

**THE
MOTHERHOOD
PENALTY**

RESEARCH REPORT

A PILOT ACTION RESEARCH PROJECT

JENNIFER TUCKETT

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INTRODUCTION AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This research report covers key findings and recommendations from The Motherhood Penalty, a pilot action research project exploring how to improve conditions for mothers in the arts.

The project partners include the Women in Theatre Lab and Women in Theatre research project and Parents and Carers in Performing Arts (PiPA).

The idea for the project was conceived by Keira Malik, inspired by her experiences working on the Disney series "Queens", the first-ever wildlife series steered by a women-led production team.

The research was led by Jennifer Tuckett, lead on the 5 year Women in Theatre research project, which was run in partnership with The Writers' Guild of Great Britain, Equity, ERA 50:50, Stage Directors UK, Black Womxn in Theatre, PiPA, Sphinx and Aurora Metro Books amongst other partners and which led in 2025 to Arts Council England agreeing to launch a year long taskforce to investigate the issue of discrimination against women in the arts.

This report is focused specifically on the impact of childcare responsibilities and has found the following key issues:

1) The need to address this issue in the arts:

100% of participants in the project highlighted the need to address this issue, which was a recurrent theme throughout data collection.

2) The need for flexible hours:

The need for flexible hours, part time and hybrid working was a repeated finding through-out the research project.

3) The need to provide greater childcare support:

The need for greater childcare support, from being standard in funding applications to greater support from arts employers, was a repeated finding throughout the research.

4) The need for greater recognition and acceptance of childcare issues when they occur:

The need for greater recognition of issues coming from childcare and acceptance of the need for flexibility was a repeated finding.

5) The need for freelancer support:

That freelancers have a particularly difficult time as parents working in the arts was a repeated finding throughout data collection.

6) The need for arts industry change in terms of working hours:

Long and late working hours and the need to address this was a repeated finding throughout data collection.

THE MOTHERHOOD PENALTY

7) The need for arts industry change in terms of schedules:

Last minute, late and inflexible schedules were highlighted as an important issue affecting parents' ability to work in the arts.

8) The need for industry change in terms of casting:

Ideas around casting from casting incentives to workshops to meet returning parents were highlighted.

9) The need to support those returning to work:

The difficulty of returning to work after a break for children was a repeated finding.

10) The need for new models:

The need for new models of working in theatre with care giving responsibilities embedded from the start was highlighted.

11) The need to consider impact on mothers vs parents:

One final finding was several of the responses highlighted the need to investigate how the impact of caring responsibilities affects mothers compared to parents as whole and whether there are differences.

In stage two, we will test out actions to address these issues but, in the meantime, we hope this stage one report will be useful for others looking to address this issue as well.

Jennifer Tuckett

Academic and lead, Women in Theatre research project (run with partnership with The Writers' Guild of Great Britain, Equity, ERA 50:50, Black Womxn in Theatre, WOW, Stage Directors UK, PiPA and other partners).

METHODOLOGY

This research project uses action research.

As stage one of the project, this pilot project explored what the issue is then gathered data on what possible solutions might be.

Data on these areas was gathered via a pre-workshop week questionnaire, focus groups taking place over a workshop week and feedback forms following the workshops in order to triangulate the evidence.

Participants were made up of a small group of industry professionals as per action research's recommendation to work with those in the industry the research is hoping to bring change about in.

Part Two will follow this report which will involve testing out actions/solutions coming out of stage one followed by reflecting on lessons learned.

In the meantime, this report shares key findings from stage one.

PART ONE:
**KEY FINDINGS FROM PRE-WORKSHOP
WEEK QUESTIONNAIRE**

KEY FINDING ONE

In terms of the pre-workshop questionnaire, key findings included that 100% of respondents felt there was a need to address how the arts can better support mothers/parents working in the arts.

Is there a need to address
how the arts can better
support mothers/parents
working in the arts?



• YES • NO

KEY FINDING TWO

In terms of reasons why there is a need to address how the arts can better support mothers/parents working in the arts, key findings included:

1) A need for more women working in the arts. Responses included:

"We need more female creative directors, animators and editors – teams benefit from a mixed set of voices/perspectives and output/creative benefits from multiple approaches/experiences."

2) Women are torn between careers and caring responsibilities:

"I felt after pregnancy that I was lucky to work until my due date with first child and then after that I suddenly felt a shift, a desperation to audition that I'd never had and it got harder and harder to get in the room. I feel like there was a simultaneous realisation I wanted to work but that working meant not seeing my children and 'bringing them up' and that was a recipe for saying 'I'm only going to do tv' and cut to second child and 6 years later my CV has gaps that make me undesirable and now I've dropped off those lists, I'm living off the narrative that one day I'll write to all the casting directors who once knew me and I'll get back into it but ultimately that's a big risk and we all know the industry works off of the last job you did and just because I had kids won't be enough to get me back in. I wish there was a positive discrimination casting portal for tv, film and theatre decision makers to be incentivised to look at the recently invisible cohort of parents (mothers) who would have continued their career trajectory if they hadn't had children and give them space to reestablish themselves."

