include Stewart Laing who makes work for his own company (Untitled Productions) as well as working as a freelance director nationally and internationally.

However, the sometimes unspoken danger is that the company – originally set up as a site of experiment and innovation – outlives its usefulness and instead of being a source of opportunity becomes a burden to both the director and the funders.

A second issue is, where is the next generation of artistic directors to come from to run major organisations – in particular the building based companies? This was raised through several

responses and the identical phrase of a 'creative time bomb' cropped up. Not only, as we have seen, are there limited opportunities for freelance directors to develop their directing skills in working on a larger stage, but there is very limited training offered for the other skills required to run a theatre company/theatre building. As we saw earlier, director traineeships not only offers experience in the rehearsal room but often gives the trainee a chance to 'shadow' the artistic director in the staff meeting and the board room too. Some artistic directors believe that's a key part of the trainee's experience.

Among our consultees we found that those who were also artistic directors commented on how ill-prepared they were for running a company/building when they first came to the job. They said that they had little background in dealing with boards and funders, financial matters, recruitment of staff and generally on the business-side of how the company operates internally and communicates externally. There is, linked to that point, a perceived lack of leadership skills outside the rehearsal room and several suggested that the Clore Leadership Programme was an excellent example of the kind of training which would be welcomed. This Programme is designed to help develop the knowledge, skills, networks and experience of potential leaders across a wide range of cultural activity. Each participant, or Fellow, has an individually tailored programme, lasting a year or longer, including intensive residential leadership courses; mentoring, tuition and group learning; time for reflection, research and debate and a period of secondment, including experience of managing a high level project. While the programme is open to anyone, there are limited spaces and, unfortunately, the opportunities for Scottish participants are reduced because the Scottish Arts Council does not fund any specific places.

Money Money Money

Directors expressed the view that they feel they are at the end of the queue when it comes to financial rewards and that writers, in particular, are able to make more money from their work. Although we are not sure that this is the case, the expression of a grievance in these terms is an indication of a lack of confidence. What is true, as with many theatre artists, is that minimum rates for directors are poor.²

In addressing this it is useful to look again at the example of the writers, and it is important to recognise that for the writers there is a split between the agency that negotiates terms and conditions and the one which is about art form development. This is a crucial distinction. The Scottish Society of Playwrights (SSP) is the recognised trade union and is there to represent all writers in pay and conditions. The Playwrights' Studio, which was created with support from SSP, develops a range of opportunities and makes strategic and artistic choices as to what to offer whom for the development of writing as a whole. It is also there to push for more opportunities in general for writers in the theatre.

Looking at the equivalent infrastructure in relation to directing, Equity negotiates for directors and lobbies for the development of training across the theatre world, including directors. However, it is not its role to provide training and other development functions.

² Grade one (larger theatres) the minimum is £856 fee then weekly of £393 total £2428; for smaller theatres the rate is currently £722 fee plus £329 per week, total £2038. (Figures supplied by Equity)

Our consultees argued that more is required for development beyond Equity's scope, although all evidence suggests that the union would be keen to be involved. This includes the coordination of opportunities, mentoring, organisation of events, lobbying for directing opportunities and a forum for discussion. The overwhelming view is that this needs to be led by directors themselves – and the FST might well have a role in thinking this through.

New Opportunities: NTS

As indicated at the start of this report, one of the new events which has stimulated the current interest in theatre directing is the establishment of the NTS. Whilst generally celebrated and seen as a point of innovation in some areas – particularly for directing – the NTS was interpreted as a bit of a threat. This 'threat' comes from all angles and is articulated in different ways: that (all the) NTS jobs will go to directors from outwith Scotland; that NTS will drain talent from the existing companies; and/or that the Scottish-based directors will not rise to the challenge and the reputation of the NTS will suffer.

Even in these early days of the NTS we might argue that the truth lies somewhere in between: and that, pragmatically if nothing else, the NTS should be seen as an opportunity rather than a threat. A brief glance at the first season of work shows that freelance directors and artistic directors currently working in Scotland will get some new opportunities; that those who have worked in Scotland in the past are being tempted back; and, that there is a training scheme for emerging directors.

