

TAKE THE LEAD AT THE OLD VIC



**EVALUATION
2025-2026**

PRINCIPAL PARTNER



Ideas
Happen
Here

Education & Community at The Old Vic	2
Take the Lead	3
Programme	4
Student information	12
Student outcomes	18
Teacher outcomes	22
Case study	26
Impact	28
Ideas for the future	35

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With generous thanks to all
 Old Vic staff and Associates

TAKE THE LEAD

Principal Partner **Royal Bank of Canada**
 In association with **The CVC Foundation**

Generously supported by
CHK Foundation, John Lyon's Charity, The Portal Trust
 and **The HW Sanderson Art in Industry Fund**

PRINCIPAL PARTNER



Ideas
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Take the Lead is a free programme for students aged 15–18 that uses theatre techniques in creative workshops to support the development of five core employability skills: self-belief, communication, teamwork, problem solving and self-management.

Take the Lead was created in collaboration with schools, businesses and theatre makers to develop a toolkit of transferable skills for young people, supporting them to take ownership of their next steps after school or college, no matter what area they wish to pursue.

Take the Lead has three core aims:

- Use theatre techniques to support participants to develop five core employability skills of self-belief, communication, teamwork, problem solving and self-management.
- Support young people to take ownership over their next steps after school and prepare them for the working world of the future
- Support the mental health and wellbeing of young people through engagement with the arts.

Take the Lead works with up to 40 state schools/colleges within the M25, engaging with students from Years 11–13. Since the beginning of the programme in 2017, we have worked with **289 groups** from **242 schools** in **32 boroughs**, totalling **6,479** students.

This year we launched the programme at The Old Vic and concluded the programme with the final workshop at the London offices of the Royal Bank of Canada (RBC). 22 Old Vic facilitators delivered interactive workshops across the 40 school groups in Nov 2025 and Jan 2026. Schools were also invited to see *Arcadia* or *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* at The Old Vic for free. They also received a free resource, called the Prompt Book, which supported students throughout the entirety of the programme with relevant and helpful tips to prepare for their next steps. Students were invited to apply for work experience and the student forum at The Old Vic, an opportunity exclusive to students from our Take the Lead and Schools Club programmes. Teachers were supported throughout the programme, receiving invitations to four continuing professional development workshops (CPD). They received a free resource, called the Teacher Resource, which guided them in how best to embed Take the Lead content into careers education programmes at their school.

EDUCATION & COMMUNITY AT THE OLD VIC

Our renowned education and community projects inspire learning and connection. Each year we work with over 9,000 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.



RECRUITMENT AND CRITERIA

Recruitment for the eighth year of the Take the Lead programme began in the summer term of the 2024–2025 academic year. Outreach was focused on reaching all state secondary schools across London with particular focus on schools with low arts provision, not currently engaging with theatres, with a high pupil premium, SEND schools (Special Educational Needs and Disabilities), and Pupil Referral Units/Alternative Provisions. An Alternative Provision is an educational environment that supports young people with complex needs that typically cannot be supported in mainstream school due to exclusion, illness or other reasons. Research was also undertaken to find email addresses for the career education leads and heads of drama/performing arts for each school to directly target the most appropriate member of staff. This year we were determined that through our outreach, we would work with more non-mainstream schools.

115 schools applied from across 31 London boroughs, a 46% increase in applications compared to the 2024–2025 programme. The programme has a solid foundation of schools who want to take part in the programme, and each year the programme's positive reputation continues to garner interest and attention from lots of new schools too. We contact every state secondary school across all London boroughs about the programme and contact London borough councils, who reinforce the opportunity in direct emails and newsletters. We have a strong relationship with four local career hubs, who helped publicise the programme to schools, and we attended impactful career events with London state schools run by the local career hubs.

This year, we aimed to allocate a quarter of all the available spaces to SEND schools and Alternative Provision groups and were delighted that we could achieve this. This year received 14 applications from SEND groups, and four from Alternative Provisions. As a result, we worked with seven SEND and three Alternative Provision groups on the programme.

The programme worked with **40 groups** from **38 schools** and **colleges** across **22 boroughs**.