"I think this issue should be addressed because it is directly affecting the careers of women and primary carers in the industry. Many end up leaving the industry or miss out on opportunities because they have caring responsibilities."

3) The arts industry is behind other industries:

"We are way behind other industries. Trapped in systems of doing things that haven't been considered, and are done that way because that's just how it has always been e.g. schedules not getting sent out until the night before, or a week before. No budget for job shares despite job sharing being absolutely something we know how to do, because we do it with child actors on stage all the time."

"I'm in a Mum's in the arts group on Facebook. There are so many women wanting to work who can't even go up for the job – tours are out for most Mums. And a lot of women can't sign up to 8 shows a week. Though they probably could if schedules were set, or there wasn't an expectation that everything will be dropped to accommodate an emergency. We are effectively narrowing our workforce, not only now, but for the future, as women and parents will leave and find a different job. It is insane that this industry is really only viable before kids and commitments unless you have income to supplement or family nearby to support."

"The industry already has a significant labour shortage and continues to be inhospitable to parents. By not supporting parents and carers we lose invaluable, experienced workers. Retention of the workforce urgently needs addressing, and supporting parents is a large part of that."

4) Working hours in the arts are problematic both as late and unpredictable:

"We work in the night time economy which is not necessarily helpful for caring responsibilities."

"There are historic learned behaviours re being available at all hours/a moments notice."

"Working hours, flexibility, support, pay equality, facilities in buildings, job shares."

"Working hours often not compatible with school hours, a lot of events in the evenings also not compatible."

KEY FINDING THREE

100% of participants also felt that projects like The Motherhood Penalty to explore possible solutions are important, suggesting the need for more research on this area.

Are projects like
The Motherhood
Penalty important
to explore possible
solutions?



• YES • NO

KEY FINDING FOUR

Key findings in terms of why projects like The Motherhood Penalty to explore possible solutions are important, included:

1) Bringing people together to tackle the issue:

"Any project that brings everyone together is important and ones that look to focus how we can all support each other are key to both happy workforce but also promotes real creativity."

"A problem shared..."

2) People are put off using people with children:

"I think people are put off using people with children- who could affect rehearsal if they get sick or might be more tired due to sleep issues. Also touring people seeing a parent with young children as less fun... less free – rushing back to have family time. I think that the exclusion of mother-talent is at best unintentional unconscious bias and at worst I've been asked 'How are old are your children?' And with young infants they sort of look a mix of charmed and concerned. Suddenly you feel the question mark land in the room."

3) The need for new models:

"We need an Industry standard. We need flexible working and job shares and accommodations for parents to be the rule, not the exception. Most don't do it because they don't know how, they're scared, or they don't have the budget. We need to make a case for this being part of how our Industry must work, to ensure talent stays. So a model, one that says – look at everything we've considered, look at how we could shimmy the budgets, look at the data that says why this is essential, look at what we as an industry think we provide for society and whether we are applying those principals to ourselves, is necessary."

"People need models. They also need the carrot not the stick. So we have to find a way of demonstrating why this is a benefit i.e. you need to increase your budget by x to make these provisions or changes, but the benefits are Y: e.g. better insurance terms if you've got a job share as you've potentially got someone else on hand who could step in, becoming an employer of choice and having a larger range of talent to choose from, ensuring that our industry survives before everyone leaves."

"The creative industries need creative solutions. Often trying to fit conventional models of working to our unique workforce proves either impractical or inappropriate. By allowing creatives to explore new models, we'll more likely find a sustainable way of moving forwards."

"It explores avenues of better practices."

4) To understand the situation and how to change things:

"These projects are vital to understand the problems that people face and how we can improve things in order to see change."

"Because without this kind of discussion and information sharing we won't ever find new ways forward and change the industry for the better."

KEY FINDING FIVE: PROBLEMS ENCOUNTERED

Key themes in terms of what problems participants encountered as a mother/parent working in the arts included:

1) Offered less work:

"I have found that children and moving out of London for family life affordability has made my contacts ask me less to do readthroughs or off the cuff development bits because they don't want to put me out. I would need to travel from Bristol but THAT'S FINE!! I moved here to have more money (tbc lol) and have the flexibility to do what I want work wise when it comes up. I don't want to sound desperate so I often don't mention it and then they realise and almost say 'oh you shouldn't have come all this way'. Without doing the small bits, the connecting readthroughs the discussion I don't get castings. People work with you when they've connected with you recently. How do you do that if you are being a mum and can't smooze or afford regular London trips for casting workshops."

"Basically I feel I need to underplay the life of a mum who is so keen to be working more but hasn't got the energy to self promote."

