



MAKE A
DIFFERENCE

The ABTT MAKE A DIFFERENCE Conference 2024

**“Bridging the gap between education and
employment to create a better industry”**

Friday 12th April

CONFERENCE REPORT

Written and compiled by: **Mig Burgess Walsh**
Senior Lecturer – Guildford School of Acting / University of Surrey
ABTT Co Chair

Table of Contents

FOREWARD.....	3
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	4
SUGGESTED ACTIONS	5
Things you can do or join to MAKE A DiFFERENCE	7
Pre-Conference	9
If you attended last year’s Conference, did you manage to action any of the outcomes regarding the recruitment and retention crisis?	9
Do you think that the education and employment sector are working well together right now?	9
Would you be interested in engaging with projects that help bring our Education and Employment sectors together to benefit our industry?	9
Summary.....	9
CONFERENCE FORMAT & STRUCTURE.....	11
Education Focus Groups Key Findings	12
Employment Focus Groups Key Findings	13
Plenary Session – Education and Employment Discussions	14
EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT MIXED GROUPS	16
Expectations of early career practitioners	16
Outreach / Awareness	16
Placements / Work Experience	17
The goal of education	18
Funding.....	18
Recruiting and training teachers	19
APPENDIX 1	21
APPENDIX 2	22

FOREWARD

The ABTT's 2nd MAKE A DIFFERENCE Conference took place at the Royal Central School of Speech & Drama on Friday April 12th 2024.

The conference title was:

“Bridging the gap between education and employment to create a better industry”

We had 95 delegates in attendance. With 50 from education and rest from industry. Several industry associations were in attendance as well as representatives from SOLT and UK Theatre and Bectu.

The Conference was facilitated by:

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

The following conference facilitators all work at the Royal Central School of Speech & Drama:

- **Kate Lane** – Reader & Head of Department (Producing)
- **Nick Moran** – Senior Lecturer, Course Leader Production lighting & Lighting Design
- **Lars Davidson** – Production technical staff
- **Paul Colewell** – Lecturer Technical & Production Management
- **Ros Sobotnicki** – Lecturer, Lighting
- **Lauren Patman** – Course leader of Stage and Technical Theatre

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The most popular theme that education wanted to share with employment was the “care & welfare” of the next generation as they enter the employment sector. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The most popular theme that employment wanted to share with education was outreach and diversity. Inspiring new people to backstage work, but also achieving a broader diversity in the workforce.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> There is a united agreement by both employment and education that they want to communicate and work more together 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> There is a united agreement by both education & employment to want to improve outreach and visibility of backstage roles to young people.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> There is a disparity in thinking on “graduate expectations”. Employers think they expect too much. Education are saying that what the next generation want has changed. It was clear that on this issue there was a difference of opinion. It would be good to explore and talk more about this area. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> There is a clear theme and message that working conditions are not desirable for retaining our trainees.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> More education opportunities for workers when they enter the employment sector are needed. Mid-career and personal development opportunities are needed to continue learning and retain staff. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> More opportunities for education to link and venture into the employment sector. More flexible structures in education to allow placements and work experience.

SUGGESTED ACTIONS

Employment

1. Invest and start to improve in areas of welfare and working conditions.
Employment to acknowledge and engage in improving working welfare practices.
2. Employment to commit and be more involved in actions around outreach.
An investment in time and budget to support these outreach actions to invest in the talent pipeline and future employees.
3. Communication and links with education.
Employment to reach out and link with education to learn more about the teaching, contribute to the content and understand the next generation of employee's. i.e CV's, interview techniques, employability lessons etc.
4. Explore more opportunities to listen and hear the needs and wants of the next generation of employees. Include them in your planning and any wider industry discussions and developments.
5. More consideration, investment and provision of mid-career and personal development training for workers. Continuous professional development for employees.
6. Provide more opportunities for placements and work experience.
7. Acknowledge and utilise the skill set of the teachers in the education sector. Work with them to harness their skills to develop employment training and personal development.