Schools and colleges

- Bishop Thomas Grant School*
- Bow School*
- Brentside School*
- Central Foundation Girls' School
- City of London, Highgate Hill
- City of London, Highbury Grove*
- Chingford Foundation School*
- Eastbury School
- Elm Court School*
- Eltham Hill School
- Evolve Academy*
- Featherstone School
- George Green's School
- Greig City Academy
- Hasmonian High School for Girls
- Hendon School
- Highams Park Sixth Form
- Jo Richardson School*
- Lansdowne School*
- Leytonstone School*
- New River Medical College
- Oaks Park School*
- Orion School*
- Phoenix School*
- Riverside School
- Plumstead Manor School
- Salvatorian College*
- Sarah Bonnell School*
- St Columba's Boys School*
- St Charles Catholic College
- St Ignatius College
- St George's Catholic School

- Stormont House Special School*
- Swiss Cottage SEN School
- The Sacred Heart Language College
- Vanguard School
- West Hatch High School*
- Westside AP School*

Boroughs

- Barking & Dagenham
- Barnet
- Bexley
- Brent
- Bromley
- Camden
- City of Westminster
- Ealing
- Enfield
- Hackney
- Hammersmith and Fulham
- Harrow
- Haringey
- Islington
- Lambeth
- Newham
- Redbridge
- Royal Borough of Greenwich
- Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea
- Southwark
- Tower Hamlets
- Waltham Forest

*New to the Take the Lead

‘Everyone who worked on the Take the Lead programme was outstanding. They enabled our pupils to develop their communication skills, employability skills and above all their confidence. The impact for our pupils will last beyond school and college and will help shape their path in the future’

Teacher, Take the Lead

PROJECT MANAGEMENT

This year we worked with 876 students across 40 groups and in each school workshop, students worked with two Old Vic facilitators. We ensured that one pair of facilitators worked specifically with 10 non-mainstream groups to ensure that their students were supported throughout the programme and were familiar and comfortable with their dedicated team from The Old Vic.

'Participating in Take the Lead with The Old Vic proved to be an excellent experience for my Year 12 students. It was an excellent bridge between the classroom and professional world. By engaging in drama-based techniques and collaborative workshops, students gained self-assurance, learning to articulate ideas with clarity. This was so helpful for our cohort with a large number of disadvantaged and SEN students, who gained a lot from understanding key employability skills in an open and encouraging environment.'

Teacher, Take the Lead

LAUNCH EVENT

The programme kicked off with four launch events across two days held in the auditorium at The Old Vic. Students heard from two speakers in each session with representatives from the arts, business and healthcare industry. This year we focused on the theme of connection and asked the guest speakers to reflect this theme in their talks about their career journeys. The launch events were hosted again by Reuben Christian, who hosted the Q&A section with speakers and was able to share his own journey with the students. After the Q&A, eight Old Vic facilitators introduced students to practical exercises that focused on the five core employability skills, and students were given the opportunity to come onto the stage and share their life ambitions and goals with the audience.

'The Launch Event was received extremely positively by our students. They were highly engaged throughout and came away motivated and enthusiastic about the opportunities ahead.'

Teacher, Take the Lead

'The way in which the facilitators used strategies to encourage and nurture communication skills was exceptional. The way that drama, movement and voice work was used to support relationships will be a life-long skill'

Teacher, Take the Lead



LEARN YOUR PART

Learn Your Part focused on skills and techniques used by actors in rehearsal rooms that built on the five core skills. The activities supported students with their communication skills through vocal and physical exercises. In the second half of the workshop, students were introduced to storytelling skills and challenged to create a 60-second elevator pitch about themselves. Students were given the framework of a beginning, middle and end, and were able to create pitches that reflected on their life, achievements, what their ambitions are and what they need to do to achieve them.

'The facilitators engaged the students beautifully, creating an atmosphere where everyone felt involved, confident, and inspired. The outcome of the session was truly incredible, you could see how much the students enjoyed themselves and how much they gained from the experience. It was a wonderfully positive introduction to our partnership with The Old Vic, and the first workshop set a brilliant tone for everything to come.' Teacher, Take the Lead

BUILD YOUR COMPANY

During the second in-school workshop, students were tasked to create and pitch an idea for a production to be staged at The Old Vic. Students were introduced to a variety of theatre roles: artistic, marketing, finance and production, which gave them a deeper understanding of the skills and jobs found across the theatre industry. Students worked together to test the core skills they had been developing and pitch to the facilitators, teachers and visiting Old Vic staff, who were able to give feedback to every participant.

