



MAKE A
DiFFERENCE

The ABTT's
MAKE A DIFFERENCE
Conference
“Recruitment and Retention”
Friday 21st April

Conference report

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FOREWARD

The ABTT's first MAKE A DIFFERENCE conference took place at the Albany Theatre on Friday April 21st 2023. The conference aim was to engage with the industry's current recruitment & retention crisis.

A short survey was conducted prior to conference day asking a wide range of industry practitioners for their thoughts and opinions on this topic. 437 responses were recorded and the data from this survey was presented to the conference delegates at a pre-conference meeting on March 31st. (The survey data can be found in the recruitment & retention survey report) Delegates were asked to digest the information presented, go back to their businesses and institutions, discuss thoughts and ideas on how we might progress, to find some actions to help improve recruitment and retention. The pre-conference offered a series of provocations for delegates to consider prior to attending the conference. The provocations were:

1. What are the **barriers** to achieving improvements in these areas?
Try to think of at least 2 for each point.
2. What initiatives & strategies have you practically implemented in your organisation that's had a positive impact to recruitment & retention? Be prepared to share the **things that have worked**.
3. Bring with you 1 proactive **idea or action** that you would like to move forward with in relation to one of the topics being discussed.

In addition the following prompt was offered:

Something to think about:

What ideas and thoughts on these issues do you have that need some more joined up thinking? *Who*

could you link with to achieve better results?

How can you expand your ideas so that they can become industry broad working achievements? *What*

organisations or companies do you need to work with to realise your ideas?
How can the ABTT help?

The Conference was facilitated by:

Mig Burgess Walsh – ABTT Co Chair, Senior Lecturer Guildford School of Acting/University of Surrey

Gareth Evans – Lecturer Guildford School of Acting / University of Surrey

Katy Downton – Senior Lecturer Guildford School of Acting / University of Surrey

Dr Michael Smalley - Senior Lecturer Guildford School of Acting / University of Surrey

Gill Allen – Freelance Production Educator (formally of Guildhall School of Music and Drama)

CONFERENCE FORMAT & STRUCTURE

The conference was facilitated as an action based proactive day of finding solutions to the problems raised.

Aims and Objectives:

Delegates were asked to reflect on their one aim or goal they would like to achieve from the day. They shared this with a person they didn't know. This person became their "accountability partner"

The following 3 topics were presented as a carousel exercise – delegates were asked to reflect on 3 areas within each topic: the barriers, what is working, and suggested actions for each area.

- **Job security**
- **Pay**
- **Education & Outreach**

The delegates were then put into break out rooms to discuss the following topics.

- **Staff Feeling Valued / Support in the work place**
- **Work Life Balance**

The delegates came back together to share their actions and agree united actions.

Action Planning

The delegates were then asked to fill in *Stop, Start, Continue* cards: outlining one thing they will stop doing, one thing they will continue doing, and one thing they will start doing. They shared this with their accountability partner.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Summary of the barriers

Exploring the practical barriers to solving recruitment & retention issues is always a good way to start the process of developing strategies.

Money and *time* featured as barriers across all topics discussed.

Interestingly another clear theme in the messaging across all topics was *communication*. People don't feel like they are being listened to, or given the chance to voice concerns. On more than one occasion across multiple topics people talked of "*production and profit over people*". There seems to be a general opinion that *people* and *staff* are not being prioritised on the business agenda; This links well with the *money* and *time* barrier; if people are not a priority, then finding time and money to develop plans to tackle these issues will also not be a priority.

There were a variety of *practical barriers* mentioned also: workloads, lack of staff, high expectations, over ambitious productions and schedules, lack of flexibility and the high numbers of freelance staff in our sector. All of them featured more than once across many topics discussed. Another theme that ran through all the topics discussed was our *culture* backstage, exemplified by "The show must go on". Our commitment and passion drive our work ethic and often takes priority over our own well-being needs. Lots of things were raised in the "what is working section", but quite often people mentioned the lack of desire to try new methods or systems, citing the phrase "we have always done it this way".