"I noticed that my agents were not understanding... that I was stressing about the career gap doing motherhood. They were happy to play the long game and weren't happy for me to do little non 'cool' career changing jobs. I feel like agents need to be educated that a mum being left behind as all her friends exit maternity leave and still being unemployed is a very lonely place to be. So I pushed harder to be put up for smaller jobs and ultimately got dropped. They were happy for me to be depressed and anxious playing with number blocks on my living room floor than exploring how they could help me do what I want even if that felt like a step back."

2) Difficult to get back into the industry:

"I took a few years out when my daughter was born, due to the gap in my portfolio I struggled to get back into the industry. It is also difficult to work in the industry on reduced hours – I have chosen to take a huge pay cut in order to still do what I love, but it has been a struggle to make ends meet."

"Aside the classic childcare issues, societal guilt/pressure etc... I have found being middle aged with children having left home = I am now invisible. This is also a massive issue - invisible, hit the menopause, middle aged women. If my husband had not worked from home we'd never have managed with childcare and I would have given my job up for him to continue as he was earning more at the time."

3) Lack of consideration given to childcare issues:

"The onus is on you to be organised and to sort it out. Sometimes during a production week, for a long show, the call for the next day wasn't being sent out until past midnight."

So my options were to either pay for childcare for the whole week (when I potentially didn't need it but would still have to pay for it), or to call my parents late at night to see if they could cover. Other productions had a set call time of midday during production week."

"Ditto rehearsal schedules – some directors and companies are organised and some are not. They want the flexibility to change the schedule the day before, but on a West End show for example, there was no flexibility to change the standard rehearsal day from 10–6 to 10.30 to 6 and adjust some breaks, so that those parents who lived further away could drop their kids at school."

"I went up for one job, it was no longer available (happens a lot in long running west end shows where they audition to see who is out there, but the job isn't necessarily available....) and they asked if I'd do a tour. I can't, because I have 2 kids, and I can't say yes to an 18 month tour 6 days a week. If job shares were standard, then I could potentially do a tour. Though the accommodation fees provided during tour don't provide for a family, so again, as an actor with a family, if you want to go on tour, you'll be paying more for somewhere that they can come and stay so you can see them."

"Choosing between big work and big caring moments e.g. first day of school vs opening night. Lack of understanding around emotional impact of maternity leave. Support in principles but not in practise."

"Lack of flexibility. Rigidity in terms of what is expected. Not enough pay to be able to afford childcare. An assumption that we will just get on with our job regardless of the added responsibility of children. Very time poor."

4) Late but also unexpected hours:

- "Working late, unsociable hours outside of normal childcare hours.
- Often not knowing when the end of the working day will be.
- Inappropriate environment to bring a child to work – either unsafe or inappropriate context of the work.
- Last minute decisions on call times.
- Expected to work away from home.
- Low pay. Nothing additional for overtime.
- Sporadic working hours, not easily covered by childcare."

5) Cost of childcare:

"Sometimes the cost of childcare either prevents people taking a job, or means you don't have enough prep time for an audition. Once The Actor's Children's Trust paid for me to have an hour of childcare so I could prep. But that is rare. So as a parent, you are often going in to rooms having had less prep time than those without kids or caring responsibilities. You're often paying for childcare (on top of singing lessons) to prepare and go to an audition. So you're at a loss before you even start."

"Incompatible hours, low pay which makes childcare arrangements difficult to finance".

KEY FINDING SIX: WHY PROBLEMS OCCUR

Key themes in terms of why participants have encountered problems as a mother/parent working in the arts included:

1) Caring is not prioritised, particularly for women:

"I think I have experienced these problems because caring for children is not prioritised, or revered in the way it should be in our society. Mother's voices in the arts are not valued in the way that they should be. There is nothing in place to help people when they leave work to care for children and no options for them when they return, they have to try and fit into a system that is not designed for them."

"Because I'm a woman."

"I think everyone is experiencing this as this is a systematic issue, the civilised solution would be free universal childcare."

2) The difficulties of getting back into the industry:

"I don't know. I definitely think that I haven't self-promoted because you are only supposed to write when you have a job you're doing or something to shout about, otherwise the industry is too busy to listen so I end up making my own work which is great but it's slower as time is poor without money... I have experienced issues getting back into the industry despite great efforts to make work and not expect anything for free but funding is hard to get."

3) The industry is behind:

"Because we're massively behind as an Industry. Because I am a parent. Because I'm prioritising my family life over taking a job where I'd never see them."

"The precarious nature of being a freelancer in theatre means that you never earn a regular wage. And often don't earn enough to be able to cover your own costs. Childcare is incredibly expensive and the way that school hours and term times run mean that trying to work full days is impossible. Simply put – the industry and its demands on time and effort and lack of proper remuneration does not mesh with raising children."

