

York Theatre Royal: Service Level Agreement report May 2016

This report will give an update of delivery against the Service Level Agreement (SLA) between the City of York Council and York Citizens' Theatre Trust Ltd.

The report covers the period from Sept 2015 to April 2016.

PARTNERSHIP DELIVERY 2012/2018

SLA conditions are noted in bold with the details of how the theatre has been working to achieve them underneath.

- 1. Provide a year round programme of work which shall include in-house productions, including a pantomime, youth theatre productions, touring drama productions, and hires to local amateur companies**

York Theatre Royal was closed for a major re-furbishment from mid-March 2015. It re-opened on 22 April 2016 with the Stage World Premiere of Evelyn Waugh's **Brideshead Revisited**.

In March 2015 York Theatre Royal began a residency at the National Railway Museum. The aim of the partnership between these two York organisations was to enhance the programme of both institutions and develop audiences for culture in York. This partnership has been awarded funds from the Arts Council Exceptional Award scheme and from Grants for the Arts to recognise the innovative approach of both organisations to improving experiences for both theatre and museum audiences.

During the Residency theatre productions were mounted in a 1,000 seat theatre venue, built as a temporary structure. Productions in the earlier part of the year included a community production, **In Fog and Falling Snow**, the re-mount of **The Railway Children** and during this report period the annual pantomime, **Dick Whittington and his meerkat**.

The Railway Children had its final performances in early September including 2 special extra performances as the show was filmed for screenings at cinemas. The screening took place at 400 cinemas nationwide on 28 March with 30 encore screenings. The screening of the film of the York production was seen by over 30,000 people in cinemas across the UK in addition to the 31,000 people who saw the production live in at the Signal Box Theatre.

Dick Whittington and his meerkat had originally been planned as the first production in the re-opened theatre but due to the overrun of the Capital project this production was transferred to the Signal Box Theatre. It was a great success in this novel space, enjoyed by audiences and the acting company. The total audience for the run of the show was 47,000.

York Theatre Royal is currently involved in a European Theatre project called **Be SpectACTive**. Over the next 4 years we will be hosting a number of European theatre companies and artists in residence as they research and create new pieces of theatre work, in discussion with and in response to people in our community.

In September 2015 we had our first residency, led by Romanian Director Gianina Carbuariu with 5 actors from the Teatrul National "RADU STANCA" Sibiu who have been creating a new piece of theatre based on the experience of Whistleblowers in the NHS. Gianina interviewed several key Whistleblowers in the UK and this research was scripted and performed in the De Grey Rooms as a piece of verbatim theatre called **Common People**.

Other theatre work in the De Grey Rooms during this period included **The Last Supper** – Internationally acclaimed performance company **Reckless Sleepers** presented a unique event that has toured around the world since 2002 where audiences attend the last suppers of the forgotten last meals of inmates on death row. We also presented the York Theatre Royal and tutti frutti co-production of **Snow Child** for the under 7s following a national tour.

York Theatre Royal was the subject of one of the BBC's On Stage season of documentaries in November 2015. The documentary covered the theatre redevelopment project and the community production **In Fog and Falling Snow**. It was narrated by Sir Derek Jacobi.

2. Provide sign language interpreted and audio described performances and touch tours

All of the York Citizens Theatre Trust productions in the Signal Box Theatre have had sign interpreted, audio-described and captioned performances.

3. Provide a regular Youth Theatre for at least 250 young people annually

York Theatre Royal Youth Theatre comprises of 370 young people who take part in weekly sessions within 14 youth theatre groups split by age, Access all Areas (referral only) and two new taster groups.

Due to the closure of York Theatre Royal and the residency relationship with the National Railway Museum many of the youth theatre weekly sessions were held at the National Railway Museum and took the railways as their theme for theatre work produced by the Youth Theatre over the year.

During Autumn 2015 we started a new relationship with York St John University offering new youth theatre taster sessions based at the University for 5-7's and 8-10's. This helped to satisfy the demand for more youth theatre places in the city, especially for these age ranges.

Performances of the Youth Theatre took place in a host of different venues during the ongoing closure of the Theatre Royal. The 11-14 year olds groups toured around primary schools in York with a new play called **The Boy Who Swallowed a Wolf** which they performed to 8-10 year olds with accompanying workshops. The 14-16 year old groups produced 3 plays **The Holding Place**, **Trojan Women** and **This Changes Everything**, in collaboration with York St. John University. Originally performed in March 2016 they will also form part of the Create Festival in May 2016.

A Youth Theatre time capsule was placed under the seating bank in the new auditorium of the theatre in February 2016 by the Youth Theatre forum. Included in the capsule were letters from current Youth Theatre members to possible members of the future, some scripts of the plays they have performed, production photos, and various other artefacts.

