

FST Producers Forum

Queen Margaret University, Musselburgh

Thursday 23 November 2017 2-5pm

Attendees:

Philip Anderson-Dyer (Bunbury Banter Theatre Company CIC), Steph Connell (Citizens Theatre), Jude Doherty (Grid Iron), Michael Emans (Rapture Theatre), Hannah Forsyth (Stellar Quines Theatre Company), Sarah Gray, Chantal Guevara (Independent Dance Managers Network), Lauren Hendry, Jaine Lumsden (Creative Scotland), Catherine Makin (Youth Theatre Arts Scotland), Torran McEwan, Michael O'Neill (Tron Theatre), Jennifer Phillips, Mhari Robinson (Janice Parker Projects), Catrin Sheridan (Festival City Theatres Trust), Kate Taylor, Lucy Vaughan (SDTN Scottish Drama Training Network), Pamela Walker (Imagine)

Chair: Kate Nelson (Nutshell Theatre)

FST: Anna Broomfield (Events & Membership Assistant), Amanda Liddle (General Manager), Fiona McCurdy (Training and Professional Development Manager)

1. Introductions

Producers' Forums are a platform for detailed discussion of wide-sector issues around aspects of producing theatre and dance. FST specialist forums are led by those that wish to be part of them. They exist to allow for networking and skills sharing, including best practice, knowledge and peer support.

Kate Nelson welcomed members of the forum and introduced the plan for the day (a facilitated session on independent CPD), which was influenced by discussions on the need for training at previous forums. All forum attendants introduced themselves.

2. Welcome / FST Update – Amanda Liddle

- New Events & Membership Assistant, [Anna Broomfield](#). Contact Anna for enquiries relating to membership, updated contact details, forums, meetings and Emporium.
- **Training and Development Events:**
 - [Working Towards Wellbeing](#) | Wednesday 17 Jan 2018 | Tramway, Glasgow
 - [Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Surgeries](#) | Thurs 25 Jan 2018 | Lyceum, Edinburgh
 - [Various workshops @ Technical Winter School](#) | Monday 5 – Thursday 8 Feb 2018 | Pitlochry FT
 - [Introduction to Finance](#) | Thursday 22 Feb 2018 | Tramway, Glasgow
 - [Tech for the Non-technical](#) | Monday 5 March 2018 | Dundee, Venue TBC
 - [Introduction to Funding](#) | Thursday 15 March 2018 | Tramway, Glasgow
- **Emporium 2018:** The next Emporium (Early Dialogue Day and Market Day) will take place 20-21 March 2018 at The Brunton Theatre, Musselburgh. Venues and promoters are encouraged to attend Early Dialogue Day, which will see 9 artists/companies present work at an early stage. Booking for the event is open via the [FST website](#). Bookings close 12 January.

- FST have issued callouts for input to working groups surrounding sexual abuse and health & safety. Email hello@scottishtheatre.org with responses before Friday 1 December (re: abuse) or Friday 8 December (re: health and safety).
- FST have circulated a [template letter](#) which can be sent to MSPs, to lobby against cuts to Creative funding.

3. Creative Scotland Update - Jaine Lumsden

- Producers Project: The evaluation report of the CS Producers Project is completed but is taking a while to publish. JL assured attendees that it would be available soon.
- CS has communicated that RFO funding decisions are now expected to be announced at the end of January 2018. To mitigate difficulties caused by this, extended contracts will be provided for all current RFOs until the end of May 2018, based on current funding levels

4. Facilitated Session: What might CPD pathways look like for producers at different points in their career? – Kate Nelson

- The aims of this session were to understand what training might look like for producers, and what kind of training would be helpful.
- Attendees were asked to split into three groups of producers: emerging, mid-career (5-10 years), and established (10+ years). All groups were asked to first quietly reflect, then share ideas about:
 1. Difficult moments in your career and the kind of procedural/systemic interventions which could have helped to avoid these difficulties
 2. Successful moments in your career and what you personally did well to ensure success
 3. What kind of CPD training would be useful for you? What would help you to succeed more often, and avoid the pitfalls identified earlier?
- All three groups were asked to feed back on the final discussion point. Training suggestions from each group are listed below:

Emerging:

- Online resource (free, no subscription) with case studies on producers.
- Skills audit data shared online.
- Sharing of common problems: what would established producers tell their younger selves, knowing what they know now?

Mid-career:

- Networking brunch once a month (needs to be regular)
- Someone to call for advice - examples of core leadership groups or regional “oracles” – perhaps the FST Skills Audit could be a starting point for this?
- Experienced people sharing their mistakes (and what they learned)
- Mix of formal and informal training

Established:

- A facilitated, structured, reflective producer gathering (e.g. space, walk, retreat).
- Structured mentor programme, e.g. [FST Step Up](#)

- Responsive mentoring – e.g. [Edinburgh Performing Arts Development](#) project, [London Tech Advocates “Triage”](#) programme (connects experts with beginners, provides immediate, actionable advice)
- Peer to peer mentorship
- CPD sessions on people management for all types and all levels
- Pots of money for buying people in for planning and evaluation (e.g. designers, tech, production managers)
- Additional money for planning time, especially for freelancers/smaller companies

5. Panel Discussion: Education, training and CPD at all career stages

KN chaired the discussion and asked 3 producers (Michael O Neill, Tron Theatre; Lucy Vaughn, Scottish Drama Training Network; Sarah Gray, Scottish Theatre Producers) to share their experiences, career trajectory and/or current projects.