Education

1. The employment sectors most popular theme to share was "outreach" and diversity.
Education to work to devise strategies to reach a broader more diverse talent pool.
2. Give more "real time" advice to graduates on "real time" employment expectations such as pay.
3. Explore a less rigid structure to allow more work placements and links to the employment sector.
4. Create opportunities for employment to come in and work with education.
5. Support to create industry guidance on best practice for placements.
6. Develop a training course for the employment sector so they know how to work with students on placement and understand inclusive language.
7. Consider having external employment businesses to consult and help with curriculum design – like an external examiner role.
8. Allow time for teachers to keep personal employment experience. So that broader wider understanding of the employment sector is retained by teaching staff.

UNITED GOALS – Employment & Education

1. Further discussions and conversations to be had around the topic of “graduate job expectations when entering the employment sector”.

Both parties have different feelings on this. Some more nuanced understanding of each side’s perspective will help to balance the next generations wants and what can be achieved.

2. Agreed goals and strategies on visibility of backstage roles. Can we all start doing weekly backstage bows? Social media and exposure of your offstage roles.
3. Working to devise united “outreach” projects that education and employment can support with funds, time, research and working hours.
4. Centralise place to post work placements and experience opportunities.
5. Industry guidance on best practice for placements.
6. More opportunities for education and employment to meet, talk, and develop ideas.
7. Explore united funding opportunities – outreach, sector visibility.
8. United approach to lobbying for funding and government support.

Things you can do or join to MAKE A DIFFERENCE

Join the MAKE A DIFFERENCE Facebook Group:

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/898126232067785/>

There are community chats available where you can find like-minded people and discuss the topics that were of interest to you at the Conferences. These chats will grow, and if you can think of any that don't exist that you think should, then let an admin know and we can create that for you!

If you have any information on upcoming events, want to share wins (or losses), or have documents and links that may be of interest to people in the group please feel free to share as much or as little as you wish!

Files are available at the top of the group, including presentations and useful information that you may find helpful in your discussions and activities.

We are here to help you, so if you need anything then please don't hesitate to get in touch with the Admin who will be happy to help.

Enjoy, be creative, but most of all, let's MAKE A DIFFERENCE together.

Sign up to Inspiring Futures:

<https://www.inspiringthefuture.org/>

Inspiring the Future is a flagship service of the Education and Employers charity. They connect workplace volunteers with schools and colleges to broaden children and young people's horizons, raise their aspirations and increase their motivation to learn.

Every young person in our country, wherever they live, whatever their parents' or carers' circumstances, should have the opportunity to meet a diverse range of volunteers and hear first-hand about jobs and the world of work.

Schools sign up and post opportunities for outside working professionals to come and speak to their students. All you need to do is sign up, set your boundaries of where you are prepared to travel and schools will contact you with opportunities.

This is your chance to talk and share more about our industry and the jobs we have available.

Join the ABTT Outreach and Visibility working group

The ABTT has an Outreach and Visibility working group, which is a sub-group of the ABTT Training and Education Committee. This working group is dedicated to working on initiatives and sharing best practice on how to improve the visibility of off-stage

If you would like to join this working group contact admin@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?

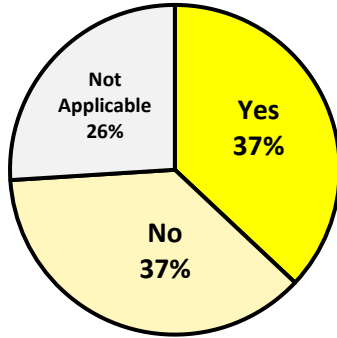
Please do share them with us as we would love to capture the great work this conference produces. If you have an idea that needs some support perhaps, we can share and find like-minded people who can help you on your way.

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

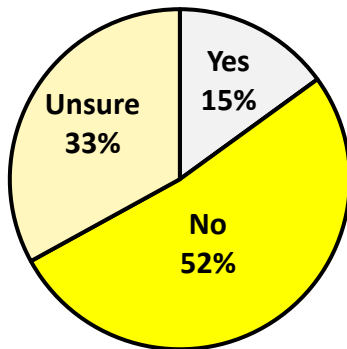
Pre-Conference

The online preconference was held on Weds 27th March 2024. Delegates were asked to attend this to be presented with the key themes of consideration ahead of the full conference day.