Ultimately no real actions and changes can be implemented if we don't change our attitude towards trying new things. It starts with this willingness to try; only then can we start to communicate and hear people's views on the problems and what can be done to solve them. Finally, if we don't start committing time, budget, thoughts and strategy towards our greatest assets; the people, then we can never hope to retain them in our sector, and recruiting new talent will remain a challenge.



Things that are working

It was apparent while reading through the collective thoughts on "things that worked" that some people are making more progress on these topics than others. The overarching theme that carried through in this section was a need to *share* good practices so that others can get on board with actions that can promote change. A host of great ideas and initiatives were mentioned, which are summarised in each section. Many conference participants were keen to hear more and discover if some of these ideas could work in their place of work. It is clear the need to share things that work is key in making bigger broader industry developments in solving recruitment and retention.

Another key theme to cover all sections in this area was training and development. Training is needed across the board: for line managers and senior leaders around well-being and staff communication, and also a commitment to development for staff, not just entry level staff but mid-career staff as an incentive to stay in roles.



SOME ACTIONS THAT ARE HAPPENING AS A RESULT OF CONFERENCE

This page outlines actions that are in progress as a result of the conference. Options to join are included.

Education and Outreach

1. The ABTT Outreach & Visibility Working Group

This newly formed working group is a sub-group of the ABTT Training and Education Committee. Its aim is to gather good outreach projects and share practice, develop new ones and focus on strategies to showcase and make backstage roles more visible to young people.

Andy Franks chairs this working group, and Chris Stone is supporting him. They have a Teams group set up, and to express an interest to join please contact sebastian@abtt.org.uk

2. The ABTT Training and Education Committee

We already have an active and vibrant training and education committee chaired by Sebastian Barnes. They are always on the lookout for willing and engaged new members that have the time to join and work on new ideas and concepts. To express an interest to join contact sebastian@abtt.org.uk

3. Current Outreach programmes

There are several active and vibrant outreach initiatives up and running. If you would like to commit and do more in this area, consider getting in touch with them. They are always on the lookout for support from industry.

Theatre Craft:

Theatre Craft is the UK's largest free careers event for anyone aged 16-30 seeking off-stage roles in theatre.

Network with employers and industry professionals in our live marketplace and take part in off stage Q and A's, workshops and panel talks in person.

Theatre craft 2023 will take place on Monday 20th November at the Royal Opera House.

Contact projectmanager@theatrecraft.org if you would like to get involved and support.

Production Futures:

One mission to take the most exciting industry on the planet to the young people.

Production Futures is an initiative for young people to learn, train, network, and develop work opportunities in production across all aspects of. Live Events, Music, Festivals, Touring, Theatre, TV, Broadcast, Film, and Virtual Production. We champion equality, diversity and employability showing all entry level opportunities and highlighting hidden job roles backstage in this exciting industry. Production Futures show now tours the UK together with world leading experts and partners, opening opportunities for industry to engage with young talent.

Contact: h.eakins@productionfutures.co.uk if you would like to get involved and support

Skillscene –

The backstage careers development forum Skillscene exists to nurture, support and highlight the pathways and opportunities for people to gain and increase competence at all stages of their career. We want to better explain the skills, knowledge, training and experience required in the technical and backstage sector, helping to enable accessible and sustainable careers.

Skillscene has its origins in the Theatre Technical Training Services (TTTS), an organisation created by eight leading subsidised theatre organisations, including the Nation Theatre, The Royal Opera House, and English National Ballet.

Contact: info@skillscene.com if you would like to get involved and support.

Get in Theatre?

Get Into Theatre is the essential website to help you find all the information and opportunities you need to pursue a successful career in theatre in the UK. From backstage to performing, training to apprenticeships, you will find up-to-date theatre jobs information and advice.

We believe that all young people - no matter who you are - should have the same chance to have a career in theatre. Many people do not know about all the job options in theatre or the different ways to make a start in a theatre career. That needs to change.

Get Into Theatre is an independent charity, generously supported by the Andrew Lloyd Webber Foundation, UK Theatre/Society of London Theatre, The Stage and Arts Council England.