'Your Build Your Company workshop not only inspired our students but also empowered them to discover their strengths, collaborate with confidence, and think like real theatre makers. We truly appreciate your commitment to nurturing the next generation of creative leaders and for having us on the programme!' Teacher, Take the Lead

TAKE TO THE STAGE

For the final workshop, students were invited to the London offices of the Royal Bank of Canada and worked with Old Vic facilitators, volunteers from The Old Vic and programme supporters, including staff from RBC, John Lyon's Charity, and CVC. Students took part in three workshops that encouraged them to try all the skills they had learnt on the programme in a professional and exciting environment. Students revisited the elevator pitch that they created in the Learn Your Part workshop and were able to deliver and share this with peers from other schools and make connections. Students worked on their networking skills and were introduced to simple and effective networking techniques that they were able to put to the test straightaway with new people. Each student also got the opportunity to take part in a mock interview with a professional. At the beginning of the workshop, all students took part in interview preparation to best prepare them all for the mock interviews, and to enable more time for the volunteers to ask questions and work with the students. This year we had 142 professional volunteers, giving encouraging and vital feedback to support students with future interviews. This was invaluable to many students who were on the cusp of having to do this to achieve their future ambitions, be it for university, apprenticeships or jobs.

This combination of activities supported students to revisit the theme of connection and enabled them to see what they had achieved throughout the programme.

'I have been on many trips and have supported pupils in numerous workshops, and I can honestly say that this final workshop at RBC was the most memorable, impactful and rewarding day I have had as a teacher. Thank you for welcoming us. Thank you for your support, encouragement, and commitment. Thank you for treating every pupil with grace and dignity. Thank you for ensuring our pupils could access this programme in an inclusive manner. Thank you.' Teacher, Take the Lead

PERFORMANCES AT THE OLD VIC

We arranged a total of 66 free tickets for participating school groups to see *Arcadia*, and 592 free tickets for *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*. Some school groups will be taking up the free ticket offer in the summer term. Students were able to recognise the transferable skills used on stage and how these skills were developed in the workshops. Attending the performances allowed students to bookend the programme, by starting it at The Old Vic when they attended the launch event, and then coming back for a performance.

'Wow, what an amazing performance — and what fantastic seats! Thank you so much! It was incredible. We had such a wonderful time, and all the girls were discussing the play on the train back home which was a sign of absolute enjoyment. It was such a wonderful end to this year's Take the Lead.' Teacher, Take the Lead

ADDITIONAL OPPORTUNITIES

The Education Manager is now Chair of the Creative, Media & Cultural Industry Advisory Group set up by Career Hub Central. The advisory group helps build stronger partnerships with schools through their careers education curriculum and the pathways and employability programmes that can be found in the creative, media and cultural industries.

'I think the group format and structure of the session was excellent — really gives the interviewees the chance to express and talk. Brilliant!' Volunteer, Take the Lead



CPD

A planned CPD for Take the Lead teachers will be taking place in the Clore Learning Centre at The Old Vic on Fri 26 Jun. The CPD session will focus on drama techniques to support self-esteem and how to create a positive educational environment to foster creativity and collaboration between teaching staff and students. The focus for the session came from a meeting with the teachers from the programme who were inspired by The Old Vic facilitators' positive delivery and how well students responded to it.

'I can't think of other educational/employability programmes or opportunities where strategies such as warming up the voice, breathing to centre and ground oneself are shared explicitly. They feel essential tools now and ones I've used in the classroom with other students.'
Teacher, Take the Lead

PROMPT BOOK

The Prompt Book is revised annually to best support teachers and students in the programme, and is designed as a helpful tool to support students take ownership of their own future and development through a physical learning resource. This year the Prompt Book was revised to allow further pages for students to reflect their thoughts and make notes, in order to personalise their own journey through the programme. We also introduced two additional pages which profiled members of staff from The Old Vic. This addition was well received from teachers and students, and was a great way to champion the brilliant staff at The Old Vic and the many different career pathways you can take in the theatre industry.