Attendees were asked 3 questions:



If you attended last year's Conference, did you manage to action any of the outcomes regarding the recruitment and retention crisis?



Do you think that the education and employment sector are working well together right now?

Answer	% of Votes
Yes	100%
No	0%
Unsure	0%

Would you be interested in engaging with projects that help bring our Education and Employment sectors together to benefit our industry?

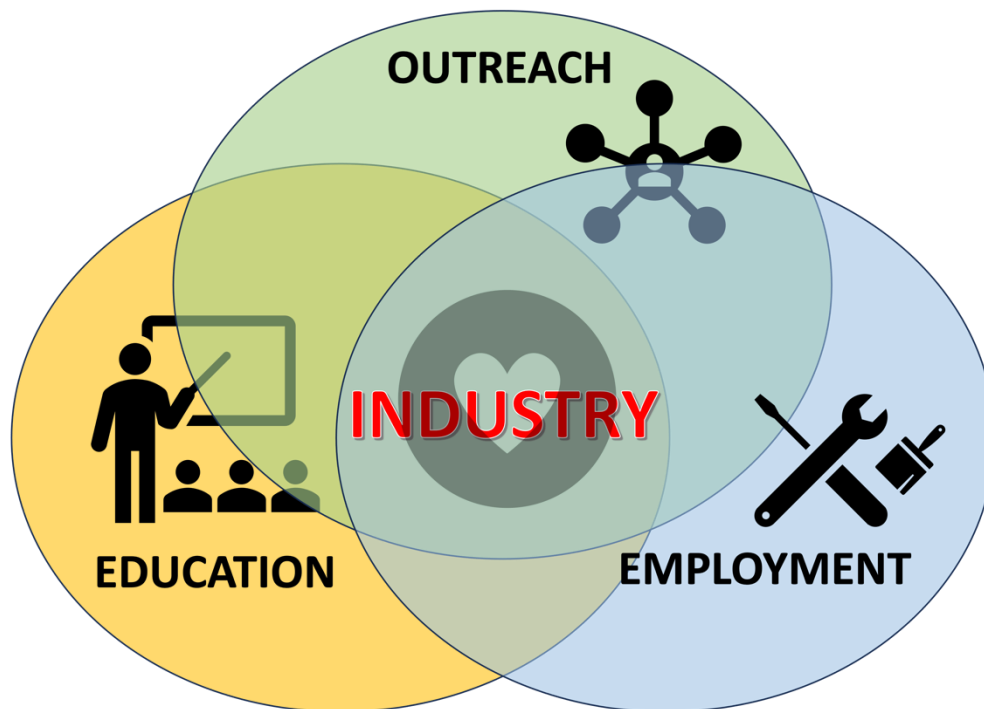
Summary

- Half of the people that attended last year's conference have committed to actions.
- Over half of the people that attended the pre-conference feel that education and employment are not working well together.
- Everyone that came to pre-conference are interested in working on projects that help bring education and employment together.

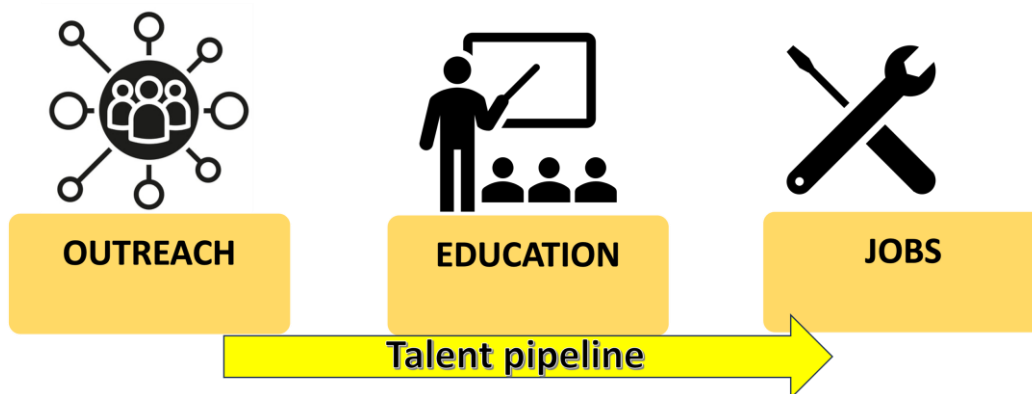
The original title of this year's conference was:
"Bridging the gap between education & industry".