Contact: Ahmet@getintothetheatre.org if you would like to get involved and support

Job Security

1. Job sharing/Flexible Working

If you have any good examples of job sharing / flexible working that you would like to share. Please feel free to send them to the ABTT. We are happy to work as a conduit to sharing and making these available as a resource to others. Send to chair@abtt.org.uk

Staff feeling valued/Support in the workplace

1. The AAPTLE Well-being Working Group

The Alliance of Associations and Professions in Theatre & Live Events group was formed in 2020 during lock down. It houses a variety of groups within our industry.

<https://aaptle.uk/>

The well-being working group has members from across all the groups and has actively been working on projects that develop practices around well-being in the workplace, including the 2021 well-being survey and the ABTT guidance notes.

They are always looking for support and new members to join and commit to helping with their up-and-coming projects.

If you would like to express an interest in joining, please email mig@abtt.org.uk

2. AAPTLE Well-being Working Group – RESPECT & DIGNITY industry policy template.

The next project that the working group will be looking to undertake is the development of a respect and dignity policy template. With many conference participants reporting incidents of bad behaviour, poor communication and

inappropriate language and tone, as a working group we felt it was the time to remind people in industry that our working world although unique and different, is still a workplace. We may well work in a creative environment but that does not give licence for people to forget the correct etiquette and behaviour in communicating with others in the workplace.

The working group will be looking to design and develop a template policy to share with industry in the hope people can download adopt and adapt. Introducing the policy, we hope will empower people to raise concerns if they arise, remind people of their behaviour and start to tackle a cultural change backstage.

If you would like to join and contribute to this project, get in touch with mig@abtt.org.uk

3. W1 and W2 Guidance notes in the Mental Health and Well-being series.

W1 Guidance note - This guidance note advises and offers ideas on how to better support freelancers in the work place. Including casual staff. You can download the guidance note for free here: <https://www.abtt.org.uk/product/guidance-note-w1/>

W2 Guidance note – This guidance note offers support and guidance on how to start conducting work related stress risk assessments. You can hear more about it at a seminar scheduled at the ABTT theatre show 11.15 – 11.45am 8th June.

You can watch a recording of the guidance note presentation here:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Xf3IbNoVtA>

You can download the guidance note for free here:

<https://www.abtt.org.uk/product/guidance-note-w2/>

PLEASE NOTE - There is an update to this guidance note under development with a better, more considered and easier to navigate risk assessment template. This will be available soon – more details at the seminar.

4. Mental Health Training

The ABTT offer discounted rates for Mental Health training.

The 2 day in person/4 half days online Mental Health First Aid training qualifies attendees to leave as a MHFAider. Introducing this model into your workplace is a great way to offer a base line of support for workers.

<https://www.abtt.org.uk/courses/abtt-mental-health-first-aid/>

We are also launching a new MHFA England course: MHFA Champion course.

This is a one day in person course (or 2 half days online). You learn more about mental health, gain awareness, ability to spot signs and gain skills to support positive well-being in the workplace. A great course for anyone who wants to know more but doesn't perhaps want to commit to being a MHFAider, especially line managers.

<https://mhfaengland.org/individuals/adult/1-day/>

If you are interested in any of our MHFA courses, contact admin@abtt.org.uk

5. Mental Health Sign Posting document.

The AAPTLE Well-being working group have developed a template document for sign posting in the workplace. You can download the populated document here for free:

https://www.abtt.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/AAPTLE_MHWP_Poster.pdf

Designed to be displayed on notice boards and the back of toilet doors.

Work Life Balance

1. The ABTT Work Life Challenge – in support of Backup, Theatrical Guild & Stage Hand

This will be launched at the 2023 ABTT Theatre show. We want to encourage individuals and workplaces to craft a challenge around dedicating more time to our activities and pursuits outside of work.

The aim is to encourage you to consider and promote a better attitude towards obtaining a healthy balance between work and other life activities that help us to unwind and get away from the pressures of our working world. Start a walking group, get together with others that run, start a weekly yoga practice before shows, baking, crafting anything you like - but make sure it makes you smile!

