FRONT LINE ATTHE OLD VIC



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FRONT LINE

Generously supported by Richard Radcliffe Trust

Our renowned education and community projects inspire learning and connection. Each year we work with over 6,000 people of all ages, from five to 100+, in London and beyond, as well as a further 25,000 through our online learning platform, The Hub. We reach people at all stages of life to support skills development, employment prospects and wellbeing.

Our programmes build community cohesion, open up access to the arts and develop the emerging theatre professionals of tomorrow. We do this through a range of initiatives, including free theatre tickets, workshops delivered at The Old Vic, in schools, in the community and online, and through innovative employability and training programmes.

Our programmes are free to access and focus on engaging with communities who are underrepresented in the theatre industry, or who have limited access to it.



Front Line gives 16–30 year olds the opportunity to discover more about careers in customer service and develop key transferable skills through 26 hours of paid work experience with our Old Vic Front of House team.

In 2024–25, 18 participants worked across three Old Vic shows: *A Christmas Carol*, *Oedipus* and *The Brightening Air*. They took part in five paid shifts over a four-week period, shadowing various roles and departments, including Box Office, Cafe, Front of House, Stage Door, and supporting the Education & Community team. Participants were also offered the chance to watch an Old Vic show for free.



'Front Line has inspired me to try to pursue a career in theatre and to be more open minded to not just the acting part but the Front of House side'



RECRUITMENT AND CRITERIA

In Autumn 2024, we ran a combined recruitment process for *A Christmas Carol* and *Oedipus*. We emailed 590 organisations, charities and councils across all London boroughs; as well as posting the placement on job sites such as, Arts Jobs, the ERIC app and across Old Vic social media channels. Applicants could apply by submitting a short online application form on The Old Vic website or by sending us a two-minute audio or video application. We offered our partner organisations opportunities for us to speak with their groups and offered tailored support with the application process, which led to a taster session at Pop Brixton for participants and group leaders from Spiral Skills and Iconic Steps.

Recruitment was based on the following criteria:

- Aged 16-30
- Looking to explore a career in theatre or hospitality
- Have little to no work experience

In total, we received **327 applications** (up from 100 the previous year) and invited **49 participants** to two selection workshops in Nov 2024. These sessions were led by the Participation Manager and two access support workers to support with various access requirements in the room. They involved fun and interactive exercises that explored teamwork and communication, while also focusing on employability skills, so that all applicants could develop skills even if they weren't successful. During the workshops, the Head of Front of House Operations and the Participation Coordinator conducted short informal conversations to get to know the applicants and assess who would most benefit from this opportunity based on their experience level.

We recruited 18 participants for the year — six to work on *A Christmas Carol*, six to work on *Oedipus* and six to work on *The Brightening Air*. One participant was unable to take up their placement due to being offered paid work, so we contacted our local partner organisations for referrals. The Drive Forward Foundation, who support young adults leaving foster or residential care to find employment opportunities, took up the opportunity for one of their young people, who was able to take a place on *The Brightening Air*.

DELIVERY

Induction

Before starting their shifts, participants took part in an induction session led by the Participation Coordinator and the Participation Manager.

The aims of this session were:

- To prepare participants to work at The Old Vic
- To inform participants about what to expect on each shift
- To introduce participants to the show they will be working on
- To support participants in starting to explore communication and hospitality skills
- To create personal goals for participants to focus on during the programme
- To support participants with their onboarding information and paperwork.

Participants also took part in an introductory tour of The Old Vic led by the Head of Front of House Operations, so they felt comfortable in the building and knew where to go for each shift. They then watched the show for free as a group so they could confidently speak to patrons while on shift.