The title was changed to reflect a more united and more holistic approach to the term "industry". One where it is acknowledged that both parties work together to nurture the talent pipeline. Both work symbiotically and together they make up our industry.

It was also acknowledged that there was a third section to our wider industry "outreach". Defined as the section that inspires and gets people interested in careers backstage, pre university and training.



It was agreed that it is both education's and employment's responsibility to support and develop the outreach sector. It is not just the role of education to inspire the next generation, it needs to be a united industry goal.



CONFERENCE FORMAT & STRUCTURE

Morning sessions – education and employment groups (not mixed)

In the morning sessions we put only education delegates into groups with others from education. The same with delegates from employment.

The groups went into break out rooms for more focussed discussions and we had;

- 5 groups of delegates from Education
- 4 groups of delegates from Employment

All of the groups came back into a plenary session to share their findings.

Afternoon sessions – education and employment groups mixed

We took 6 key themes from the morning session:

1. Expectations of early career practitioners
2. Outreach / Awareness
3. Placements / Work experience
4. The goal of education
5. Funding
6. Recruiting and Training teachers

Delegates were asked to go to the theme they most wanted to talk more about and consider ideas and actions to make a difference.

All the groups came back into a plenary session to share their thoughts.

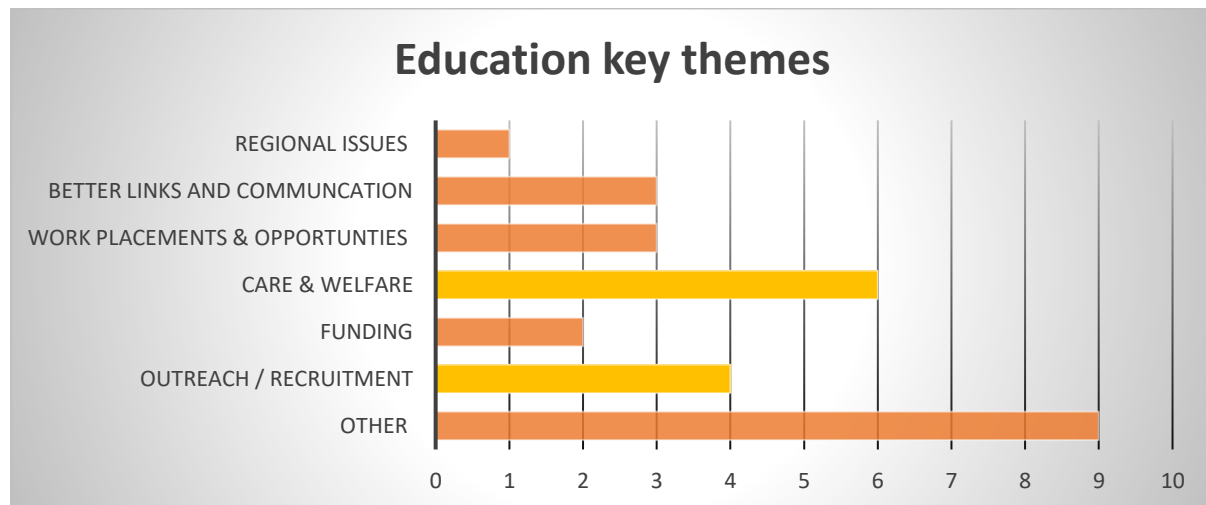
Education Focus Groups Key Findings

There were 5 groups of delegates that identified as being from education.