STUDENT FORUM

Now in its second year, the Student Forum includes 10 students from across the Take the Lead and Schools Club programmes. The students will meet with education managers, Alice Watson and Becky Rathkey over four sessions between Mar and Jul 2026 to discuss what The Old Vic means to them, and how the organisation can celebrate, value and incorporate young voices into its work and ethos. The students will have the opportunity to explore our new building, Backstage, and take part in workshops led by The Old Vic staff to help generate ideas and discussions about the organisation. The Student Forum will also help to create and develop careers day planned at The Old Vic for the 2026–2027 academic year.

WORK EXPERIENCE

Each year 20 students across the Take the Lead and Schools Club programmes are accepted onto Work Experience, which will take place between 06–10 Jul 2026. Led by Old Vic facilitator Marshall Stay, students will take part in industry workshops exploring many different careers within the theatre industry. The week concludes with a sharing from the students. All students who apply to the programme will be invited to a selection workshop, where they will have the opportunity to meet other young people and learn theatre skills.

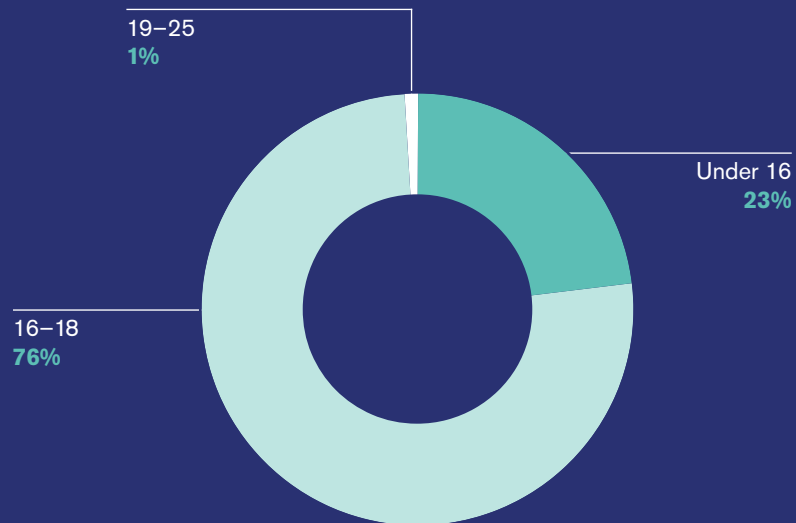


'To use drama and theatre techniques to unlock employability skills is such an effective method and has had a lasting impact on all of my pupils. Being able to transfer these skills to real life situations is invaluable'