In raw terms, and even excluding the opening *Home* project, there are fourteen directing opportunities in the first NTS programme, of which four are allocated to the NTS's own directorial team, the rest being offered to freelance directors. In addition the *Home* project which launches the NTS across Scotland is offering 10 'director-led' events. In future years the NTS anticipates that there will be in the region of 10/11 opportunities for those who are not on staff to direct at a variety of levels each year, and this does not include workshop opportunities wherein CPD and experimental and lab-type work might be particularly significant. Some of these opportunities will go to freelance directors based in Scotland; some will be taken up by others from elsewhere; and many will be co-productions with other theatres, led by their artistic team.

As indicated, the NTS is also involved in developing new talent, for example, through the 'director in residence' scheme which offers a two year opportunity including assisting on shows, directing work and a placement abroad.

As the NTS takes on its 'flagship' role, it will be engaged in supporting the development of new theatre artists and, by its very size and scope (and budget), will be offering more and more opportunities to directors. It takes its leadership role seriously and the support of the NTS does bring with it financial and political 'clout'. It needs to be a key part of any new development. However it is not the job of NTS to solve all the problems of Scottish theatre and it cannot become the excuse for lack of initiative elsewhere in the theatre community. As much as the theatre community (and funders) might look to NTS for ways forward; the NTS is looking to the theatre community to work with it in delivering drama in Scotland.

Conclusions

There is a systemic problem in director training in Scotland: in short, director training – at all levels – is too *ad hoc* with no clear path for anyone who wants to pursue a career in theatre directing. There are no coordinated initiatives for the development of the artistic ambitions of existing directors and limited entry level support. All of this has consequences for the range and diversity of the work we see in our theatres which has implications for the ambitions to produce world-class theatre for audiences across Scotland and beyond. This is not about ‘failure’ but is about instilling confidence and developing skills in directors and, above all, raising the game.

A useful way in conceptualising the task in hand is to say that the objective is about achieving for directors what has been achieved for playwrights.

The arguments for a course for training theatre directors which involves ‘craft, culture and experience’ is as persuasive today as it was twenty years ago when it first appeared in Rae’s report, *A Better Direction*. This current report, however, is particularly concerned to identify issues surrounding the development of such a course *in* Scotland, considering issues such as critical mass and cost effectiveness. We anticipate that current developments in higher education in Scotland as well as the arrival of the NTS will re-energise the discussions around this issue and, more importantly, allow a solution to be found.

Realistically, though, this is not going to happen over night.

One of the problems with the policy debate around the development of directors in Scotland has been its inability to move beyond, what we might term, the ‘Higher Education solution’ – that is easy assumption that that only context in which effective directors’ training might be facilitated is higher education. There is good reason for this: the work which has been done on director training in the UK is part of a ‘professionalisation’ of theatre, dating from the mid-twentieth century that follows the path taken for the training of actors and other theatre professionals. It is a convincing model: the development of appropriate graduate/post-graduate training which raises both the standards and the status of theatre artists.

Without rejecting the idea of a higher education training course for directors in Scotland, it might be worth turning the model around and looking, not at how actors are supported, but, again, at how playwrights have achieved the success and influence they are currently enjoying.

It is clear that higher education has had a role in relation to the enhancement of playwriting in Scotland, but not always via specialist courses. The *real* breakthrough has come via the articulated network systems and structures which kick in once a playwright has decided to write: mentoring; work-shopping; exposure to the work of others; commissions; and, above all, the production of their work and, crucially for writers, the publishing of their play scripts.

So, we see a solution for Scotland that lies in a ‘twin track’ approach: yes, the continuing lobbying for a specialist courses at post-graduate level; but also the creation of opportunities to make work, to share ideas, to learn from others. All in all this would mean a more transparent approach to the

development of directors.

Those involved in the initial commissioning of this report made it clear that their vision is for a self-managed forum, with limited additional support in terms of administration, and that the future lies in creating new opportunities for training, not in the establishment of another structure. The experience of the FST in managing the *Critical Exchange* scheme, its role in developing member services and its ambition to push for continuous professional development across the theatre sector, all suggests that it is the organisation best placed to support such a forum of theatre directors.