For more information visit the ABTT fundraising page: – <https://abtt-work-life-challenge.raisely.com/>

2. The AAPTLE Well-being Working Group – *Work life balance easy wins* document

The well-being working group are currently working on developing an industry easy win towards work life balance policy. If you would like to join and contribute, please get in touch. mig@abtt.org.uk

We want to hear from you.

What ideas did you have as a result of attending our conference day? Or, if you couldn't make it, what ideas has this process and report sparked? Please do share them with us as we would love to capture the great work this conference produces. If you have an idea that needs some support perhaps, we can share and find like-minded people who can help you on your way.

Please contact admin@abtt.org.uk to share.

AIMS AND GOALS

The delegates were asked to think of one goal or aim they would like to achieve from this conference day. They were asked to go and share this aim with a person they didn't know. This person became their "accountability partner"

They came back into a plenary session to share some of them and they can be categorised into these three sectors:

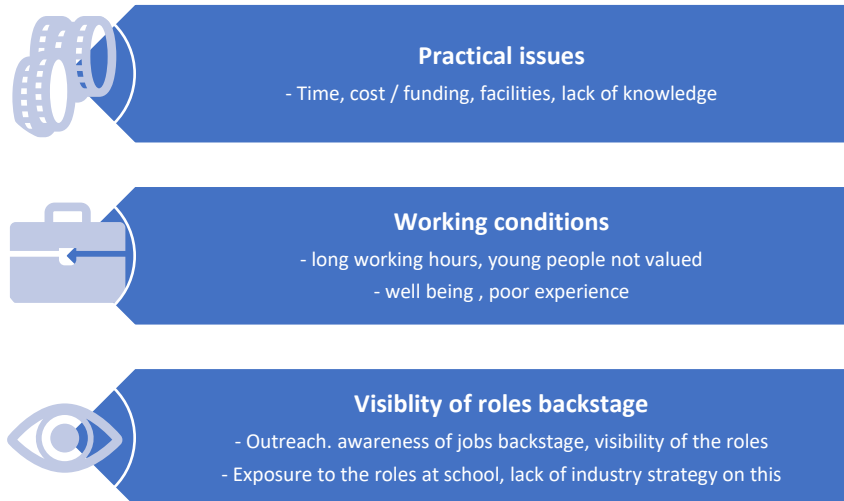


EDUCATION & OUTREACH

Job security, Pay and Education and Outreach were presented as a carousel exercise. Delegates were asked to reflect on the 3 areas: the barriers, things that work, and suggested actions for each of the topics. They posted their thoughts on each.

Barriers

Some of the barriers that were presented have been identified and grouped as follows:



Things that work

- Apprenticeship scheme
- Input into new government “T” levels
- In house short courses
- Job shares
- Wellbeing being talked about widely and on the agenda
- Bringing students and young people to the ABTT Theatre show
- Contacts lists of educational groups/sharing good practice

Actions

Support & share existing groups	Sharing Training Models that work	Training and support
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • School Theatres Support Group - http://stsg.org.uk/ • Production Futures - https://www.productionfutures.co.uk/ • Theatre Craft - https://www.theatrecraft.org/ • Get into theatre - https://getintothetheatre.org/ 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lesson plans, training • Create a unified industry template for training to improve quality control • Sharing info with parents on careers in backstage roles • More visibility of jobs you can do backstage 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • For mid career, career changers, returners • Investing in training for retention

PAY

Job security, Pay and Education and Outreach were presented as a carousel exercise. Delegates were asked to reflect on the 3 areas: the barriers, things that work, and suggested actions for each of the topics. They posted their thoughts on each.

Pay was a delicate topic to consider as several key unions and organisations are currently in conversations around pay. Some of those people made this very clear at our pre-conference meeting on March 31st. Some delegates couldn't attend due to commitments and workloads linked to these on-going pay conversations, but were all very keen to be updated on the topics discussed across the board (not just pay). A separate more in-depth report documenting all the comments posted has been created and this has been sent to all those that wanted to be informed.

Barriers

Some of the barriers that were presented have been identified and grouped as follows:



Things that work

It should be noted that only 5 responses were recorded from 70 delegates, which suggests that this matter is delicate and not easy to solve, or that people simply don't know how to improve things relating to pay.

