

PUPPETRY DEVELOPMENT CONSORTIUM

Action Plan - Consortium Establishment



1. Introduction

Establishment Action Plan

The proposal to establish a Puppetry Development Consortium came out of the collaborative project, *Working Together to Strengthen Puppetry* conceived and coordinated by Puppet Centre Trust (PCT) and funded by Arts Council England, which took place from November 2014 to January 2015. The idea behind *Working Together to Strengthen Puppetry* was to explore how the puppetry sector might be better supported and better equipped to capitalise on its undoubted artistic successes by raising its own profile, building audiences and optimising funding opportunities.

As part of *Working Together to Strengthen Puppetry*, a Puppetry Development Steering Group (PDSG) was formed comprising a group of puppetry professionals working in different fields and across different geographical locations in England working with an independent Chair, and supported by a Research Assistant. A key proposal coming out of PDSG was the establishment of a Puppetry Development Consortium. This group will comprise of a broader partnership of puppetry leaders with a common desire to have a Consortium approach in order to share strategic vision and work together to deliver the areas identified in the 'Working Together to Strengthen Puppetry' initiative.

Once fully formed, the new Consortium will develop a three year action plan to address its objectives. This Consortium Establishment Action Plan has been written to provide a spring board for this proposed group and its activity and will outline:

- The main issues considered by the PDSG;
- This Consortium's key aims and potential actions pending full membership debate;
- This Consortium proposed structure and membership;
- A timetable and plan for the Consortium formation;
- This Consortium's Year One budget and fundraising overview for Years Two and Three;
- A Communications strategy for the Consortium establishment and overview of its longer-term communications plan.

2. Context

Puppetry Context

Over the last twenty years, the landscape of puppetry in England has developed within both experimental and main stream theatre. But the message is mixed. Populist productions have flourished on our stages, large scale outdoor arts have delighted the general public on our streets, and many small, medium, and large-scale works have peppered our cultural life leaving no doubt about the power and versatility of puppetry and the role it can play in Britain's vibrant contemporary arts scene. However, despite obvious successes, the profile and general public perception of puppetry in Britain remains largely unchanged, and in many ways the sector struggles to build a strong professional infrastructure because of recognised issues:

- Many research and development initiatives are funded but few are then funded to full production for touring;
- Mid-scale puppetry productions are scarce;
- There is a network for regular programming of puppetry for children however there is a tendency for them to be one off weekend bookings;
- Adult puppetry lacks a network of programming venues;
- Avenues for training and CPD remain sparse and career paths opaque;
- Support for emerging artists is hard to sustain;
- Established and mid-career artists often work extensively overseas to make ends meet;
- Critical appraisal, publications, and means for celebrating excellence are rare;
- Few puppet companies receive regular funding of any type, and performance fees tend to be low, as is other earning potential.

Whilst the sector has established a number of good networks and created interesting work, in comparison with dance, circus, outdoor art and theatre there is a lack of professional infrastructure, which threatens puppetry's ability to compete, thrive, build on opportunities, develop audiences and generate more income. Puppetry has demonstrated its artistic potential, but it is in danger of falling behind other sectors threatening its long-term position.

External context

This Consortium is being established at a time of continuing economic and cultural change, and shifts in patterns of arts engagement. The recession, which continued for far longer than originally anticipated, has impacted on public and private funds in the long-term. Financial challenges have for some time affected the confidence of venues and promoters to take risks, and arts attendance has been affected by reductions in disposable income. At the same time, engagement in the arts is at an all-time high. The Cultural Olympiad created an unprecedented swell with over 177,000 different activities, and DCMS's Taking Part National Statistics report (July 2014) showed that this increase has been retained. 78% of adults in England attended or participated in the arts in 2013/14, over 10% higher than in 2005/06 when these records commenced. ACE's 2014 report Value of Arts and Culture to People and Society highlighted many positive benefits of the arts including their impact on the country's economy, which was further confirmed in CBI's 2014 report Creative Nation which highlights that the creative industries account for 10.6% of UK exports.

Now, in spring 2015, this Consortium's founder members see the vital need for the puppetry sector to work together to minimise the negative impact of funding cuts, and to capitalise on the positive shift in arts engagement and opportunities opened up through the creative economy.