Drawing on the experience of the playwrights, the appropriate model for the FST is one which is concerned with the artists' development – not the negotiation of pay and conditions which is a role properly fulfilled by Equity. The role of the directors' forum would be to push for more directing opportunities, continuous professional development and mentoring support.

As we complete this report there is more than the usual degree of uncertainty around the future of the funding priorities of the Scottish Arts Council as it faces a merger with Scottish Screen and the removal of the national companies from its responsibility. The decision to separate the funding of NTS from the rest of the theatre sector underlines the importance of a lobby which works across all theatre and is embraces companies who are Executive funded, funded at arm's length, or, indeed, not funded at all.

The Scottish Arts Council, meanwhile, is also reviewing its funding priorities. There is a particular and significant debate around the best way of supporting individual artists, and the Scottish Arts Council has shown willingness in the past to consider being a funding partner in the development of formal training of directors. If there is investment to be made into the development of directors, some discussion is needed to agree where it should go and how the balance should be struck between offering individual training opportunities and administrative support to make it happen. There is an urgency to the creation of a lobbying voice for directors.

Another challenge for the funders and the profession as a whole concerns the question of 'specialisms'. Should the focus be on developing directors to work on all/any type of theatre or should there be a commitment to creating one kind of expertise or specialism? For example, if, as we see, the Traverse has been the theatre which has been most, if not the only, one concerned with new writing in Scotland, should there be an equivalent theatre which focuses on the development of new directing?

Finally, while the issue of theatre in rural areas was not raised in this research, it has been the subject of other work carried out by CCPR and it is important to be reminded that theatre-making happens across the whole of Scotland and not just in the urban centres. In the Highlands and Islands, for example, Mull Theatre, Tosg and Grey Coast all work on a full-time basis and they are all part of the Highland Theatre Network, which boasts 22 members. Admittedly not all of these companies are in a financial position to produce every year but this represents a lot of creative talent seeking opportunities. The development of any new initiatives for director training and support needs to reach beyond the central belt of Scotland and capitalise on and enhance talent elsewhere.

The issue of how to develop directing talent in Scotland has been the subject of much debate and discussion over the last twenty years – mainly in the context of wider UK initiatives. With the arrival of NTS, the continuing development playwriting, and, now the impending changes to the funding structures of the arts in Scotland, the moment has come to determine a way ahead for directors that is led by directors. The purpose of this report is to set that goal in context. The final part of this report, the recommendations, suggests an agenda for the directors' forum.

Recommendations

Approach/structure

We recommend that the first step is to develop a self-managed forum or network of directors (working title 'Scottish Directors' Forum') whose role will be to work across the theatre community in Scotland to raise issues and develop initiatives which will address the training and development Scotland's theatre directors. We further suggest that the FST takes on the role in the first instance as administrative support for network with a view to moving into developing 'member services' as agreed with the Forum. This will require some (modest)³ additional funding from the Scottish Arts Council. This Forum should include representation from Equity which continues to be the trade union negotiating for directors' pay and conditions.

Priorities for development

Short term

Assuming funding can be made available to the FST, in the first instance, we recommend that the Scottish Directors' Forum focus on what might be termed 'quick wins' – initiatives which are fairly quickly achieved. These should include:

- Creation of membership list and a web site for information;
- Coordination of mentoring, master classes and CPD;
- Development of fora on range of topics;
- Identification of directing training opportunities;
- Working with higher education institutions to ensure the development of appropriate and viable training opportunities;
- Pressing of the Scottish Arts Council to gather statistics on opportunities and diversity (or lack of it) in directing; and,
- Discussion with artistic directors of how to open up opportunities to a wider group of freelance directors.