"The style of working has not changed in decades. The way theatre is made needs to shift with the modern workforce that is no longer just men with no commitments. But so far it seems to want to fit the same model as it did in the 1990s."

KEY FINDING SEVEN: USEFUL SOLUTIONS

Key themes in terms of what participants thought would be useful solutions that would help with these issues included:

1) The need for society change as a whole:

"Unfortunately, I think that systemic change is needed for proper change. We need governments who a) recognise that parents need proper support and b) recognise the importance of the arts so it funds it properly. We need more money in the system. We could also do with Universal Basic Income and proper grants and funding. The theatre industry would also need to seriously engage with a system of job sharing and flexible working hours which flies in the face of the usual expectations which are that 'if you are truly passionate about theatre and therefore worthy of your job you would make sure you are able to work the hours you need to'. We are expected to 'suffer for our art'."

"Not sure – maybe I'm too old but I feel like there's been this debate for years – back in 1999 when a guy left work to pick his kids up early everyone looked up and congratulated him ... As he left the production manager turned around and asked "would you have congratulated a woman for leaving early?" ... of course not."

2) Funding support:

"Funding for making work in order to get back into work."

"Philanthropy. ScreenSkills is a charity which TV companies pay into, it provides training but it also funds the handover day on job shares. There are 70 pairs of women job sharing in TV currently via this model, though not as performers."

3) Freelancer support:

"Better support for Freelancers... Freelancers make on average less than 30% than PAYE. And they have none of the protections. So we also need to sort that out – be it insisting that orgs or productions pay Freelancer 30% more as standard (and thus trying to push jobs that used to be PAYE back to being PAYE), making it a legal requirement that organisations that have to report on gender data etc, also include freelancers (at the moment many don't because they say it's too difficult which is a nonsense), and then we also need to look at graded pay. In NHS or for teachers, your pay is based on your experience, not just your role. In the theatre, the minimum rates (which most companies tend to treat as the actual rates rather than the minimum), are per role. So you can have people who have been in the Industry for 20yrs earning the same as someone who has been employed for a year. There is no progression. There's this sort of myth that you might get rich and famous, and so that is why the pay is so low. And it's ridiculous. The FMTW data will show it's actually those who are older, with caring responsibilities, that are most likely to leave, because it becomes untenable."

4) Casting changes:

"Casting incentives for directors and casting directors to use mothers exiting maternity leave."

"I would love theatres to get touring companies and in-house productions to do a day of workshop on the upcoming work with local parents wanting to get to know these creatives but having no 'in'. This would also enable mums who can't travel as much and want to work close to home gain visibility in their local industry decision makers."

5) Greater transparency:

"All those jobs advertised as possible job shares at the start. Don't put the onus on a performer to have to ask during an audition."

"Schedules set in advance. I recently advised an Assistant Company Manager who wasn't able to plan her childcare for her neurodivergent homeschooled child with her partner, because they didn't send out the schedule for the following week until the Friday or Saturday. It isn't enough time for people with commitments to book and pay for childcare, or indeed work it out with a partner who also has to work."

6) Industry considering this issue as standard practice:

"An expectation that people need to invest in all of us that are defecting from the industry to keep the talent pool wider. Also it's not obvious that post children people change in many ways and to be considered as fresh talent that has a different offer now."

"I think you have to look at different parts of sector e.g. freelance/employed, performance/producing as they don't all require the same solution."

"Directly working with mothers and committing to finding new models for creating work. Making set work hours the norm. Seeing job shares and part time work as achievable."

7) Flexible hours:

"I think that flexible hours and hybrid working would be fantastic. I think that the option to jobshare or having a plan with the company you are working with on what the next few years look like, so that you can gradually rejoin the work force without losing momentum. I think being able to discuss these things without feeling like you will be a problem, or that it will be held against you would be the most important start. Seeing companies value parents and the job that they are doing is a crucial shift that we need to see."

"Job shares and flexible working as standard for all jobs, with the onus on the Employer to explain why it's not possible. And budget not being a suitable answer (though legally it's one of the reasons they can refuse)."

8) Childcare support:

"Childcare as standard for all arts funding applications."

KEY FINDING EIGHT: WHY THESE WOULD BE USEFUL SOLUTIONS

In terms of why these would be useful solutions, key findings included:

1) Helping mothers/parents return to work:

"If we can make our work then we can become visible again. Make new networks where old ones have dwindled in our career breaks."

"Auditions are great but it's your last job that interests people. With a big gap trust wains and so I feel I need quality time with local directors in a workshop environment for them to get to know me and my capability and to like me. An audition for 15 minutes is very rarely going to result in a job if they don't know you or people you've worked with. Theatre needs to be a family and built trust and strangers, no matter how good the read, will always be discriminated against unconsciously."

"It (childcare support) works in other countries really well, and allows parents rejoin the industry."