1. Changing the balance of expectation of over time vs salary	4. Social media forums discussing pay and rates to expect
2. Transparency of rates	5. Flexible schedules and allowing work outside the venue
3. Tighter controls of budget and more advertising to allow shows to survive and attract new workers	

Actions

Below is a summary of the key themes of the comments:

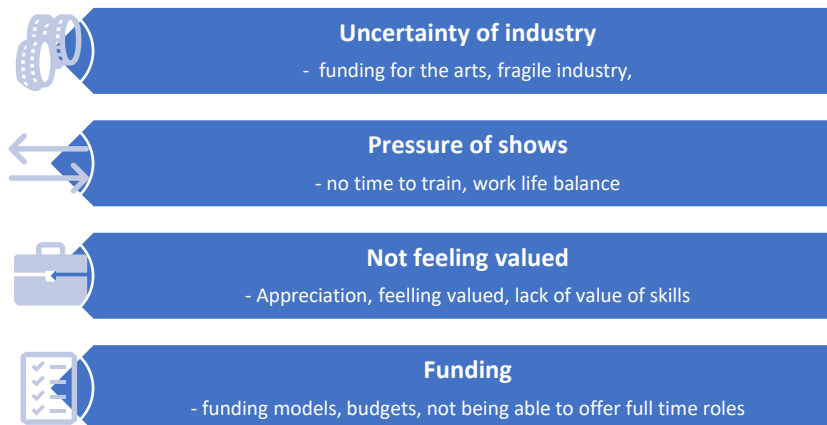
Tackling the 'working for free culture'	Training / Share wider benefits	Transparency of pay	United voice on the issue
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • clarity on overtime • clearer rules for freelancers • review of buy out contracts? • Stop designer/students /early careers early career working for free to gain experience • Expenses and pay for placements 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In particular training for freelancers, subsidy, being included in plans by employers, consideration of time for CPD. • Investment in staff development • Show tickets / staff benefits 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sharing pay scales • Parity of pay across the sector • Compare and review pay to other sectors 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Social media coverage • Training on how to negotiate pay

JOB SECURITY

Job security, Pay and Education and Outreach were presented as a carousel exercise. Delegates were asked to reflect on the 3 areas, the barriers, things that work, and suggested actions for each of the topics. They posted their thoughts on each

Barriers

Some of the barriers that were presented have been identified and grouped as follows:



Things that work

- Job Shares
- Training
- Staff development
- Part time roles / job shares – sharing templates that work
- Flexible working
- Management and Leadership strategies & training

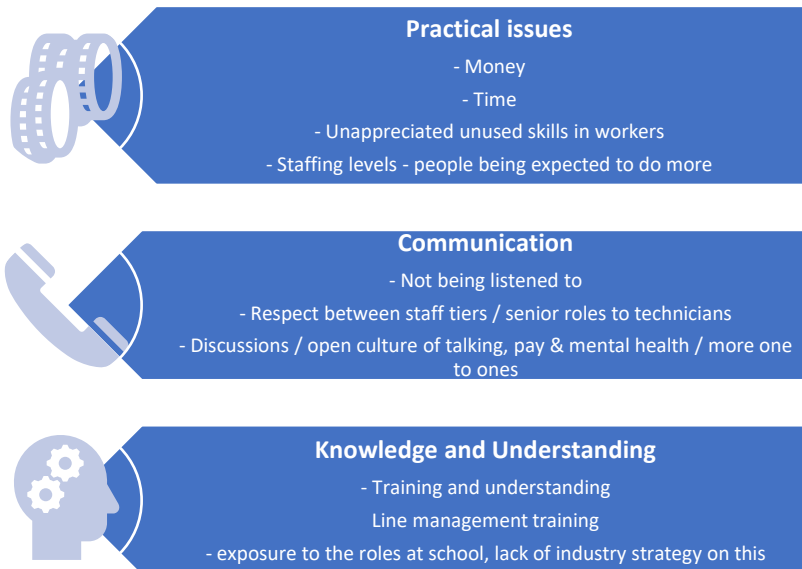
Actions

Job sharing / Flexible roles	Training	Freelancers / casuals
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • developing ways to make this work • normalising 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Training, CPD development for staff • Training for line managers • Nurture and offer career development 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can we offer more security? • Take ownership of and responsibility for them more