SHIFTS

Over the course of their four-week placement, participants took part in the following activities:

- Box Office: learning to use the Tessitura ticketing system, supporting the team during the busy incoming; printing, scanning and upgrading tickets
- Cafe: serving food and beverages to customers, learning about stock rotation and receiving barista training
- Education & Community: this year we introduced a new Events Assistant shift where participants worked on an Education & Community event, supporting with preparation and set up, welcoming participants, supporting with delivery of the event, packing down and debriefing
- Stage Door: another addition to the programme this year, participants were able to work with the Stage Door Keeper to experience how the busy backstage area of a theatre runs. This included welcoming and signing in staff, cast and visitors, dealing with deliveries, announcements and theatre operations tasks
- Front of House: participants took part in two ushering shifts. During their first shift they shadowed ushers across different tracks where they: scanned tickets on the door, assisted customers with enquiries, helped show patrons to their seats, supported with latecomers, sold merchandise, worked on the cloakroom and observed the Access Usher. To expand and embed their learning they then chose their favourite track and followed it for their second shift. They also attended briefings, fire drills and debriefs on both shifts.

ADDITIONAL OPPORTUNITIES

We also were able to offer additional opportunities for participants to learn more about access at The Old Vic, such as inviting participants to shadow on touch tours that give visually impaired patrons, or anyone who may benefit, the opportunity to touch the sets, props and costumes and to familiarise themselves ahead of the performance. We also booked participants onto our Audio Described, Relaxed, Captioned and BSL Interpreted performances, so they could learn how we support various patrons with access requirements and work to make theatre more inclusive.

'An amazing opportunity for anyone who has the chance.' Front Line Participant

NEXT STEPS WORKSHOP

At the end of the programme participants took part in a next steps workshop led by the Education & Community team. During this workshop, we celebrated everything they had learnt during their shifts, explored how to write and talk about Front Line, gave participants positive and constructive individual feedback from the teams they had worked with, revisited their goals for the programme and wrote new ones for the future. Participants also took part in activities to support with writing CVs, cover letters and preparing for interviews, as well as sharing useful resources. This year, we introduced mock interviews, where participants were able to prepare answers and then take part in interviews led by members of the Education & Community team to practise everything they had learnt on the programme.

After the programme, we invited all participants to join OV Connect, our alumni scheme which offers a continued relationship with The Old Vic through free or discounted ticket offers, exclusive events and workshops, and networking opportunities. We also continue to share relevant job opportunities with the cohort.

'I finished Front Line. Didn't think I could take part as a carer.' Front Line Participant

TRAVEL AND SUPPORT

We are committed to working with young people who have access requirements including disabled and neurodiverse people, and made adjustments at all stages of the application process and to the programme itself.

This year, we provided three participants with dedicated access support workers who worked one to one with them whilst they were on shift. This included building confidence, supporting with tasks and making sure participants felt comfortable with communication and asking for help when needed. We observed that this was a positive and essential offer for participants who may have otherwise faced significant barriers to taking part in the programme.

We also provided tailored travel support and other expenses to participants who required financial support to take part. This included providing a prepaid oyster card that covered travel to all shifts and workshops, and providing lunch while on shift.

'I am quite proud of how quickly
I learned and adapted to the roles
I was in. It really felt like I was another
employee not just a Front Liner!'

Front Line Participant

'The workshop leaders made me feel comfortable sharing any issues I had and that made me feel better about the project'

Front Line Participant

The Equal Opportunities Monitoring Form was completed by all 18 participants at the start of the programme.

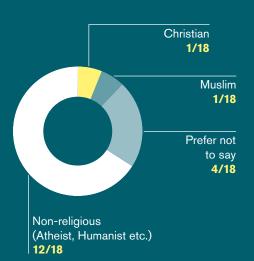
Prefer not to say 1/18 Male 4/18 Self-identify 2/18 Female Non-binary

Participants specified that they self-identify as genderfluid and genderflux

2/18

RELIGION AND BELIEF

9/18



IDENTITY

Do you identify as trans?







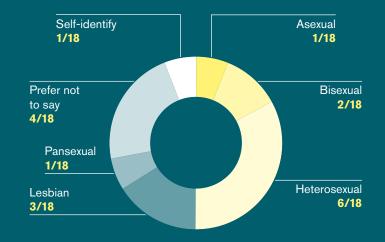
Is your gender identity the same as the sex you were assigned at birth?