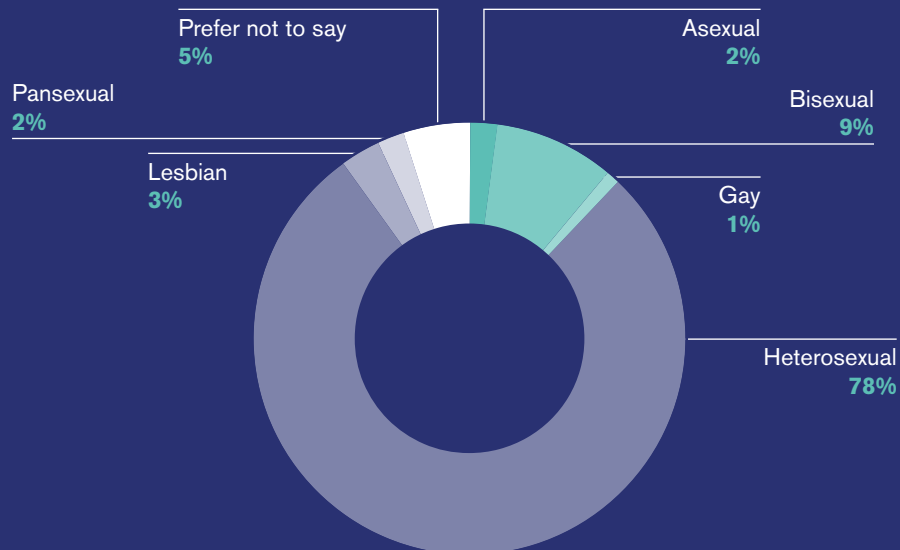
Teacher, Take the Lead

STUDENT INFORMATION

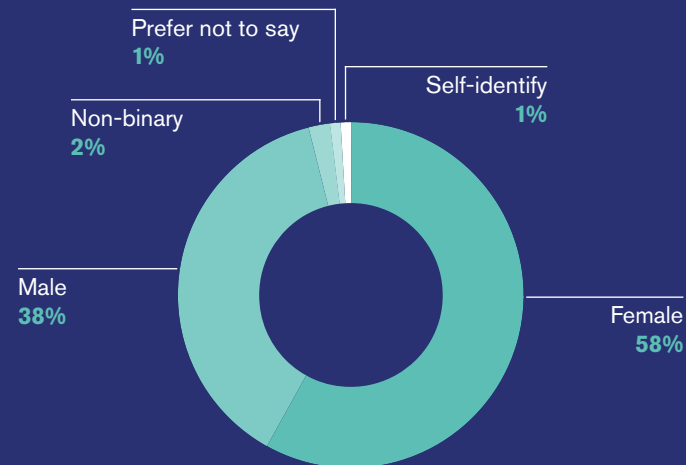
AGE



SEXUAL ORIENTATION



GENDER



IDENTITY

Do you identify as trans?



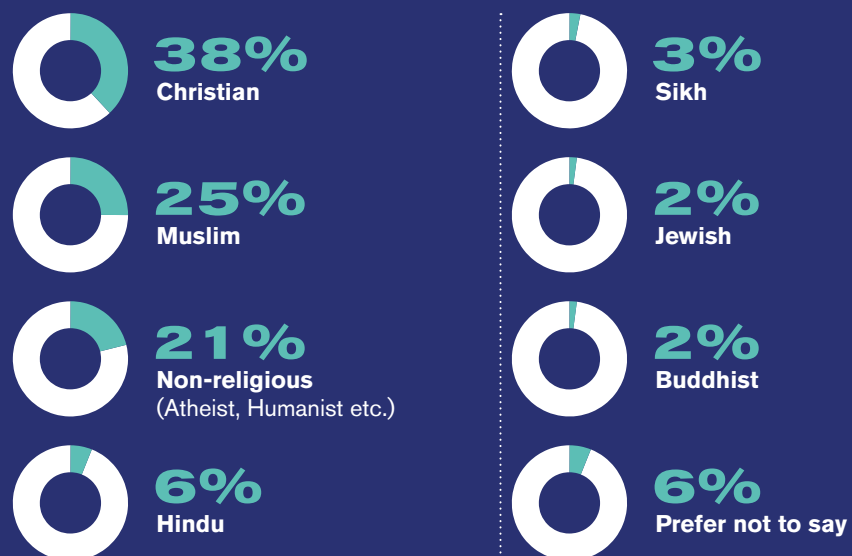
‘Thank you so much for making me feel like somewhere I belonged. Thanks for making me believe that whoever I am I should be proud of that’

Student, Take the Lead

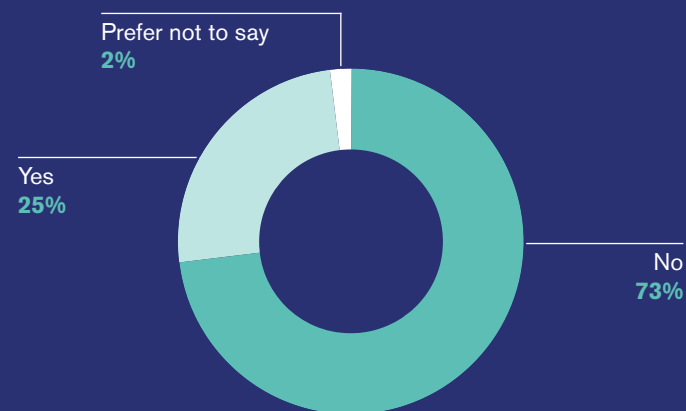
ETHNICITY

2% Arab	5% Black or Black British: Caribbean	3% Mixed Other
6% Asian or Asian British: Bangladeshi	1% Black or Black British: Other	1% None of the above backgrounds
2% Asian or Asian British: Chinese	3% Latin American	1% Prefer not to say
5% Asian or Asian British: Indian	3% Mixed: Asian and White	16% White: British, English, Welsh, Scottish, Northern Irish
8% Asian or Asian British: Other	4% Mixed: Black African and White	1% White: Irish
6% Asian or Asian British: Pakistani	5% Mixed: Black Caribbean and White	7% White: Other
19% Black or Black British: African	1% Mixed: Middle East and North Africa	