The top key theme from all the groups I have collected under the title “Care and Welfare”.

Under this banner the groups talked about:

- The high level of welfare provision that is required by all education establishments. Students and learners become accustomed to wellbeing provision with their education institutions, but upon graduation the employment sectors consideration and provision for wellbeing is not to the same standard.
- The noted increase and declaration of mental health conditions and neurodiversity within our student cohorts. Is the wider industry aware of this and are they prepared for what this means for our workplaces?
- The expectation of our next generation is very different to how it might have been when we trained.
- A worry that pay, current working conditions and work life balance wont retain our next generation.
- A desire and want for more diversity and consideration for inclusivity in the workplace.



Recruitment and outreach were a clear theme across the groups and was the need to inspire the next generation.

There was clear desire from all the education groups for a want to communicate and work better with the employment sector.

For a full list of the summarised raw data see [APPENDIX 1](#)

Employment Focus Groups Key Findings

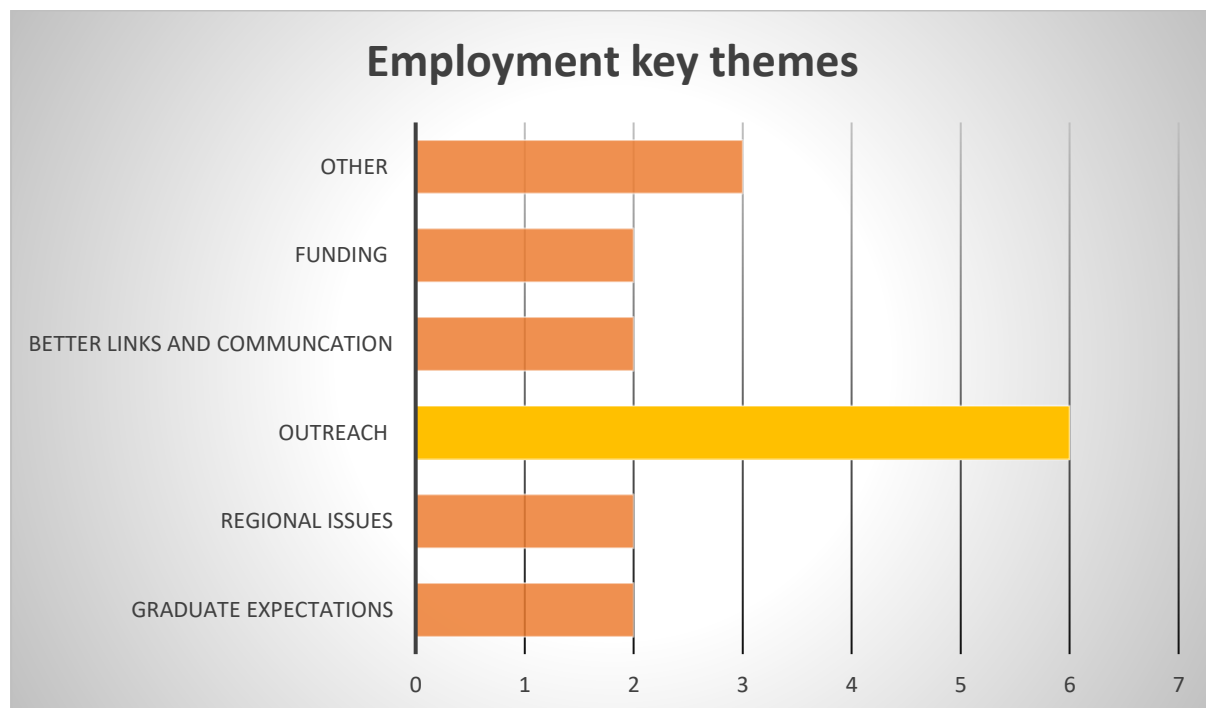
There were 4 group of delegates that identified as being from employment.

The top key theme from all the groups I have collected under the title “Outreach”.

There was a clear winning theme across the employment groups. Outreach was a popular and recurring theme.