2) Allowing people to be honest about caring issues:

"I think they would be useful because being able to be honest about what your struggles are is the first step to being able to overcome them. Having a plan with your company (if you are PAYE or a long term freelancer) for how you are going to exit and then rejoin the industry will make things go smoother and with less anxiety and could ensure that your career stays on track. Flexible hours would mean you can maximise your time to get things done, make the most of childcare and chose the childcare that you actually want (for example if you do not want your child to go to nursery then this might limit your hours or days). Jobshare would enable you to still do the job you want to do but with less hours, you would stay working in the job that you want instead of being derailed."

"Because they centre the worker and not the process. Theatre is still process centric instead of worker centric and that needs to change to sustain a work force."

PART TWO:
**KEY FINDINGS FROM FOCUS GROUPS
AND FEEDBACK FORMS**

KEY FINDING ONE: BARRIERS TO THE INDUSTRY

In terms of barriers to the industry, key findings included:

1) Change needs to be embedded:

"Having a separate person at companies to contact about their policies. Change needs to be embedded in how the company runs and it needs to be industry wide to avoid elitism or exclusion."

"Idea of a Code Of Conduct (which CIISA will do in part) and PIPA emblem, or similar that people can check either on website, or potentially a paragraph or the emblem on the castings/job breakdowns"

2) The need for transparency:

"The need for transparency and sharing arrangements with affected parties."

"The need for transparency across the board when it comes to these discussions and needs. The need for new best practice to work so the production can still work financially. More knowledge is needed about these issues for both parents/carers as well as companies so that open discussions can be had. That major awards can actually change industry by making certain changes compulsory to submit."

3) Understanding of realities of the situation:

"Every individual needs different things and therefore an individual HR session would be a solution prior to fixed schedules being sent out."

"The need for transparency to be not just between a producer and employee, but across the team. That actions to help parents are intersectional, often also helping other needs and accessibility. That focus of a production period is as important as flexible working. That job shares and depping needs to have a framework to meet everyone's needs."

In terms of barriers to the industry, key findings in terms of possible solutions included:

1) Having a separate person at companies to contact about policies would be useful:

"Having a separate person at companies to contact about their policies. Flexibility and upfront to combat transparency. Information handovers – boundaries for staff members. Sat night tech off instead of Monday morning. Or invite family up options? Tech week can help with feelings holiday from being a parent. Job shares and scheduling to be invested early on. – address fee systems."

2) The creation of new models would be useful:

"It needs a project like this to try out and adjust and model something, that then we roll out across the board. It requires a lot of work before a project begins, as it has to start pre recruitment. Whatever the culture is, it has to be embedded from inception."

"To improve company policy in addressing these issues, I also like the idea of awards making changes that force anyone wanting submit to have best practice."

"I think a rethink of how theatres and companies make work in terms of funding, timelines and quantity needs to happen with theatres actually talking to the people involved in making it and not simply looking at the bottom line and nothing else."

3) Employers taking caring responsibilities into account right from the start:

"Employers being upfront about taking caring responsibilities in to account."

"More concern for the individuals in the team rather than the profit margin."

"Policies and frameworks set earlier on that are used in practise and not just on paper, that are reviewed regularly."

In terms of why these solutions are important, key findings included:

1) Creates a safe pathway:

"Creates a safe pathway for industry professionals to feel supported and included in all stages of their careers."

"The main issue with change across our Industry, as I see it, is lots of empathetic, passionate people doing things separately. So we have Tonic, we have PIPA, we have CIISA, we have Freelancers Make Theatre Work. But we need something that gathers everything together. It takes the pressure off the freelancer/employee to ask."

2) It makes it easier to raise issues:

"It makes it easier to raise these issues as a parent or carer and not feel you will be penalised for asking."

"Communication would lead to higher self-esteem, better work life balance and longevity and endurance to remain in the industry."

3) The theatre model needs to be rethought

"Lack of funding has turned theatre into an obsession to not lose money. And that's happened to the detriment of the people involved. It needs to be rethought as an industry so as to be financially viable for the theatres but also for the workers. So much of what makes parenting in theatre hard comes back to money, whether paid to the worker or funding strands from the theatre."

"Solutions need to consider not just balancing the home life of the carer, but what enables them to create art to their best ability. Those in performing arts really do care about making a good product and solutions are as much about enabling that as it is about supporting being a parent."

KEY FINDING TWO: REHEARSAL, TECH AND PRODUCTION WEEKS

In term of rehearsal, tech and productions weeks, key findings were:

1) The need for greater awareness:

"That, whatever processes and schedules get put in place, whoever is leading the room (director, choreographer etc) needs to be fully understanding of the process to not deviate back to old habits. That producers don't often understand everyone's roles well enough. How do you work these new methods and models with people who are unwilling?"

"That more time needs to be taken to listen to team members at the start to set up a production where everyone can thrive."