STAFF FEELING VALUED / SUPPORT IN THE WORK PLACE

Barriers

Some of the barriers that were presented have been identified and grouped as follows:



Things that work

- **Practical** - working hours reduced, no overnights, rota's being arranged 4/5 weeks in advance.
- **Training** – Shadowing/upskilling, offering career progression. Learning opportunities. Allocating time for professional development.
- **Better Pay**
- **Communication** – Consulting with staff, getting feedback, promoting a culture of talking. Team building activities, lunches, networking. Sharing things that work.
- **Well-being** – Occupational health, employee assistance programmes. Mental Health First Aiders. Accessing companies designed to support in this area e.g. Applause for Thought.

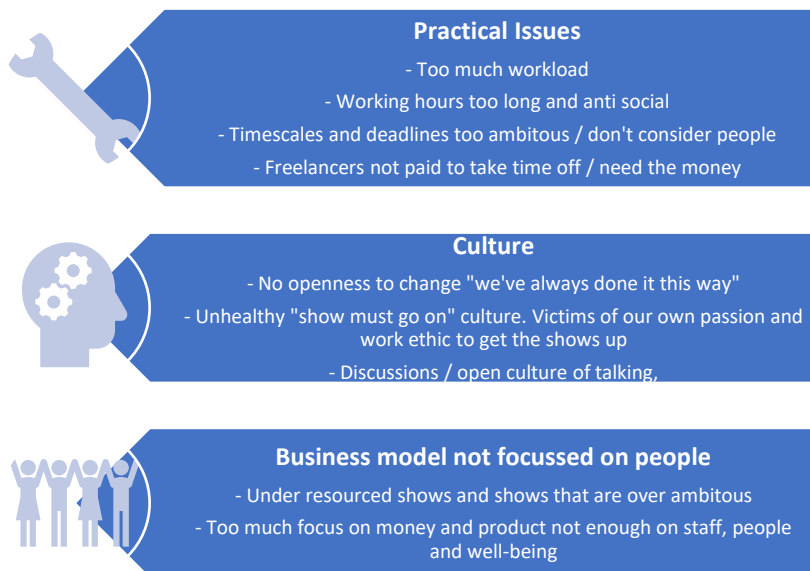
Actions

Culture	Employment processes	Business strategy	Sharing and sign posting
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More communication & information sharing • Genuine support not box ticking • Effective employers' pastoral care • Bring back the passion and fun • United approach not them and us. Celebrating successes of staff 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Better inductions • Working conditions - 2 tech session days • Better policies on well-being • Respect and inclusion • Flexible working / sabbaticals / time to upskill • Adding support to tool box talks 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Line management training • Training for soft skills • Mentoring • Allocating time and money to staff wellbeing • Mental health awareness 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Access to support, mental health and financial. Backup / Theatrical guild • Inform, join and support industry committees. • Collaboration in training

WORK LIFE BALANCE

Barriers

Some of the barriers that were presented have been identified and grouped as follows:



Things that work

- **Practical** - 2 session tech days, using 'Reset Better' charter. Daytime fit ups and get outs. Working Time Directive and HSE H/S 1974 regs. Shorter production days.
- **Planning** – Correct staffing levels. Rotas 4/5 weeks in advance. Scheduling and taking breaks.

- **Working conditions** – Encourage staff engagement, feedback etc. Working from home when possible. Upskilling opportunities for staff. Remove building responsibilities for show staff. Enforcing that designs come in with plenty of time for tech staff to process. Job sharing. Encourage down time and protect this time. Hybrid working. Honouring holiday, allowing sick days and protecting this time.