Puppetry Development Steering Group

The function of the PDSG was to explore ways that the sector might work together to build its strategic capacity, and the group involved a number of stakeholders in discussions; exploring assumptions about whether the puppetry sector could perform better in areas such as audience development, income generation, and talent development, examining models of good practice, and debating actions the sector could take together to increase puppetry's profile and build its infrastructure.

The key purpose of the PDSG was to agree a realistic and achievable action plan that a wider constituency of the puppetry sector could take forward, debate, adapt and implement to help support the sector's development. To achieve this, the PDSG was tasked with the responsibility to decide what actions could support the development of puppetry and how the sector could come together to develop a strategy to address these matters. Its objectives were to:

- Establish a steering group as a precursor to a future strategic leadership mechanism, which was to be explored and identified during the project;
- Develop an achievable action plan to strengthen puppetry and agree its implementation;
- Employ a research assistant who would provide information to supplement that of the membership and start the process of building a database of evidence about the sector.

Research

The research component of the project was conceived in collaboration with Royal Central School of Speech and Drama. This work commenced with a Survey sent to over 800 puppeteers to identify key fact responder's careers and experiences.

During the project, it became clear that there was currently little factual information about the size and impact of the sector in England. The PDSG agreed that it was a priority to address this in order to provide a body of evidence through which to measure outcomes of the project in the long term and to support the sector as a whole in terms of advocacy and profile raising. The committee agreed that gathering an ongoing database of information such as the number and size of puppetry companies, puppeteers and puppet makers, puppetry's audience size and profile, funding, income generation, and turnover was the top priority for the project research.

Overview of Agreed Priorities

Several issues for the sector were discussed by the PDSG, including leadership, infrastructure, profile, critical appraisal, artistic development, audience development, education and training, income generation, and touring support. Members agreed that some of these areas carried greater potential to impact on the health of the sector. Thus, the focus and priority areas were narrowed down to:

- Leadership and Advocacy;
- Talent Development;
- Audience Development.

3. Puppetry Development Consortium

To address the issues identified, the PDSG has agreed to establish a Puppetry Development Consortium as a model to progress the priorities identified through *Working Together to Strengthen Puppetry*.

Key Purpose

The Key Purpose of this Consortium is to formulate, coordinate and communicate a strategic action plan to support puppetry in England in consultation with a wide range of partners, focusing on leadership and advocacy, talent development and audience development.

The membership will work together to develop a strategic three-year action plan that will identify and address long-term priorities for sector development and short term plans that will help achieve them. Subject to annual review and updates, this plan will include activities and projects that the Consortium members can take together.

Structure and Membership

This Consortium is led by its membership and is a partnership of puppetry leaders with the common aim of working together. It is not a membership body that can represent all views, but is group of puppetry leaders who see this as an extension of their existing responsibilities and choose to collaborate to develop shared strategic approaches.

Puppetry is a large and diverse sector in which democratic representation of all puppeteers is essential. This Consortium provides a different type of structure with members selected for their geographical spread, their varying perspectives, leadership and expertise. This Consortium wants to be able to make things happen and not to be bound to administrative process. Borrowing from consortium leadership models successfully established in other sectors, such as theatre, street arts and dance, this Puppetry Development Consortium will be light on its feet, with a contained membership to allow for functional decision making and priority setting. Care and consideration has been given to making a selection with geographical spread as the deciding factor.

We want to offer opportunity for wider engagement through the breadth of its membership, the activities it undertakes, and by charging members with the responsibility to liaise with other puppeteers in their geographical area. We also wish to work in partnership with existing leading puppetry organisations. The membership will be reviewed continually and there will be a call for interested parties to put themselves forward for existing members to consider against a Consortium Membership Specification.

The membership shall consist up to 12 puppeteers and puppetry leaders who represent different parts of the puppetry infrastructure in England, including touring companies, building based companies, puppetry festivals, individual puppeteers, umbrella organisations, puppetry programming theatres, and puppeteers working in the commercial sector and will need to be committed to talent development in the sector. The final agreed criterion in terms of representation was:

- To have representation from each ACE area including representation of South West, South East, London, North East, East, Midlands, and North West.
- To have two individuals representing the following expertise:
 - NPOs
 - Programming puppetry venues
 - Puppetry festivals
 - Commercial work
 - Training specialists
 - Individual practitioners

A Chair with appropriate strategic development and advocacy skills will be appointed from within the Consortium. The Chair will rotate every 2 years. The post holder will be required to undertake additional work and leadership outside meetings. If no Chair can be found from within the group, the Consortium will consider appointing an independent Chair. Co-ordination and administrative management of this Consortium will be undertaken by a company appointed to this role (see below).