2) The need for company change:

"The divergence of need between parents/carers. The carrot and stick approach to making companies change"

"That we need to seriously question assumptions that are made about scheduling and job shares – these can be improved, they don't have to stay the way they are. People need to take responsibility, such as directors, for not totally side tracking meetings. That funding and initial budget conversations are not realistic for the team left to deliver."

"Job Matrix and RACI – so job profiles for each role, and then the RACI. That level of prep means everyone understands who does what, and who is responsible for what. The main thrust was communication – so that parameters are set, esp in terms of scheduling that work for all."

"Rethinking how productions are planned, scheduled, and managed across departments — with an emphasis on embedding care into the foundations of the work."

Key themes in terms of solutions were:

1) Better communication:

"Looking at not just clear communication, but structured communication is key. Addressing the hierarchy of the team to some extent also to enable the whole team to be on a level in terms of flexible working parity."

"Better communication. Better understanding of needs. Once again changing how the industry takes advantage of people's fear of asking for change. It has to be a systemic change of approach and if saying you can't win awards or get funding until you do those changes works then that sounds good."

2) More flexibility:

"Schedule performances to be closer together, buddy up on jobs to allow more opportunity for career growth and life balance."

"More honesty about people's needs and understanding what jobs actually really need."

"So as above, the matrix – job role and RACI, and then the code of conduct/values and baseline offerings from which to open out options. Getting clear "would like"s and "non negotiables."

"We also need to think more widely – so the scheduling options that work for this project, won't work for all – a commercial 8–9 show west end, is going to look very different to a tour of one location per night. Looking at tech from a whole new perspective – so why do we do 10–10? Why don't we do 10–5 with 2 sessions per day, and then an hour or two at end for creatives or mopping up stuff we didn't get round to."

3) Develop new models:

"Integrate a Pre-Production Access and Care Planning Session, Develop a Job Matrix and Visibility Timeline, Pilot Anonymous 360-Degree Feedback."

"A job matrix, which clearly defines who is needed and when across a production timeline. This helps avoid burnout, duplication, and wasted resources — especially valuable on productions with multiple moving parts. Understanding when individuals are genuinely needed, and allowing flexibility where possible, could improve both morale and efficiency."

"A Culture of Listening and Accountability Even if not every request or change can be implemented, people need to feel heard. Small adjustments, when made transparently, can build trust. One idea was to introduce 360-degree reviews, conducted anonymously, allowing everyone — not just senior staff — to give and receive feedback. This would foster greater accountability and a healthier working culture."

"Rethinking Scheduling Models We looked at international examples like Chicago's theatre scene, where shows are routinely scheduled on only four nights a week — and still manage to sell out. Compressing the schedule in this way doesn't just improve work-life balance, it can also enhance audience demand and reduce running costs."

In terms of why these solutions would be important, key findings included:

1) You need a framework:

"When people talk about clear communication they often think just saying we'll all be clear is enough, but actually you need a framework, not just to enable people to bring issues forwards, but also not to hold up the room and a tight process. Looking at where the hierarchy impedes communication would help make everyone feel they have an equal access to making work."

"I think at the moment there are lots of attempts to change "bits" of the industry and that's great and admirable but realistically it's the structures and attitudes or everyone in the industry that has to change. That needs openness in the hiring practice, adoption of clearly stated nationally applied standards and the empowering of people to be able to talk about what they need. If that comes from "forcing" change through deprivation of funding or marketing through aware wins then that's fine with me."

2) Avoid industry loss:

"Allow creatives to still upskill during parenting years and stay current, avoid industry experience loss and impact on profit or diversity. Loss and lack of inclusivity in the industry. They start unpicking the unsaid and make people realise that when creating projects there are many different people brought together in an unconventional environment (i.e. not an office) and that we need more visual on what each other really need. But ultimately and frustratingly budgets really do drive this conversation."

3) New models are needed:

"The old school tech model is entrenched – getting data on who has done it differently, successfully and unsuccessfully would be helpful. We chatted about people not knowing everyone's job, and thus what they need. So the only way to fully grasp that is with those matrixes, which a Producer can then look at and scheduling happens from there. We also spoke about the social element – e.g. a communal free lunch once a week, engaging with neurodivergent team members in advance so we can make it a workable and worthwhile option."

"These solutions would be useful because they address the root causes of exclusion, burnout, and unsustainable working conditions in theatre, especially for parents and caregivers, by shifting from reactive fixes to proactive, structural change."

KEY FINDING THREE: MENTORING

In terms of mentoring, key findings were:

1) The issue of imposter syndrome:

"How imposter syndrome can stop people considering mentorship both to mentor and to be a mentee. That gate keeping is a real issue also."

2) The lack of a joined-up approach:

"The lack of a joined up considered approach to mentoring and how similar frameworks could be used to help parents back into the industry."

"The need for specificity and open access for any Mentorship programmes. And Mentoring being it's own category – not as a way of avoiding putting proper training or performance management in and getting people to give their time for free. Idea of Mentoring being across buildings or orgs or indeed the Industry rather than being a linear/hierarchical set up within one project or building."