Michael O Neill, Tron Theatre

- Tron 100 programme: Began as a network among freelance producers, to avoid feelings of isolation. A professional, artistic membership – regular programme of workshops and networking, development events, all year round. Began as 100 people, expanded to ~200. Now at the end of the 3rd year of running and currently undergoing evaluation (to be published early December).
- A number of fruitful relationships are emerging from this programme (particularly for Edinburgh Fringe), but many are still in their early days. Part of the evaluation is to see how this can be encouraged.
- Funded through membership with support from Tron theatre.

Sarah Gray, Scottish Theatre Producers

- Participant in the Creative Scotland Producers’ Project. The project was created as part of CS efforts to increase producing capacity across Scotland. Four ‘hubs’ were created and ran by four producers who would mentor new/emerging producers.
- The four hubs were: Cumbernauld (North Lanarkshire), The Lemon Tree (Aberdeen), The Tron (Glasgow) and Woodend Barn (Aberdeenshire).
- The project allowed producers to have a stable income which was beneficial – SG commented that this allowed her to spend as much time as she needed with individual artists, long term, rather than on a project-by-project basis. KN commented that this was very valuable, especially as SG is able to help artists tour internationally which is important for Scotland’s reputation.

Lucy Vaughn, Scottish Drama Training Network

- The aim of SDTN is to bridge university/college education with industry/theatre sector
- What actually happens when you leave uni and get started? Lots of interesting stories to share. Then how do we (SDTN) support people at mid-level of career – returning to formal education? Short courses? CPD?
- Often sharing individual pathways and how people get into producing. There are many courses around festival and cultural management, but many people come into producing through a practical role.

- For example, LV did a broad degree at RCS, not sure where to specialise. Always worked around theatre education but never had the job title of Producer, but every job has been focused around producing work.
- LV stressed the importance of individual CPD.

6. Open Discussion: Education, training and CPD at all career stages

KN opened the discussion by pointing out that most producers work from home/freelance and that the isolation/ lack of support is difficult for many – therefore, CPD for producers has to take this into account. Producers need a way to be together (not just skill share) and support each other. How can this be achieved?

Responses:

- Because so many producers are used to working in isolation, it can be difficult to bring people together.
- More peer working could be helpful – for example, National Theatre Scotland open up their offices to allow people to work together. Perhaps more organisations could provide hot-desking facilities?
 - Imagine and Stellar Quines have hot-desking facilities
 - Festival City Theatres Trust encourages people to get in touch if they need hot desk space
- It was noted that there is a lot of red tape in organisations which stops open conversation about this.
- There is a need for this information to be easily accessible, especially for early career producers. Perhaps companies could put an “open door” policy for producers on their websites, inviting people to get in touch?
- Similarly, there is a need for an online resource that is publicly accessible (e.g. FAQs for those starting out), widely circulated and centralised to make it easy to find.
- The idea of workshops/seminars for emerging producers could be useful, where established producers could share knowledge.
- YTAS are working on online video content of this nature.
- KN shared that in Germany, the majority of Assistant Director posts come up at the same time every year (almost like grad scheme). This contrasts hugely to UK model of freelancing from job to job.
- Role of Assistant and Trainee: Not a lot of roles focused on producing, admin or assistant roles – bigger companies need to take responsibility for creating these roles. Is this because of budget and time restrictions?

Mid-to-established CPD

- Much of the above focuses on CPD for emerging producers: what about mid-career/established producers?
- Example: Tron 100. Funding comes from membership and Tron theatre. EPAD often has conversations about setting up similar projects in other cities
- Need for activity outside of the central belt, e.g. producers retreats – but these needs to be structured

- Focused, specific training useful at mid/established career level, e.g. marketing, fundraising, etc.
- FST Training & Development events can be good for established producers – FMc commented there would be more to come in the next cycle.
- Independent producers are not less established or successful than in-house producers, but this is the general perception.
- Is there a way to sustain freelance career whilst also getting these training opportunities?

7. Action Learning - general questions & queries for the group

- As much discussion has been had re: CPD in the last few Producers' Forums, other areas of discussion will be explored in the next few months.
- FMc mentioned there was a desire for courses on working with difficult people and effective leadership - these are available at [Technical Winter School](#) (note these are management courses not necessarily technical courses).
- FST thanked Kate Nelson for chairing the last three Producers' Forums.

The next Producers Forums will be scheduled for June and November 2018 – dates TBC