Joy Haynes , Director of Norwich Puppet Theatre has agreed to take the role of founding Chair of the Consortium and she will be in post until a Chair can be voted in by the full membership. This post will be supported by mentorship from an external experienced advisor. Other founding members include: Sue Buckmaster, Artistic Director of Theatre Rites, Corina Bona, Bristol based practitioner and Slavka Jovanovic, Interim Artistic Director Little Angel Theatre, Mervyn Millar, Director Significant Object, Sean Myatt Senior Lecturer BA Theatre Design Nottingham Trent University and practitioner, Darren East Director, Performer and co-founder Brighton Puppetry School, and Alison Duddle Joint Artistic Director, Horse + Bamboo. A further 3 founder members will be appointed to represent the geographical gaps.

Areas of work/what want to achieve

This Consortium's first role will be to shape a vision and develop an action plan. Puppetry does not currently have a strategic development plan that Arts Council England and other funding bodies can refer to – the Puppetry Development Consortium hope to change that.

The Puppetry Development Consortium will focus on the three areas of work previously identified:

- Leadership and Advocacy
- Talent Development
- Audience Development

The content of the action plan will be formed by Consortium members inspired the following list of priorities:

Leadership and Advocacy

As a leadership group this Consortium has the opportunity to:

- Amplify opportunities for advocacy and profile raising through working together;
- Connect the puppetry eco-system including subsidised and commercial sectors, TV and theatre as well as geographical hubs, thereby creating opportunity;
- Develop a strong collective voice that can present a strategic plan to funders and stakeholders;
- Work together on advocacy and PR strategies, sharing information, budgets and opportunities to raise the profile of puppetry through press, traditional and social media;
- Coordinate research collection and data for the use by all, thereby backing up funding applications and advocacy campaigns;
- Provide peer to peer leadership support and action learning opportunities;
- Open up opportunities for sector development funding via consortium projects;
- Enhance, not replace or disrupt, the current puppetry infrastructure;
- Strengthen and develop the leadership voice in the sector.

Talent Development

In terms of talent development the Consortium has the opportunity to:

- Explore whether existing centres of talent development wish to work collectively, creating a network of geographical hubs, thereby providing a collective voice and ongoing debate about training provision;
- Clarify the various pathways into puppetry, and support existing co-ordination and publicity of continuing professional development opportunities;
- Open up conversations with formal education and HE regarding puppetry training;
- Explore options for the development of Youth Puppetry groups, using examples of successful models to encourage theatres and youth group;
- Make connection with talent development at international puppetry schools and courses and models in existence within film or TV, eg at Aardman Studio;
- Advocate to funders for ongoing support for emerging artists;
- Explore options to coordinate and cross advertise existing training provision (for which we have already made a data collection) and to investigate training swaps and touring;
- Investigate a system of peer accreditation;
- Explore opportunities to provide platforms, resources and exposure for emerging puppetry companies and individuals to create and present new works.

Audience Development

Through working together to develop audiences, the Consortium might:

- Develop a shared PR strategy, developing opportunities for nationwide press releases as well as cross publicising activity;
- Explore the possibility of developing a touring framework such as 'House' to encourage venues to take mid-scale and/or adult puppetry (both areas were discussed as being in need of development by the PDSG);
- Negotiating and managing opportunities for showcases of selected work as part of the above touring puppet-friendly framework;
- Explore the possibility of developing a producing project with funding from ACE, such as Black Theatre Live, which supports the development and touring of mid-scale Black work;
- Expand on the success of festivals programming by branding and programming a 'national puppetry month/event', thereby opening up the possibility gaining significant national attention;
- Build audiences through the appeal of international companies - working collaboratively to identifying high profile international companies and arranging a tour in England to puppet-friendly theatres.