"How to encourage and help all – mentoring is not a replacement for training but an opportunity for all to grow and connect. That we need more understanding."

"Mentoring needs clear structure, objectives, and training to be effective. There's a need to address discrimination in hiring and interview processes."

3) The need for mentoring for parents:

"Parents in PA having visibility with local networks theatres when trying to come back to work and a central pot to fund and incentivise industry leaders to facilitate ways back in whether that be buddying or mentoring or training."

"The importance of creating supportive frameworks for working parents in the theatre industry. The value of collaborative research and sharing knowledge across different sectors."

Key findings in terms of potential solutions were:

1) Clear models for mentoring:

"Clear structures and training for a mentor scheme that clearly define the relationship, the parameters and expectations of the scheme and who it is for."

"Co-ordinated mentorship programme across the industry with its own funding and training and independent body."

"Funding for some sort of Industry wide mentorship programme. A database of would be mentors and mentees. Everyone on our project committing to be a mentor to one person and a mentee potentially? Mentoring not in place of training, e.g. not getting mentors to feed back to bosses on how a particular employee is doing – that is perf management and should be treated as such. Clear comms – what does it involve, what's the purpose, what do you want out of it, a specified time commitment per week so everyone knows what it will take."

2) Paid mentoring/mentoring which works for everyone:

"Potentially being paid (if there was funding?)."

"Organised exchanges or cooperatives with defined roles for mentoring and open dialogue on how people are truly feeling."

"Social Corporate responsibility in any funded theatre company/ building to have protocols to be inclusive and include within that parents returning to work. Create a document that could educate teachers to use the right arts career language from their first nativity!"

"Useful solutions could include implementing structured mentorship programmes with clear goals and training for mentors, alongside policies that actively combat discrimination in hiring and interviews. The theatre industry could introduce flexible work models, childcare support, and transparent pathways for career progression to better support working parents. Partnerships across sectors and sharing research findings would strengthen advocacy efforts and encourage industry-wide adoption of more inclusive practices."

In terms of why these solutions would be useful, key findings included:**1) Increase accessibility:**

"By clearly guiding the mentor relationship, it becomes more accessible"

2) Way to improve training:

"Because it could talk to industry partners and find a way to make mentoring work across the sector, it could offer training rather than the current lack of training. It could round workshops for new parents and provide both routes back to the industry and a degree of social care that is currently lacking i.e. make people feel that it's possible to go back to work. They take the bones of what mentoring should be and provide clear ways to make it possible and equitable."

"Without organisation and clear ideas on what the mentoring/advisory roles are and how they run they're both open to abuse but also failing. Structure in place/good foundations create freedom for people to open up."

"I think the biggest problem is no one has time to worry about yet another industry issue so, if it's in black and white, it'll make them accountable."

3) Addresses causes of problems:

"These solutions are useful because they address root causes rather than symptoms."

"Structured mentorship ensures consistent support and skill development, empowering participants to thrive. Anti-discrimination policies and flexible work models directly challenge systemic barriers, making the theatre industry more inclusive and sustainable for working parents."

KEY FINDING FOUR: FREELANCERS

Key findings in terms of freelancers were:

1) Lack of transparency:

"The lack of transparency in terms of... job offers which is at odds with the non-theatre industry."

"All inner circle in terms of who we choose to work with- no advertising or no 'real' advertising as you know who you want for the job."

2) Payment issues:

"That fees throughout the industry often fall short of adequate. The culture of hiring from an established pool commitment creep making it hard to effectively schedule life."

"Pay was raised today, and that's fairly crucial. And interestingly it's the day we went most off topic and had to be brought back, because it's the most emotive. It speaks to how we value ourselves and how we feel valued."

"Our fees don't graduate according to experience. No career progression ladder. Need to have different levels of experience in order to safeguard the longevity of people coming into the industry as well as protect caregivers... (and then there is looking after your parents) to come back into the industry after motherhood."

Key findings in terms of solutions were:

1) Honesty and transparency:

"I think the industry itself has to be more honest in general – it has to understand what it can achieve with the money it has to offer and not just approach theatre professionals with the attitude that regardless of money or time they will somehow pull things out of the bag. I think some kind of industry wide fee structure that included freelancers should be introduced alongside more transparency in offers about time and roles. Ideally theatre jobs should be advertised with detail and if they aren't advertised then some sort of detail beyond just Tech/rehearsal dates should be included."

"Transparent fee structures with honest timeframes for that work. A need for open recruitment that creates a team that has mixed experiences, both new hires and established hires."