SEXUAL ORIENTATION



Participant specified that they self-identify as Queer

ETHNICITY

1/18	Black or Black British: African
------	---------------------------------

2/1	18	Black or Black British:	Otho
		DIACK OF DIACK DRITISH:	Otne

1/18 White: Irish

2/18 White: Other

Participant specified: Mixed: Black and Asian

BOROUGH

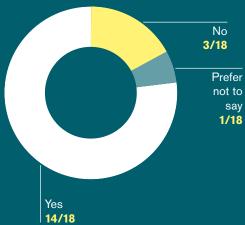


1.	Bromley	1/18
2.	Camden	1/18
3.	Croydon	1/18
4.	Royal Borough of Greenwich	2/18
5.	Hackney	1/18
6.	Haringey	1/18
7.	Harrow	1/18
8.	Lambeth	3/18
9.	Lewisham	1/18
10.	Southwark	5/18

1/18

11. City of Westminster

DISABILITY



Of the participants who selected yes: (able to select more than one response)

9/14 Social or behavioural issues

(e.g. neurodiverse conditions such as autism, attention deficit sisorder or asperger's syndrome)

8/14 Mental health (e.g. anxiety, depression, bipolar disorder)

5/14 Learning, concentrating or remembering (e.g. dyslexia, dyspraxia, dyscalculia)

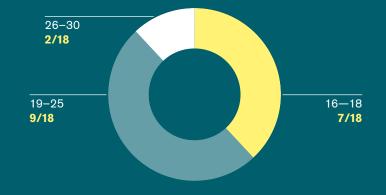
4/14 Other (Participants specified: tourettes, functional neurological disorder, chronic pain/ fibromyalgia & chronic fatigue syndrome, chronic pain and lupus)

3/14 Mobility (e.g. difficulty walking short distances, climbing stairs, lifting and carrying)

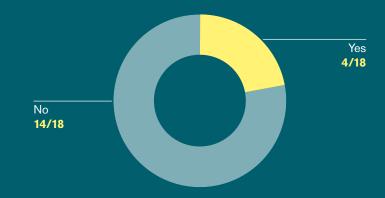
1/14 Hearing (e.g. deafness or partial hearing)

1/14 Stamina or breathing difficulty

AGE



CARING RESPONSIBILITIES



Of the participants who selected yes:

(able to select more than one response)

2/4

Primary carer of a disabled adult (18 and over)

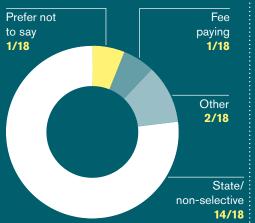
2/4

Primary carer of an adult

1/4

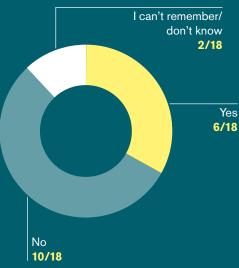
Prefer not to say

EDUCATION FREE S MEALS

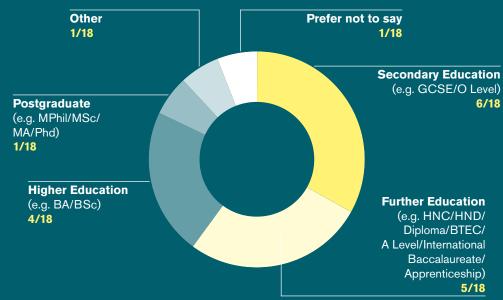


Participant specified: 'I missed a lot of school' and 'both fee paying and state school'

FREE SCHOOL MEALS



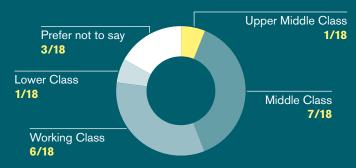
QUALIFICATIONS



Participant specified: 'None'

SOCIO-ECONOMIC BACKGROUND

What do you feel best describes your socio-economic background?



What was the occupation of your main household earner when you were aged 14?