Research database

It is important to the sector to establish an ongoing database of puppetry information in order to provide evidence, information and data about the sector. It is proposed that this information (unattributed) is shared with companies who agreed to be part of the research group. Research information may be selectively used in guidance documents, plans and statements about puppetry, and it provides a professional way of measuring proposed strategies which will inform the Consortium and other partners, and which is recognised by funders and other stakeholders. It is proposed that the Consortium will partner with a University that focuses on this type of research such as City University or UCL.

Consortium projects

This Consortium has an excellent opportunity to work together and make an active difference through initiating and leading projects such as a national puppetry month or an international conference. This is an exciting opportunity collaborate together on large scale initiatives, and to have real impact on audience development and building puppetry's profile. Such projects would be dependent on successful income generation.

Consortium co-ordination

In order to facilitate and administrate the meetings of the membership the Puppet Centre Trust has been appointed to administratively coordinate the Consortium in the first year subject to funding. This coordination with include:

- Administrating and managing meetings;
- Supporting the development of the action plan and writing of any consortium strategies;
- Managing collection of research data and communication with the chosen research partner;
- Upkeep of the website and social media.

Communications strategy

Communications and provision of information underpins all areas of this Consortiums work. Incorporating vital areas of development such as profile raising, advocacy and creating clear pathways for training and career development, as well as communicating information within the consortium and with its wider puppetry constituency.

Advocacy and Profile Raising

Knitted in to the Consortium's key objectives described earlier, the Consortium will develop activities and strategies to raise the profile of puppetry with stakeholders including funders, venues, promoters and the general public. During the first six months this Consortium will agree its priorities in terms of advocacy and profile raising, and target groups such as venues and funding officers. It will agree the fundamental key messages about puppetry that will serve the aims of this Consortium and will develop a shared PR strategy in terms of press and social media. One of the key benefits of bringing this Consortium together will be to find and share opportunities to promote puppetry as well as the creation of new joint activities that multiply impact. This Consortium will share information about target groups creating further joint benefit. This Consortium aims to have a comprehensive advocacy and profiling raising communications strategy in place within its first year of operation, including specific target groups, key messages, tools and timetabled opportunities.

Information for and about the Sector

There are a number of information channels within the sector already including weekly comprehensive email information to their membership from PUK, and monthly e-news letters from Puppet Centre, as well as facebook groups, and many venues and company's e-shots and newsletters, which this Consortium would like to use. This Consortium will explore methods of working with existing information tools to ensure access to information for areas such as pathways for training that are visible and understandable to early and mid-career puppeteers, additional new initiatives that could include the promotion of new talent, the Puppetry Month and other joint ventures.

Consortium communications

The Puppetry Development Consortium wants to ensure that its strategic objectives are clear and that there is a two-way flow of information with interested non-members. This will be achieved both through the membership, who will each be responsible for directly communicating with and seeking opinions from other puppetry professionals, and through a number of communication tools, such as:

- Networking meetings - This Consortium plans to host open meetings to debate the issues for puppeteers and to hear thoughts from non-members. In addition Consortium members will host periodical networking evenings in their localities. Ideally these will be on first nights of puppetry shows and will involve a brief meeting pre-show and networking drinks after the performance.
- Website and e-shots – This Consortium will develop a simple website with information about its work, news bulletins and a connected mailing list. E-shots will be sent to the mailing list as appropriate. This will be administrated by PCT as the Puppetry Development Consortium co-ordination body.
- PR and Media Activity – This will largely be focused on profiling puppetry and advocacy opportunities (see above).

- Social Media – In addition to e-shots and a web presence this Consortium will connect with the community through facebook and twitter retaining a strong presence and gathering and analysing opinion to key issues that arise.
- Announcement of the Puppetry Development Consortium establishment – PCT will make an announcement after the 9th March, at which the Consortium plans to agree new members to join the group. A press release and this detailed Action Plan will be made public via current Consortium members marketing channels and Animations Online in the first instance and we hope shared wider.

4. Financial overview

Financial Model and Fundraising Plan

In the current funding environment the Consortium is adopting a careful yet flexible approach to its financial modelling. This Consortium is a vital step for puppetry and, therefore, provides an exceptional opportunity. Reductions in public funding over several years have created a highly competitive fundraising environment and, whatever the result of the May election, it is likely that there will be further cuts. With the likelihood of specific areas of public funding being ring-fenced by an incoming Government, we believe public funding for the arts may reduce further. At the same time, we also know that Arts Council England supports the concept of producing organisations taking a lead in artistic and sector development rather than supporting separate development agencies.