Medium term

As the Forum develops, we recommend it take up a lobbying role with Scottish Arts Council/ Creative Scotland to press for:

- Entry-level trainee-ships specifically for Scottish theatres;
- Funding for theatres specifically to engage associate and/or assistants along side trainee ships; and,
- Support for Clore Leadership Programme and/or other leadership training opportunities

³ We were not asked to produce any costing but it seems that this could be achieved in the first instance with the creation of a half time post to support the setting up and administration of the Forum. Beyond that some more detail discussions would have to take place on how much project management support would be required for the initiatives which are recommended.

Longer term:

We recommend that Scottish Directors' Forum, like the FST itself, work across Scottish theatre which will include directors who will work for companies funded from the Scottish Executive, the Scottish Arts Council/ Creative Scotland, other public sources as well as those not funded at all. This has the potential to give the Forum a powerful voice. As we have shown, one of the biggest barriers to the development of directors is the lack of opportunity to work. It will be the Forum's role to build alliances with other theatre artists and organisations to press for increased opportunities for theatre-making in Scotland.

Finally, to take the argument back to the beginning, if in the future directors in Scotland are to achieve the kind of recognition won by the playwrights, we recommend that the Scottish Directors' Forum work closely with NTS and other theatres to promote the work of Scottish directors beyond Scotland.

Appendix 1

Sources

Reports

A Better Direction: A national enquiry into the training of directors for theatre, film and television
Kenneth Rea (Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation: London, 1989)

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Web sites

Birkbeck, University of London:

<<http://www.bbk.ac.uk/study/pg/subjects/ft/theatredirectingmfa>> [accessed 11 January 2006]

University of Bristol

<<http://www.bris.ac.uk/drama/postgrad/macp.html>> [accessed 11 January 2006]

Goldsmiths, University of London

<<http://www.goldsmiths.ac.uk/departments/drama/programmes/MA-Performance.php>> [accessed 11 January 2006]

Middlesex University

<<http://www.mdx.ac.uk/drama/mamfatd.htm>> [accessed 1 January 2006]

Queen Margaret University College

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Channel Four Directors Scheme

<<http://www.c4tds.co.uk>> [accessed 11 January 2006]

Clore Leadership Programme

<www.cloreleadership.org> [accessed 11 January 2006]

Cove Park

<<http://www.covepark.org>> [accessed 11 January 2006]

Equity

<<http://www.equity.org.uk>> [accessed 11 January 2006]

Appendix 2

List of those consulted

Artistic Directors:

Graham Eatough, Suspect Culture
Vicki Featherstone, National Theatre of Scotland
Philip Howard, Traverse Theatre
Graham McLaren, Theatre Babel and Perth Rep
Nazli Tabatabai, Zende

Freelance Directors:

Pamela Carter
Stewart Laing
Jemima Levick

Others

Lorne Boswell, Equity Scotland
John Carnegie, Theatre Directors' Councillor, Equity Council
Julie Ellen, Creative Director, Playwrights' Studio Scotland
Professor Maggie Kinloch, Director, School of Drama, Royal Scottish Academy of Music and Drama
Andrew McKinnon
Lizzi Nicoll, Director, Federation of Scottish Theatre
Professor Adrienne Scullion, Department of Theatre Film and Television Studies, University of Glasgow
Rob Swain, Course Director, MFA Theatre Directing, Birkbeck, University of London
David Taylor, Head of Drama, Scottish Arts Council

Appendix 3

Centre for Cultural Policy Research, University of Glasgow

Research Project Survey

Theatre directing in Scotland: investigation into training and development needs

Q1 - How many directors are employed by your company on a regular or ongoing basis?

Q2 - How many shows will they be directing this year (April 2005-March 2006)?

Q3 - How many freelance directors will your company be contracting during the same period?

Q4 - Does your company have a trainee director?

Q5 - If you have answered yes to Q4, is the trainee director supported by your company's mainstream budget? OR

- a special fund/scheme (if yes, please specify below)

In addition to looking at opportunities for theatre directors in Scotland, the research team is also examining the training and ongoing professional development of directors. Please complete the box below with any comments you wish to make about any aspects of the research.

Your responses will be treated in confidence. We provide space below for your contact details in order to check anything that is unclear about your responses. However, you may choose not to provide this information.

Name of theatre company

Name of person completing
this return

Email address and telephone
number