Outreach and Community Youth Theatres

Access All Areas is the referral only theatre group that meets every week. We are working with young people from The Island Project, York Young Carers, All Together Active Youth Club, young people who have been referred to us by personal social inclusion officers and Applefields School students. The aim of this group is to make friends, build confidence and self-esteem whilst learning about theatre. During the Autumn they took part in organizing the TakeOver Festival at the National Railway Museum and in the Spring they worked on acting in a play called **Kasper the Wild** by Tim Crouch which the group hope to perform in the future. They will again become part of the **TakeOver** Festival Volunteer team in the Summer 2016 TakeOver Festival at York Theatre Royal.

Project Q is a now a weekly youth theatre session for young people aged 8-13 with learning difficulties and additional needs.

4. Provide educational activities related to each main house production, including special matinees, talks, teachers' packs, workshops and visits to schools

As always we are working with schools on many different projects.

We have continued our ongoing long-term cross-curricula relationship with seven York schools including, Knavesmire, Joseph Rowntree and St Olave's.

And we have been working with a cohort of eight schools as the York Shakespeare Cluster. This is a continuation of the Royal Shakespeare Company Learning and Performance Network. Schools in this network include York High, Applefields, Poppleton Road Primary and Acomb Primary School. Each school group will be working on a 10 minute

section of **The Tempest** to present on the main stage of York Theatre Royal as part of the opening artistic programme in May 2016.

5. Provide a range of activities to engage older people in activities connected with the Theatre

Facilities at the theatre for our work with older people have been compromised during the closure. However the Friends of York Theatre Royal continue to offer opportunities for older people to volunteer to be involved in the work of the theatre. The Friends is an important and inclusive social club for older people. It continues to expand its activity with opportunities to be creative as well as support the theatre in fundraising and looking after audiences.

The team of Welcome volunteers who enhanced the visitor experience at the Signal Box Theatre throughout the run of the Pantomime, although not exclusively for older people, has offered more opportunities for a regular and purposeful role for many older people to be involved with the theatre.

We continue to offer two Adult Acting classes on a termly basis that are consistently over- subscribed. Our Adult Acting class members perform a new play each term.

6. Develop The Studio programme promoting new and culturally diverse work: using the space to provide opportunities for local voluntary arts organisations and to develop the creative infrastructure of the city.

Please see above for the artistic programme details during the closure of York Theatre Royal.

7. Provide student placements and careers advice to support the development of a strong local creative sector

Placements for young people during this period of closure have been more difficult to manage as the organization planned its reoccupation of the Theatre Royal.

Our major placement opportunity has been the TakeOver project for 12 – 25 year olds. In this period we held a two week Festival managed by the TakeOver young people at the National Railway Museum.

A TakeOver Board of 15 young people and over 70 others in roles as varied as Artistic Director and Stage Technician programmed, organized and ran a multi-arts Festival in the Museum. The programme of arts events included new theatre commissions, small-scale theatrical events, performance poetry, film, music and lots of participatory arts activities. Theatre performances took place in railway carriages, goods trucks and promenade through the museum.

It took place throughout the half term week and was very successful in animating the museum spaces in very new ways. 78 performances during the 10 day Festival were further enhanced by a continuous programme of Creation Stations across the museum that encouraged people of all ages to take part in arts activities.

8. Develop the De Grey Complex, along with the Theatre, as a creative production hub for the city

The De Grey Complex has been very busy during this period with the closure of York Theatre Royal.

The York Theatre Royal box office and reception moved into the De Grey Rooms. We managed a “pop-up” café in the Rooms giving regular theatre café visitors continuity with the theatre and a venue for regular groups to meet.

The Friends of York Theatre Royal maintained a weekly craft session in the Rooms and held a Craft Fair in November.

York College performing arts students continue to be based in the De Grey Rooms for dance and drama sessions.

There was a programme of public dance events including masked balls and tea dances.

Costume Hire and the theatre’s Costume makers are based in the De Grey Rooms.

Permanent residents in De Grey House include Pilot Theatre Company and The Society of Ticket Agents and Retailers, a national agency.

The De Grey Rooms and House continue to offer creative production facilities for both the professional and voluntary arts. Companies using the spaces included tutti frutti, Flying Cloud Theatre, The Flanagan Collective, Telling Tales Theatre Company, Pilot Theatre, TongueTied,

Mud Pie Arts, Ensemble Theatre Company and Bad Apple Theatre Company.

9. Work with key stakeholders on the Cultural Quarter developments as well as other developments as appropriate

York Theatre Royal re-opened following a £6 million capital investment on 22 April 2016.

The project was funded by Arts Council Capital Lottery Funds, York Conservation Trust, City of York Council, and many major national and regional Trusts & Foundations. The community of York contributed well over £200,000 in individual donations.

Liz Wilson Chief Executive
York Citizens Theatre Trust
14 May 2016.