Under this banner the groups talked about:

- The need to inspire the next generation at a much younger age i.e primary school age.
- A collected acknowledgement that schools don’t know enough about our sector.
- The desire to expand and recruit beyond just universities to improve diversity. Amateur theatre groups, job centres.
- The need to improve recruitment diversity.



Employment had a clear theme where they talked of graduate expectations. Not wanting to accept the lower crew roles.

For a full list of the summarised raw data see [APPENDIX 2](#)

Plenary session – Education and Employment Discussions

This is a summary of the key themes that arose from the 1st plenary session between education and employment. There were lots of questions and discussion around what the educators teaching content and structure was.

- Is management training covered?
- Are we training for the vacancies out in the sector?
- Do we train for these entry level roles?
- Why do we train for more senior and HOD roles?
- Is this contributing to higher expectations when students go into the employment sector?

The education sector talked openly about the challenges they are facing. The rising costs for the programmes and the rising fees for the learners. Universities are now very “market’ driven and what our next generation want, is not really what the backstage employment sector is offering - which is something we as a collective industry need to consider.

There were also reflections on how ridged our teaching structures are and how they aren’t flexible enough to allow for employment opportunities such as placements or onsite work. For example, some students are not free for Christmas shows.

There was a desire and lots of discussion about how courses can link more with the employment sector to get learners into the workplace earlier. A broader discussion was had around “vocational training”, being taught to do a job and the more nuanced “educational” training given at higher education level; where they learn broader skills in critical thinking, innovation and original thought.

The educators fiercely defended their education methods while the employment sector leaned more towards the short-term issue of getting people into these entry level roles. This can be seen from the rise in employment sector boot camps and short-term training courses.

Does the employment sector have in place the provisions and training to upskill these people into middle management and senior management roles later down the line?

We learnt from the 2023 Make a Difference Conference on recruitment & retention that there is a lack of mid-career learning and development opportunities. Employment sector training schemes need to factor in the broader people management and leadership skills that people will need later on in their careers. These are all covered and factored into higher education programmes.

Education gave a clear message of what our next generation want and expect in entering the employment sector. The desire for inclusive workplaces and a workplaces that prioritise welfare provision.

Early career workers have very different expectations to those of us that entered the sector 20 plus years ago. The economic climate they are navigating is different, and they are more educated around mental health, well-being and neurodiversity.

As an industry we need to acknowledge the wants desires and needs of our future work force and begin to plan and devise strategies in our workplaces to meet these needs, or we face continued recruitment and retention issue in the future.

It was very clear from the discussions that both sides had things to learn from each other and at present the problem may be that each is simply too focussed and consumed by their own immediate issues and problems.

The desire to want to listen and work more together as a united industry was clear to see in the room, but how we devise and create more structured and formal opportunities to work together isn't clear at present.

What is clear to see is that each sector, education and employment, is aware and working on things, but they aren't working together.

This conference offers a great chance to meet network and connect with wider industry and forge links to work on goals that make a difference to bridging the gap between employment and education to make a better industry.

EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT MIXED GROUPS

The afternoon saw the delegates mix and move towards a key theme that they were interested in. We had 6 themes:

1. Expectations of early career practitioners
2. Outreach / Awareness
3. Placements / Work experience
4. The goal of education
5. Funding
6. Recruiting and Training teachers

Expectations of early career practitioners

For this theme we wanted the group to consider:

- Generational differences
- Wages
- Student debt
- Work life balance
- Seniority of job roles
- Living wage

Theme 1	
Expectations of early career practitioners	
	Give students much more practical skills
	Can these skills be H.E wide? For example, an employment template or “What does a CV look like?”
	Stigma around crewing. Is it a step back?
	Seen as failing in your career after a degree, when you go into low paid jobs.
	Pay needs to be better to reflect how crucial the role is.
	Average pay guidance for graduates.
	Education should continue into employment.
	More representation of graduates at conferences and events.