6/18 Modern professional and traditional professional occupations (e.g. teacher, nurse, physiotherapist, social worker, musician, police officer (sergeant or above), software designer, accountant, solicitor, medical practitioner, scientist, civil/mechanical engineer)

3/18 Senior, middle, junior managers or administrators (e.g. finance manager, chief executive, large business owner, office manager, retail manager, bank manager, restaurant manager, warehouse manager)

1/18 Small business owners who employed fewer than
20 people (e.g. corner shop owners, small plumbing companies, retail shop owner, single restaurant or cafe owner, taxi owner, garage owner)

2/18 Technical and craft occupations (e.g. motor mechanic, plumber, printer, electrician, gardener, train driver)

2/18 Long-term unemployed (claimed Jobseeker's Allowance or earlier unemployment benefit for more than a year)

1/18 Routine, semi-routine manual and service occupations (e.g. postal worker, machine operative, security guard, caretaker, farm worker, catering assistant, sales assistant, HGV driver, cleaner, porter, packer, labourer, waiter/waitress, bar staff)

3/18 Prefer not to say

ACCESS AND INCLUSION

Before the programme:

14/17

of participants strongly agreed or agreed that they felt comfortable and welcome at The Old Vic

5/17

of participants strongly agreed or agreed that they felt connected to The Old Vic.

After the programme:

17/17

of participants strongly agreed or agreed that they felt comfortable and welcome at The Old Vic

16/17

of participants strongly agreed or agreed that they felt connected to The Old Vic.

WELLBEING

Before the programme:

7/17

of participants strongly agreed or agreed that they were generally confident in their own skills and abilities

8/17

of participants strongly agreed or agreed that they cope well with rejection in a professional context.

After the programme:

16/17

of participants strongly agreed or agreed that they were generally confident in their own skills and abilities

10/17

of participants strongly agreed or agreed that they cope well with rejection in a professional context.

EMPLOYMENT

Have you had any jobs before?

12/17 5/17

Yes

No

Previous jobs listed included: Bartending, Café, Carer, DJ, Kitchen Porter

INDUSTRY SKILLS

Before the programme:

9/17

of participants strongly agreed or agreed that they felt confident working in a theatre environment.

After the programme:

17/17

of participants strongly agreed or agreed that they felt confident working in a theatre environment.

WELLBEING

As a result of the programme:

13/17

of participants strongly agreed or agreed that their mental health and wellbeing had improved.

LIFE SKILLS

Before the programme:

15/17

of participants strongly agreed or agreed that they were a good team player

12/17

of participants strongly agreed or agreed that they had good communication skills

13/17

of participants strongly agreed or agreed that they had good problem-solving skills

4/17

of participants strongly agreed or agreed that they were good at networking

4/17

of participants strongly agreed or agreed that they felt confident about applying for work.

After the programme:

16/17

of participants strongly agreed or agreed that they were a good team player

15/17

of participants strongly agreed or agreed that they had good communication skills

16/17

of participants strongly agreed or agreed that they had good problem-solving skills

10/17

of participants strongly agreed or agreed that they were good at networking

15/17

of participants strongly agreed or agreed that they felt confident about applying for work.

QUALITY AND IMPACT

17/17

of participants strongly agreed or agreed that:

Overall, the project was excellent

The workshop leaders were excellent at creating a welcoming and inclusive environment.

16/17

of participants strongly agreed or agreed that:

As a result of this project, their employability skills were developing

The workshop leaders adapted to their needs.

'Working as Front Line in The Old Vic I learnt a lot about the workspace from other employees and it's made me realise that I'm okay with applying for a job even if I might not get it, it's the experience that will help me'



QUALITY AND IMPACT

15/17

of participants strongly agreed or agreed that:

As a result of this project, they felt better connected to networks and knew how to access opportunities that could help them pursue a career in the creative and cultural industries

During this project they did something they didn't know they were capable of.

14/17

of participants strongly agreed or agreed that:

As a result of engaging in this project their mental health and wellbeing had improved

As a result of this project, they felt more connected to a community

As a result of this project, their confidence in themselves had improved.

'I know how to improve myself in a work area and I believe as an employee I am becoming better'





'People genuinely just want to help each other build a more inclusive and more exciting and more creative world, which is brilliant and quite rare'

Olivia is 25 years old and took part in the Front Line programme. When asked what made her want to participate in the programme, Olivia said 'desperation' after being turned down for many jobs.