RELIGION AND BELIEF



DISABILITY



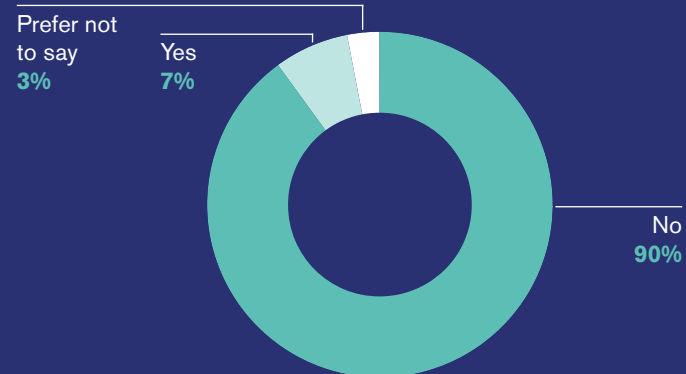
Of the students who selected yes:
(able to select more than one response)

- 5% Hearing** (e.g. deafness or partial hearing)
- 29% Learning, concentrating or remembering** (e.g. dyslexia, dyspraxia, dyscalculia)
- 30% Mental health** (e.g. anxiety, depression, bipolar disorder)
- 12% Mobility** (e.g. difficulty walking short distances, climbing stairs, lifting and carrying)
- 81% Social or behavioural issues** (e.g. autism, attention deficit disorder)
- 19% Stamina or breathing difficulty**
- 10% Vision** (e.g. blindness or partial sight)
- 4% Prefer not to say**

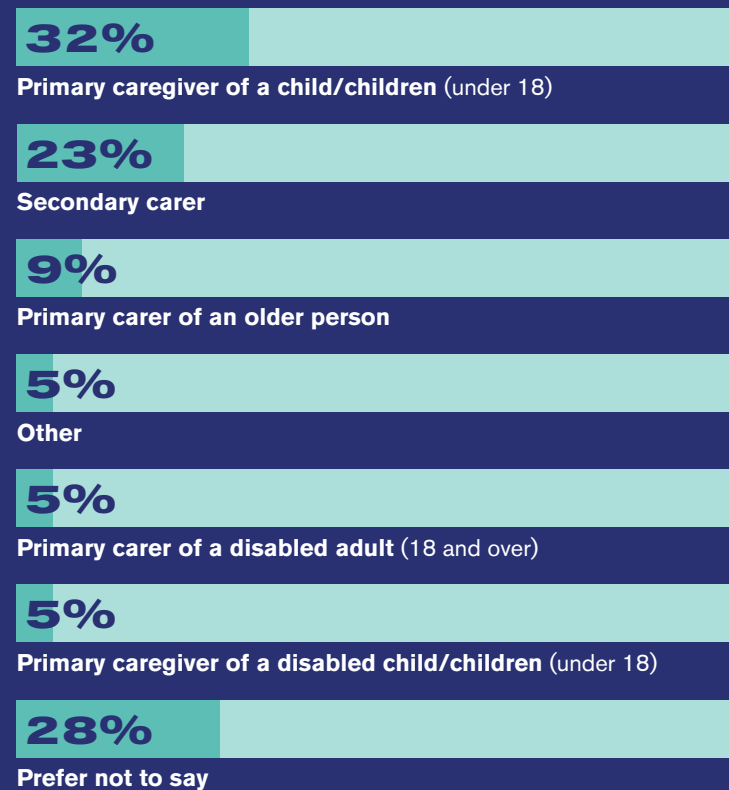
'I felt welcomed from the moment I stepped in'
Student, Take the Lead



CARING RESPONSIBILITIES



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



STUDENT OUTCOMES

ACCESS AND INCLUSION

As a result of this project:

95%

of students strongly agreed or agreed they felt comfortable and welcome at The Old Vic.

92%

of students strongly agreed or agreed they felt comfortable and welcome in this space.

78%

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

WELLBEING

As a result of this project:

85%

of students strongly agreed or agreed their confidence in themselves had improved.

73%

of students strongly agreed or agreed they did something they didn't know they were capable of.

58%

of students strongly agreed or agreed they would now like to attend the theatre regularly.

50%

of students strongly agreed or agreed it had helped them with their studies.