2) Protections:

"We spoke about contracts – so how a job can get cancelled by producers and that's fine, but if an actor or creative pulls out, they can be sued... The old thinking of the Producer is taking a risk and an individual isn't, is a nonsense. So we need better protections across all unions – because freelancers take a risk staying in the Industry every day. I'd like to see a model within this project where we budget and ask ACE for the money to have 3 tiers

of payment for the departments where career paths are not obvious – e.g. sound design. Or maybe even 2 tiers. So we have those with x years of experience at a higher rate, and an entry level at lower rate. And then we do the childcare subsidy on the side, so that it's budgeted for but isn't within the rate per se. I'd also like within our project to suggest a different review process for ACE – i.e. we look at what we budgeted, what the feedback was from everyone involved initially (e.g. you're paying me x but I should be being paid y), and the funding pitch has 2 amounts – budgets as per usual ACE suggestions and rate cards and time, plus the budget to allow for the additional work that creatives feel is necessary, or where the suggested rates are not sufficient. And then at the end of the process, regardless of which budget we got, we lay out how much was spent – be that monetary if they gave it to us, or in unpaid time, if they didn't. Because if there is no review process at the end of a project to look at was the money actually enough, then it will never increase."

"We also spoke about having a separate budget and policy laid out in advance for emergencies – so emergency unpaid leave to look after a child would be paid in our project. Or some sort of facility to bring the child into the workplace. But unless we already have a childcare person on site then that is difficult, and if the child is ill, then they couldn't come in. So looking at the unpaid elements of childcare legally (e.g. unpaid parental leave you can take up until they are 18yrs which I imagine most freelancers just never take because they wouldn't feel they could in short term jobs, and the emergency unpaid childcare leave). We could potentially cap the emergency one at 1 Day paid, as beyond that they have time to sort childcare if we're being cautious re budgets."

3) Inclusivity improvements:

"Need to give jobs based on... targets so different tiers of workers are involved. This would impact parents coming back into work and should become one of the 'tick boxes' on ACE forms and on funded organisations to prove they are employing carers and parents within that. Look at pay structure and tiering fees based on experience. If we stick to fixed rates then people can't employ more than one person to fulfil a function. Then that sole person works beyond their proposed time frame and is also doing some jobs they are overqualified to do and someone else could do if there were some funds."

"Demonstrate the economic and creative value of supporting parents. Challenge funding bodies to recognise diverse workforce need. Create frameworks for long-term industry transformation. Provide practical solutions for work-life balance."

In terms of why these solutions would be helpful, key findings included:

1) If you know what is expected it's easier to manage:

"Simply because if you know what is expected then it becomes easier to manage and if things go beyond what is expected then it is possible to point this out to producers etc without worrying that you're making yourself "difficult" and therefore potentially losing future work creates a work force that has both an established relationship with

the company, and keeps avenues open for parents returning to work. Clear time frames understood by both sides allows the parent to plan their work more effectively."

2) The need for proper payment:

"The pay's the thing.... We can't do our best work if we don't have enough time or money to do it fully."

3) The need for accountability:

"Accountability creates change. Currently there is a lot of 'how do we get the funding' and no real consciousness of the social impact the organisation is having."

"These solutions would be useful because they address systemic barriers through practical, implementable strategies."

CONCLUSION

This report has found the following key issues:

1) The need to address this issue in the arts:

100% of participants in the project highlighted the need to address this issue, which was a recurrent theme throughout data collection.

2) The need for flexible hours:

The need for flexible hours, part time and hybrid working was a repeated finding throughout the research project.

3) The need for to provide greater childcare support:

The need for greater childcare support, from being standard in funding applications to greater support from arts employers, was a repeated finding throughout the research.

4) The need for greater recognition and acceptance of childcare issues when they occur:

The need for greater recognition of issues coming from childcare and acceptance of the need for flexibility was a repeated finding.

5) The need for freelancer support:

That freelancers have a particularly difficult time as parents working in the arts was a repeated finding throughout data collection.

6) The need for arts industry change in terms of working hours:

Long and late working hours and the need to address this was a repeated finding throughout data collection.

7) The need for arts industry change in terms of schedules:

Last minute, late and inflexible schedules were highlighted as an important issue affecting parents' ability to work in the arts.

8) The need for industry change in terms of casting:

Ideas around casting from casting incentives to workshops to meet returning parents were highlighted.

9) The need to support those returning to work:

The difficulty of returning to work after a break for children was a repeated finding.

10) The need for new models:

The need for new models of working in theatre with care giving responsibilities embedded from the start was highlighted.

11) The need to consider impact on mothers vs parents:

One final finding was several of the responses highlighted the need to investigate how the impact of caring responsibilities affects mothers compared to parents as whole and whether there are differences.

In stage two, we will test out actions to address these issues but, in the meantime, we hope this stage one report will be useful for others looking to address this issue as well.

Jennifer Tuckett

Academic and lead, Women in Theatre research project (run with partnership with The Writers' Guild of Great Britain, Equity, ERA 50:50, Black Womxn in Theatre, WOW, Stage Directors UK, PiPA and other partners).