When Olivia found out that The Old Vic had the Front Line programme, 'the first thing that came to mind was, well, relief and excitement, because The Old Vic had always been a sort of safe haven'. Olivia added that as someone with autism, she 'thought it would be a fantastic place for [her] to explore... and a way that doesn't drain [her] and that doesn't expect [her] to change [herself]'.

Olivia shared the positive impact of the one-on-one conversations she had with the project manager on the programme, and how this made her feel at The Old Vic, 'I felt incredibly seen and heard and, instantly knew that I could be vulnerable around these people, which rarely happens'. Olivia shared that the selection workshop was 'great', and as a group, 'we got tasks and did things that we'd never done before, which I really enjoyed'.

At the beginning of the programme Olivia set the goal of finding a way to work in a theatre that would 'genuinely excite [her]', and that being part of a Front of House team meant that when welcoming visitors to The Old Vic, she 'was the first piece of the story. If you come to The Old Vic and you're going to see Oedipus, you're going to meet me first and you're going to talk to me first. So I'm part of your story of the night. I was like, oh, actually, that's really exciting'. Olivia enjoyed the interactions she could have with the public and with staff and witnessed this and saw the positive impact it had on everyone, 'we're present and it's real. It's not fake small talk'.

Olivia's enjoyment in working Front of House made her reflect that, 'I was living in a little utopia bubble at The Old Vic', and that if she applied for a similar position in another theatre, then it might not be the same. She also reflected upon the positive impact of being able to shadow on touch tours that focus on supporting visitors with a visual impairment. This session supported Olivia's experience and skills as a Front Line participant but also heightened her inclusive practice in her own theatre-making work.

Olivia spoke about how much the programme has supported her confidence and by taking part in the programme she now has 'the lived experience that I can do it, which is incredible. And I have put it on my CV and it's gotten a lot easier'.

The opportunity to have this experience in person was particularly impactful for Olivia, who shared that, 'you can theorise all you want... you can't learn these things without doing them. This was incredible, not just for my confidence in, actually proving to myself that this is a thing I can do. Because I did it yesterday, and I did it today, and I will do it again tomorrow. There was so much warmth and kindness there too'.

Olivia shared that the Front of House team were aware of Front Line, and some were alumni members from the programme too, and how supportive it was to have people who were there to support the programme who understood it. 'No one was bothered by the fact that I was there and trying things for the first time. And I felt like I was an equal and because there were a lot of ex-Front Liners on the team, they were like, oh, I did that three years ago. That was great. And I was like, fantastic. So there is hope.'

Olivia's employability skills were able to develop as she felt 'incredibly supported' and was able to 'mess up and try again' without judgment. She added that, 'people were incredibly supportive and really wanted me to do well and checked in with me a lot'. Olivia highlighted the uniqueness of the programme and that she, 'had not come across anything like it, and it's such a valuable thing to just explore it in real time with your own hands with other people'.

Olivia spoke about her disability and how this experience had taught her about self-worth, and how the team worked alongside her and adapted to her requirements, 'I don't have to feel like I'm constantly changing myself for other people or for other environments, which is kind of what being disabled feels like a lot of the time, because it's not meant for you or for your abilities. So to just go in and be like, actually, can we do it this way, or can I try something and see if it works?'

Olivia has a newfound appreciation for Front of House positions, and in the future would like to be an 'Artistic Director of a place like The Old Vic', recognising that everyone who works in the theatre are 'all part of the story'.



CONFIDENCE

After completing the programme, Front Line participants reported an increase in feeling confident in their own skills and abilities, rising from 7/17 to 16/17. We also found a large increase in their confidence about applying for work, where 4/17 participants said they felt confident before the programme and 15/17 by the end. Participants thoroughly enjoyed working in a theatre setting, where some had a personal interest from studying drama at school and others had little personal connection or had never been to a theatre before. By the end of the programme all participants felt confident working in a theatre environment, rising from 9/17 at the start.

Workshop plans for both the induction and next steps workshops were redesigned this year by the Education & Community team and increased to three hours each. This meant we had more time to prepare participants, target key employability skills and personal development.