In this environment the Puppetry Development Consortium has agreed to approach Arts Council England for funding in Year One, with a lean and practical financial model - but also one with the opportunity to develop further. Working with PCT as a coordinating body, provides this opportunity. PCT has many years experience in operate effectively to deliver ambitious goals with only project funding. Since ACE supported *Working Together to Strengthen Puppetry*, we believe that they will be open to an approach for pump-prime funding for the Consortium's establishment providing the Consortium's long-term plan does not rely on repeat approaches to them. Instead the Consortium's three-year plan will focus on future fundraising being aligned to projects with full cost recovery, rather than repeat requests for infrastructure costs. In developing our strategy, we believe that:

- Arts Council England and other arts funders are more supportive of projects which have artistic and developmental outcomes, rather than core costs. Projects may also provide other funding and ticket income;
- Arts Council England will want to see a plan that does not involve long term dependence on them;
- Other funders and potential donors will want to see the high quality impact of the Consortium's work before providing significant funds. Therefore an approach to them in Year Two is more realistic.

These matters lead to the decision that the Consortium adopts a modest budget and operation in Year One, with plans to develop strategic fundable projects with full cost recovery in Years Two and Three.

Therefore we will be making the follow approaches:

- Statutory – the Consortium will seek establishment/pump-prime funding from Arts Council England to support the set up of the Consortium. It will also approach ACE and other public funders and Trusts in future years to support artistic projects;
- Trusts and Foundations – the Consortium will look to secure multi-year strategic grants to underpin its infrastructure costs. It will also approach Trusts in future years to support artistic projects;
- Individual giving – Consortium members are each making a financial contribution to the Consortium, which they see as delivering part of their work in terms of advocacy and partnership;

Appendix A

Overview of the Puppetry Development Steering Group Conclusions

The PDSG focused its exploration on three priority areas:

- Leadership and Advocacy;
- Talent Development;
- Audience Development.
- Leadership and Advocacy

Issues identified:

- Need for a mechanism for puppetry leaders to share strategic vision and work together on delivery;
- Fragmented sector, impossible for one body to make democratic decisions on behalf of everyone who works in puppetry;
- Lack of factual evidence about the sector (size, talent pool, funding);
- Need to explore alternative finance and make a strategic case for funding support for the sector;
- Need for mechanisms to support puppetry leaders.

How to address

The PDSG agreed that establishing a leadership model and structure was important in order to create a coordinated approach to talent and audience development, to build a case for support for puppetry, advocate the sector and develop fundraising opportunities, raise puppetry's profile, and provide mutual leadership support. A number of leadership models were explored including examples from puppetry sectors in other countries and other aligned sectors such as Theatre, Street Arts and Circus. Members agreed to set up a Puppetry Development Consortium with an extended membership (see below).

Talent Development

Issues identified

- Need for clearer information about entry points and career progression opportunities;
- Communication about training pathways in vocational and formal education
- Inclusion of career preparation and building entrepreneurial skills in training;
- Insufficient opportunities for puppetry practice at an early age;
- Provision for practitioners transferring to puppetry at a later age.

How to address

The PDSG agreed to explore mechanisms to develop a strategic approach to these issues, including possibilities for coordinating sector delivered training, and potential partnerships with HE. To progress this, members agreed to discuss with existing centres of training provision the benefits and logistics of setting up a network of geographical talent development hubs working together.

Audience Development

Issues identified

- Low public profile, and small number of venues and festivals specialising in puppetry;
- Audiences and venue perception that puppetry is for children, resulting in low take up of adult shows, in turn impacting on production;
- Gap in mid-scale productions and touring;
- Inaccurate perceptions about the scope of puppetry.

How to address

The PDSG considered a number of ways to support audience growth for adult puppetry, including: raising PR strategies for puppetry generally, developing midscale work and a supportive touring model, and capitalising on the appeal of festivals. It was agreed that establishing a leadership structure would enable members to take strategic advantage of commercial success to build the profile of the sector. Members agreed to progress audience development through the Puppetry Development Consortium and to consider establishing a touring consortium.

Next Steps

In the first instance the PDSG agreed to establish a Puppetry Development Consortium as a leadership model to progress the priorities identified.

