

RITA

Regional Independent Theatre Alliance

Built to last, not funded to survive

A case for co-investment in independent regional theatre as part of the national growth agenda

Who we are

RITA is the alliance of large-scale independent regional theatres. Charitable, not-for-profit organisations that are neither subsidised nor purely commercial. We are the third way: mission-driven, financially self-reliant and growth engines. Generating jobs, building skills and measurable economic impact without day-to-day public subsidy and with no banker of last resort.

For too long, cultural bodies have been cast as a drain on public finances. RITA members break that frame and we are launching this alliance to ensure that policy recognises us.

The founding members of RITA are:



BIRMINGHAM
HIPPODROME

Leeds
Heritage
Theatres



**MARLOWE
THEATRE**



N **Norwich
Theatre**

Collectively, these RITA venues are custodians over more than 8,000 theatre seats in the UK and in 2024/25 generated in excess of 2.6million cultural attendances.

At the large-scale, each venue is committed to a balanced and multi-artform year-round programme of both commercial and ACE-subsidised work with the latter occupying an average of 24% of stage time across the RITA venues.

The Economic Value

The numbers are not aspirational. They are what our five members already deliver, year on year, without a penny of public subsidy for day-to-day operations. Proof that artistic ambition and financial resilience reinforce each other.

- **£83 million +** in gross income - genuine commercial scale, no day-to-day public subsidy
- **£52 million +** in audience spending per year - local restaurants, pubs, taxis and hotels
- **£27 million +** through local supply chains - dozens of businesses per region sustained
- **£10 million +** of Arts Council England-funded touring work through our venues - essential infrastructure for the subsidised sector's national reach
- **£781 million** five-year economic impact - visible, measurable, rooted in place

Independent theatre is growth people can feel - grounded in real jobs, real communities, real places.

Take a theatre away, and that economic activity vanishes with it. We contribute to the UK's £124bn+ creative economy, a contribution that is unrecognised due to a lack of a clear delivery model.

The Gap in Delivery Architecture

The independent regional theatre sector lacks sufficient channels for engagement with the Department for Culture, Media and Sport and Arts Council England, and the current systems and data infrastructure do not give government the opportunity to know or count its contribution. That is not a criticism of either. It is a gap that has grown because no delivery model was ever built for the third way.

As Local Government Reorganisation and devolution reshape accountability, place-based investment, and regional governance across England, independent theatres are among the resilient anchor institutions that can remain constant through that change. What is needed is new delivery architecture, built for how we actually operate, and embedded in the growth agenda.

Capital expenditure on the third-way is not a subsidy or a grant; it is the essential co-investment required to unlock matched private, commercial, and charitable funds for more jobs, higher regional growth and stronger communities.



Our Asks

1. Recognise the third way.

Policy and funding frameworks must formally distinguish the independent not-for-profit sector from both the subsidised and purely commercial models and assess, count, and support it accordingly.

2. Build the data relationship.

Establish a regular data-sharing mechanism between RITA and DCMS. Help build the infrastructure to make that possible, starting now.

3. Champion the case.

Support a national co-investment strategy for independent theatre and commit to a matched government capital fund of up to £10 million per venue over five years.

We are not asking you to define the solution today; we are asking you to talk to us about it. We are built to last. We simply need a policy environment that is built to recognise us.

Growth · Investment · Resilience

About the RITA venues



Birmingham Hippodrome is one of the UK's busiest and most vibrant arts venues. The Hippodrome's rich history spans over 125 years, with the organisation now welcoming over 600,000 paid visitors a year to world class musicals, large scale ballet and opera, drama and family productions. Over 200,000 people are engaged further through a programme of free festivals, community projects, artist development, and learning and participation work. In 2023, the New Musical Theatre department was established, the first of its kind in the UK, dedicated to developing the artform from a base outside of London. Proudly based in the heart of the city, the venue is the home of NPO organisations Birmingham Royal Ballet, FABRIC, Mercury Musical Developments and One Dance UK.



Leeds Heritage Theatres operates three nationally significant cultural venues: Leeds Grand Theatre, one of the UK's great Victorian theatres and home to Opera North and Northern Ballet; City Varieties Music Hall, the UK's oldest, longest-running music hall; and Hyde Park Picture House, the world's only remaining gas-lit cinema. Together, the venues welcome more than 450,000 visitors annually and play a vital role in the national cultural ecology. We support the national touring circuit by presenting work from leading Arts Council England-funded organisations, and provide platforms for artists, communities and audiences to find authentic and meaningful connections. We nurture local talent through our award-winning learning and engagement programmes, which supported by our multi art-form venues, facilitate a rich and diverse offer.



The Marlowe Theatre is Kent's only large-scale theatre and its largest performing arts employer. We combine creative excellence, social purpose and commercial success. Each year 400,000 audience members enjoy our eclectic programme, and in 2025 we began producing large-scale drama, made in Kent and touring the UK. We have sustained relationships with over 60 local schools, focusing on areas of coastal deprivation and high pupil premium. We are developing The Hive, an £8.5 million project to transform a Grade I listed building into a Creative Learning Centre. As Kent's home for new writing, we support over 100 regional writers. Our trailblazing vocational training programmes include a UAL Level 3 Performing Arts course, co-created with East Kent College Group and award-winning apprenticeships across technical, estates, digital and producing.



Newcastle Theatre Royal creates moments of magic on and off stage, through an ambitious creative programme for audiences and communities across the North East. Our grade one listed, landmark theatre in the heart of Newcastle is a place where everyone is welcome and a space for all to enjoy. Our on-stage programme gives audiences across the North East access to world-class theatre by producing, presenting and partnering with artists, companies and cultural organisations locally, nationally and internationally. Our Creative Development programme is at the heart of all that we do, made up of three core strands – Creative Engagement, Creative Futures and Creative Growth. From young people to professional artists and across communities, our work focusses on developing and supporting new work to upscale, developing talent and supporting skills, well being and community cohesion through innovative, diverse and inclusive projects.



Norwich Theatre is the largest arts organisation in the East of England, presenting a vibrant programme of live performance and creative engagement activities that entertain, enrich and inspire diverse audiences. More than 500,000 people a year visit its three venues, Theatre Royal, Playhouse and Stage Two in the heart of the city of Norwich. Its new six-year strategy, Creative Intent launched June 2026, defines an ambitious long term approach built around three strategic priorities: Bold Theatre that speaks loud and clear, Social Impact that touches lives and communities, and Creative Endeavour that sees growth and change. Together, these priorities outline how Norwich Theatre will unite artistic ambition with public value, strengthen its civic role, and ensure that by 2032 it is recognised not only for the quality of its creative work, but for the positive impact it delivers for people, places and the wider region.

RITA

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