For example, in the next steps workshop, the participants:

- Explored where to look for jobs and how application processes work to get a better understanding of the procedure
- Completed activities looking at building successful CVs and crafting cover letters
- Were given a practical toolkit to help with any pre-interview nerves
- Were given individual feedback from teams that they worked with, giving them positive and constructive feedback which helped to develop their confidence and supported their goals
- Set goals using the PRISM framework (Personal, Realistic, Interesting, Specific, Measurable) for the next week, month and three months relating to their employability journey.

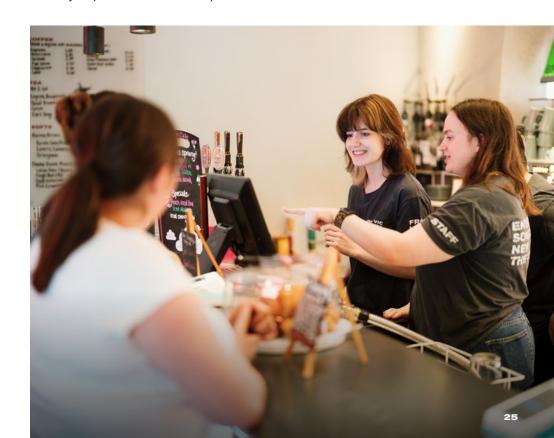
'I am far more capable than I expected. And yes, social anxiety is no joke but proving that I can do a customer facing job with success, whilst still being myself, was incredibly inspiring'

Front Line Participant

We also introduced participants to the STAR method (Situation, Task, Action, Result) and talked through how use it to construct cover letters and interview answers. They were then able to prep answers for a one-to-one mock interview with a member of the Education & Community team and then received personalised feedback afterwards. This new workshop plan was extremely successful, as for some participants, this was their first time building a CV and many felt nervous about interviews.

For some participants, we decided they may benefit from a one-to-one next steps session due to a variety of access requirements, meaning they may prefer individual support. The Participation Coordinator led these two-hour sessions where they talked through the information from the next steps workshop and were able to answer any questions, give more personal feedback on participants' CVs and support participants with applying for jobs they were interested in.

'I have learnt new skills and developed confidence which helps employability. The next steps workshop was very helpful!' Front Line Participant



EMPLOYABILITY SKILLS

Front Line is specifically designed to offer participants skills development through the workshops they attend and practical work experience with the Front of House team. After the programme, 15/17 participants agreed that they feel better connected to networks and know how to access opportunities that can help them pursue a career in the creative and cultural industries. 16/17 participants agreed that as a result of this project, their employability skills are developing. Increases were also seen across all of the core skills that the programme focuses on — teamwork, problem solving, communication and networking.

The Education & Community team worked with participants to set individual goals for the programme in the induction session. All participants reported that they had achieved these goals by the end of the programme, which were primarily based around confidence, teamwork and gaining work experience for their CVs. All participants said that taking part has given them the skills or experience that will help with their next creative steps, with one adding Front Line was a 'great addition to my CV and helped me develop my hospitality skills'.

To support participants with their learning, we introduced a Front Line task sheet this year. At the induction session participants added their goals to the first page as a reminder throughout the programme and were encouraged to bring their task sheets to every shift. Tasks involved fun activities and questions to answer on each shift, as well as space to list everything they did and reflect on what their highlights and learning were. We revisited this at the next steps workshop and highlighted the importance of remembering everything they had experienced and learned for future job applications.

The Education & Community team have worked closely with the Front of House and People teams to encourage a pipeline from completing Front Line, to working as a Front of House Assistant at The Old Vic. In Spring 2025, recruitment for Front of House Assistants was exclusively open to recent Front Line participants, which resulted in five alumni from this year working at The Old Vic, alongside many more who have completed the programme in previous years.

'It allowed me to prove to myself that I could do customer-facing jobs and learn my own limits in a safe and supported environment.' Front Line Participant

NEW SHIFTS AND INCREASED HOURS

Having received feedback from previous participants that they would like the programme to be longer, this year we increased hours both in the workshops and on shifts. Both induction and next steps workshops were three hours long, which gave us time to properly introduce participants to The Old Vic, and then celebrate everything they had learnt and prepare them for their next steps.