Outreach / Awareness

For this theme we wanted the group to consider:

- Early years – School age
- Career visibility / advice
- Parent influence / knowledge
- Talent Pipeline
- Joined up outreach initiatives

Theme 2	
Outreach & Awareness	Primary schools are important point of contact.
	They have an end of year Christmas show.
	More flexibility in non-England curriculum
	Sadlers wells taught a teacher how to use their LX rig and that teacher has passed that on to students. It's now used for shows.
	Can we do volunteer days?
	Educate employers about the current landscape.
	ABTT Guidance notes.
	Encourage employers to give their staff time for outreach - speakers for schools.
	Support the Guides / Brownies to have a production side.
	Provide funding for employers to attend trade shows targeted at F.E
	Increase visibility.
	Backstage bows.
	Producers to facilitate " meet the production team"
	Suppliers to do outreach as bid awarding process.

Placements / Work Experience

For this theme we wanted the group to consider:

- Neurodiversity / welfare and wellbeing
- Promoting good work life balance
- Shadowing
- Mentoring
- Work immersion – provision for under 18

Theme 3	
Placements and work experience	ABTT to collect stats on who offers placements.
	Do we know how many there are and how they operate?
	Training for placements hosts and mentors.
	Can this lead to more uniform guidelines across H.E (hours, pay etc). Helps employers and doesn't exploit students.
	Centralised national job board open to all education providers.
	Placement good practice guide laying out good practice from both employers and student perspective.

	CPD for employers working with student. Teach them about educational language.
	Train the trainer programmes.

The goal of education

For this theme we wanted the group to consider:

- Curriculum content
- Modules for courses / construction
- Training v education - Practical versus intellectual skills
- Education language
- Inclusivity language
- Generic skills vs specialism
- Industry certification vs degrees

Theme 4	
Goals of education	Is course validation appropriate - done by industry?
	How good should we expect a graduate to be?
	Involve students in the discussion.
	Redesign degree courses with a whole in industry year in the middle.
	More involvement of industry to advise education of what the skills are?
	Basic skills are being done ok but can management skills / critical thinking be done better?
	Can someone even with soft skills graduate into management - probably not but can be accelerated.
	Manage student expectations as educators regarding first job.
	More opportunities for placements.
	Different models of provision around the country - use these to find ways of running different placements.
	Forum where employment and education can come together.
	External employment industry person.

Funding

For this theme we wanted the group to consider:

- Funding of education
- Funding of Outreach
- Funding for employers to do CPD / outreach

Theme 5	
Funding	Need for sector collaboration to bring in levies / monies for apprenticeship like construction
	Look at where the gaps are.
	What are the long-term implications for underfunding?
	Political lobbying needed.
	Centre for cultural value - Leeds university, UK theatre - Do these organisations have useful data already?
	What have universities already got? - HE funding to work with industry.
	Tax codes - We make events sic codes.
	What are we funding? - Lobbying? Embracing STEAM (Science, Technology, engineering, Art, Mathes) Need to ensure project aren't created and worked on in silo.
	A coordinator position needed?

Recruiting and training teachers

For this theme we wanted the group to consider:

- Understanding what it is to be a teacher
- Complexities of designing education schemes
- Industry mentors – do employment have the skills to do this?
- Teacher training – how do we help teachers stay current
- Supporting school drama teachers to teach tech skills

Theme 6	
Recruiting and training teachers	Recruiting trainers with industry experience / knowledge is almost impossible. Will this end apprenticeships?
	Needs flexibility from employers and institutions.
	Allow freelancers to have the opportunity to train. This needs funding as freelancer rates are higher.
	Mutual understanding of the internal structures between employment and education.
	There is a difference between being shown a skill / competency which industry can do and being taught the wider context which is education.