Actions

Culture	Employment processes	Practical
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be open to making changes • Prioritise time and planning for people in business objectives • More communication with staff / debriefs • Manage expectations - shows need to reflect resources • Encourage a culture that allows time off/sickness allow 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maintain appropriate staffing levels • Job sharing • Flexibility in job roles 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No emails out of hours • Encouraging work boundaries • Schedule in pack up and down time • Apply realistic times to schedules with contingencies • Sharing information that works across industry

STOP START CONTINUE



The delegates were asked at the end of the conference to fill in a *stop, start, continue* card: one thing they will stop doing, one they will continue doing, and one thing they will start doing. They were then asked to go and share it with their accountability partner. Delegates were encouraged to share contact details with their accountability partner and check in with each other on how they are progressing with their aims and commitments.

The main themes gathered from the delegates "Start" section are outlined below. The top 3 topics are listed in order of popularity. (Please note number 2 and 3 have joint topics as they had equal amounts of commitments.)

- 1. Developing work life balance policies and good practices**
- 2. Networking, joining groups, gathering together and sharing ideas
Developing training, committing to CPD**
- 3. Mental Health First Aid training
Developing ideas and committing to outreach programmes to showcase
backstage work**

Other topics raised worth mentioning:

- Developing better appraisals for all staff including casuals and freelance staff
- Job sharing and flexible working policies
- Improve communication and culture with senior management
- Being more confident to say "no". Working within the means to achieve shows.

SUMMARISED ACTIONS FROM CONFERENCE

Education and Outreach

1. OUTREACH

Share and support existing groups and organisations that support outreach work

2. TRAINING

Share templates of good practice for in house training schemes
Develop broader industry models to release and use in wider industry
Develop and update existing training models – ABTT Bronze / Silver / Gold
Develop training for mid-career workers

3. VISIBILITY OF BACKSTAGE ROLES

Develop strategies to promote backstage roles to broader public
Social media campaigns, BOH bows, etc

Pay

1. Share the conference findings with Unions and SOLT / UK Theatres.

Job Security

1. JOB SHARING / FLEXIBLE WORKING

Share models that work.
Develop industry guidance and practice

2. TRAINING

Line management training

3. FREELANCERS

Acknowledge the high numbers. Commit to taking ownership of them and looking after them.

Staff Feeling Valued / Support in the workplace

1. PEOPLE OVER PROFIT

Commitment to a change of culture prioritising people
Policies on well-being, staff and people. Respect & dignity
Money and time on staff and people
Mental health training

2. LINE MANAGEMENT TRAINING

3. COMMUNICATION

Staff feeling that they are being heard

Work Life Balance

1. COMMITMENT TO CULTURE CHANGE

Time money and business strategy on staff and people
Communication with staff
People on the agenda not just profits and product

2. SHARE THINGS THAT WORK

Job share templates, flexible working etc

3. WORK LIFE BALANCE POLICY

Develop a work life balance policy and share a wider industry version for all.

2023 MAKE A DIFFERENCE Conference Delegate list:

AAPTLE Well-being working group	Production Futures
All together Theatre	Production Managers Forum
Almedia Theatre	RADA
Ambassador Theatre Group	Royal Central School of Speech and Drama
Applause for Thought	Robe
Apprentice	Royal Birmingham Conservatoire
Association for Lighting Production and Design	Royal Opera House
Association of British Theatre Technicians	Sadlers Wells
Association of Sound Designers	Southbank centre
ATG Phoenix Theatre	Stage Management Association
ATG Productions	TAIT
Ambassador Theatre Group (ATG)	The Albany
Battersea Arts Centre	Theatre People
Bectu	University of Bristol
Birmingham Rep Theatre	University of Greenwich
Brit School	Watermill Theatre
CAST	Welsh National Opera
CharcoalBlue	Westminster City Council
Clearcom	Whitelight
Create Britain	Wolsey Theatre
Delfont Mackintosh	
Disney	
Factory international	
Freelance Costume Professional	
Freelance Costume professional	
Freelance Stage & Production Manager	
Freelancer Production / Events Manager	
Freelancers Make Theatre Work	
Fuercoe seating	
Harper Tackley Consultants	
Independent Theatre Council	
Lincoln School of Performing Arts	
Mountview	
Mulberry Schools Trust	
National Theatre	
National Theatre Wales	
Nederlander	
Student from Royal Central School of Speech and Drama	
Nimax	