We were also able to introduce an additional shift, which allowed more time for participants to work across more departments and gain greater knowledge of working in theatre.

Through discussions with the Front of House team, we decided to replace the duty manager shift with an additional usher shift, where participants were able to consolidate learning from their first shift where they shadowed multiple roles, to then choosing their favourite and following the usher track on their second shift. We also split the cafe shift with time on Stage Door, where participants could see where front of house and backstage areas meet, and learn more about other roles in theatre.

Finally, we introduced an Education & Community shift, where participants supported the team at either a 12 Choirs of Christmas concert (which pairs community groups for people aged 50+ with primary schools to create 12 intergenerational choirs that perform concerts onstage at The Old Vic) or on a Matinee Idols event (our programme for people aged 50+ to discover more about The Old Vic, engage with our shows, learn new skills and interests and tackle the effects of loneliness in the local community). These new shifts were really successful and we received great feedback from both participants and staff. One participant commented, 'The variety of roles allowed me to broaden my skillset and provided better insight into how a theatre works'.

'The participants working alongside us at our Matinee Idols workshops were brilliant! The events couldn't have run as successfully without their support'

Education & Community Coordinator



CRITERIA & OUTREACH

This year we received 327 applications for 18 places on the programme. Many applicants we met at the selection workshops were already working Front of House and were therefore overqualified for the programme and had the experience to apply to work at The Old Vic already.

Next year we will look to make the eligibility criteria for Front Line clearer to make sure we are targeting the right participants. We want to further target young people aged 16–30 who are NEET (Not in Education, Employment or Training), have little to no work experience and do not feel confident about applying for work. We will also introduce a question on the application form about applicants' work experience to date with a note highlighting the experience level we're looking for, so they know having no experience will not hinder their success. We will also do more targeted outreach to organisations that work with young people in our target groups and continue attending events, such as school career fairs, to meet young people who may not be aware of the work we do.

APPLICATION PROCESS

Having reflected on the current application process and benefited from direct referrals from partner organisations for the 2024–25 programme, next year we will run selection workshops in autumn 2025 to recruit for two Front Line cohorts and then partner with organisations to ringfence places for young people who may struggle to apply for the programme or not be aware of it. We will look to contact organisations that work with care experienced young people, disabled young people, young people with experience of the criminal justice system and Pupil Referral Units. This will enable us to establish new accessible entry routes into the programme and allow us to better engage with NEET young people and those with little to no work experience who would benefit most from taking part in Front Line.

'Love this opportunity. Thanks for letting me take part!'

PARTICIPANT PACK

Currently, we provide a welcome pack at the beginning of the programme with the key dates, information on each shift and FAQs. This year we introduced a task sheet to support their learning on shift and a space to make notes during the programme. Also, at the next steps session we provided participants with a Take the Lead Prompt Book (Take the Lead is an education programme that works with students in Years 11-13 and uses theatre techniques and creative workshops to build on five core skills: communication, self-management, self-belief, teamwork and problem-solving). We would like to introduce a participant pack to bring all this information together and support participants before, during and after their Front Line experience. It will provide information on what to expect of Front Line, space to reflect on their learning as well as resources and activities to support them in looking for work, writing CVs and cover letters, and preparing for interviews.

BACKSTAGE

The Backstage building opening in autumn 2025 will offer an opportunity to diversify Front Line shifts and experience in the future. All workshops will be able to take place onsite in the new Clore Learning Centre, so participants will feel more connected to the building from the very beginning of their experience. The new venue will bring the opportunity to look at a variety of new and varied shifts and offer participants an even greater connection to The Old Vic and the Education & Community team. Giving participants an even greater variety of Front of House experience will benefit their CVs and expand the pathways they will take post programme.

'Thank you, thank you and thank you. This was exactly what I needed at this point in my life, and it has given me all the tools to move forward'



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The Old Vic Theatre Trust 2000 Charity No. 1072590 The Old Vic Endowment Trust Charity No. 1147946