2024 MAKE A DIFFERENCE Conference Delegate list:

Rose Bruford College	Battersea Arts Centre
Middlesex University	University of Derby
Freelancer	STTF- Stockholm University of the Arts, Sweden
Trafalgar Theatres	Southbank Centre
Theatre People UK	Footprint Scenery
Association For Sound Design and Production	University of Nottingham
Delfont Mackintosh Ltd	California State University Fullerton, USITT
Rose Bruford College	Nigeria OISTAT
Derby theatre	Hartismere School
Nigeria OISTAT	Bath Spa University
Will Bowen	ALPD
Theatre Royal Wakefield	Mountview
Sadlers Wells	Sightline
Roundhouse	West Midlands Creative Alliance
University of Alberta, Canada	Performing arts school
BECTU	SGS College
Academy of Live Technology (formerly Backstage Academy)	Bristol Old Vic Theatre School
London Higher	Nederlander
LAMDA	Brit School
Stahl Theatre/ Oundle School	National Theatre
Northbrook College	Disney
Hartismere School	Robe Uk
Pen state Univeristy	Southbank Centre
Guildford School of Acting	d&b solutions UK Ltd
Production Futures	Occupational Awards Limited (OAL)
Lighthouse Poole	The Green Captains
Pleasance Theatre Trust	Royal Central School of Speech and Drama
National Theatre of Wales	University of Lincoln/Lincoln Arts Centre
Studio fabz / UAUIM / ARUP, Romania	Self employed
Royal Birmingham Conservatoire	MUTI Live
Durham University	Academy of Theatre and Dance, department Design & Technology
Guildford School of Acting	School of Theatre , TV and Film Sandiego USA
Mountview	Disney
Chichester College Group	Mulberry Schools Trust
The National Theatre	University of Hawaii at MÄnoa
Goode Projects ltd	The ABTT
Mousetrap production	Hartismere School
Theatre Institute Chattogram	Expertise Centre Technical Theatre - RITCS-EhB Brussels
University of Greewich	BEO Trekwerk B.V., Netherlands
Eightyseven Training	NODA
Wales Millennium Centre	University of Alberta, Canada
Aranyak Natyadal, Bangladesh Centre of Theatre Arts and Design (BACTAD), Bangladesh OISTAT Centre	Royal Opera House

APPENDIX 1

Education groups raw data:

Education group 1	
	Harder to recruit into courses.
	Pipeline dwindling.
	Funding cuts.
	Employment need to not close ranks but think holistically.
	Lobbying / looking outside of industry - think bigger and more strategically.
	Looking after graduates once in employment - CPDs/ Wellbeing.
Education group 2	
	Recruitment is an issue.
	We would like employers to consider how they care for a generation that is fundamentally different from ours.
	Don't poach students before the end of the course.
	Think about placements.
	Loan equipment.
	Don't make education speed up their process.
	Have more care for new Graduates and learning.
Education group 3	
	We want all areas to make visible the vast range of opportunities (not just in theatre) through industry events and paid work.
	Put info on website such as names of tech managers, so young people can get in touch.
	Hold events and open up what is available.
	Paid work needs to be properly paid and have a work life balance.
	Career progression.
Education group 4	
	Diversity - neurodiversity and cultural
	The talent pipeline
	Funding cuts
	Concern for regions where there isn't access
	Encourage art organisations to run sustainable / regular outreach to allow young people to have access to things
Education group 5	
	As educators we have a more holistic approach, we don't train people for one task only.
	We want industry to be appreciative of the difference between education & training.

APPENDIX 2

Employment groups raw data:

Employment group 1	
	Entry level jobs and graduate expectations.
	They don't want to work crew.
	Challenges are different between London, the South East and regions.
	Working with job centres in order to reach people in community with transferable skills.
Employment group 2	
	Limitations on schools acknowledged.
	Need to get young people involved earlier.
	Can we use amateur theatre groups to make technical theatre more visible in schools?
	Education and Employment to utilise amateur theatre far more.
Employment group 3	
	Collaboration.
	Organisations working more regionally.
	Employers supporting educators to help them deliver.
	We know money is an issue, but we need to encourage the people at the top to think of it as an investment in their future business.
	Not just a social responsibility.
Employment group 4	
	Look at early years education to show not just performance but the off-stage roles as well.
	Empower people to go to the gatekeepers of money and time (head teachers etc.)
	Language Education, attitudes and skills.
	Training, specific knowledge to do something