LIFE SKILLS

As a result of this project:

94%

of students strongly agreed or agreed they now felt confident with their communication skills.

92%

of students strongly agreed or agreed they felt more confident about being interviewed.

88%

of students strongly agreed or agreed they now felt confident with their teamwork skills.

83%

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

80%

of students strongly agreed or agreed they now felt confident with their self-belief.

79%

of students strongly agreed or agreed they were good at networking.

75%

of students strongly agreed or agreed they now felt confident with their problem-solving skills.

67%

of students strongly agreed or agreed they now felt confident with their self-management (timekeeping, working to deadlines, reliability).

'Thank you for being so amazing and giving young people this opportunity'

Student, Take the Lead

'The whole experience was incredible'

Student, Take the Lead



STUDENT OUTCOMES

INDUSTRY/ THEATRE SKILLS

As a result of this project:

87%

of students strongly agreed or agreed they felt better equipped to take their next steps (for example into employment, higher education, apprenticeship).

QUALITY OF THE WORKSHOP

As a result of this project:

97%

of students strongly agreed or agreed that overall, this project was excellent.

96%

of students strongly agreed or agreed the workshop leaders were excellent at creating a welcoming and inclusive environment.

SCALE

Students were asked on a scale of 0–100, to what extent they felt that The Old Vic is an inclusive environment. The average score was:



Students were asked on a scale of 0–100, how likely they would recommend this project to a friend. The average score was:



ACCESS AND INCLUSION

As a result of this project:

100%

of participants strongly agreed or agreed their group/students felt comfortable and welcome at The Old Vic

of participants strongly agreed or agreed their group/students felt comfortable and welcome when they visited RBC.

83%

of participants strongly agreed or agreed their group/students felt connected to The Old Vic.

WELLBEING

As a result of this project:

100%

of participants strongly agreed or agreed that during this project their group/students did something they didn't know they were capable of.

64%

of participants strongly agreed or agreed their group/students would now like to attend the theatre regularly.

LIFE SKILLS

As a result of this project:

100%

of participants strongly agreed or agreed that:

Their students' communication skills had improved

Their students' problem-solving skills had improved

Their students felt more confident about being interviewed.

96%

of participants strongly agreed or agreed that:

Their students were good team players.

92%

of participants strongly agreed or agreed that:

Their students were good at networking.

88%

of participants strongly agreed or agreed that:

Their students felt confident about applying for work.

76%

of participants strongly agreed or agreed that:

Their students are good at self-management (timekeeping, working to deadlines, reliability).

TEACHER OUTCOMES

'Thank you so much for making me feel confident and inspired'

Student, Take the Lead

TEACHER OUTCOMES

INDUSTRY/ THEATRE SKILLS

As a result of this project:

100%

of participants strongly agreed or agreed their group/students had learnt about the five core employability skills

of participants strongly agreed or agreed that as a result of this project, their students' employability skills were developing.

80%

of participants strongly agreed or agreed their group/students felt better connected to networks and knew how to access opportunities that could help them pursue a career in the creative and cultural industries.

QUALITY OF THE WORKSHOP

As a result of this project:

100%

of students strongly agreed or agreed the workshop leaders were excellent at creating a welcoming and inclusive environment.

96%

of students strongly agreed or agreed the workshop leaders adapted to their students'/groups' needs (if applicable).

CREATIVELY CONFIDENT TEACHERS

As a result of this project:

100%

of participants strongly agreed or agreed that:

Overall, this project was excellent.

80%

of participants strongly agreed or agreed that:

They now have greater confidence using drama activities with their students/group.

72%

of participants strongly agreed or agreed that:

Their theatre knowledge and skills were developing.

36%

of participants strongly agreed or agreed that:

The amount of drama had increased in their school.

SCALE

Teachers were asked on a scale of 0–100, to what extent they felt that The Old Vic is an inclusive environment. The average score was:



Teachers were asked on a scale of 0–100, how likely they would recommend this project to a colleague. The average score was:



'It was fantastic, and there was such an effort on the part of The Old Vic team to communicate clearly and in a timely way ahead of every session. It is absolutely excellent'

Teacher, Take the Lead

‘It’s made me more confident to present in front of others and talk about myself. It made me think more about my strengths and things that help me be the person I am.’

Rowan is a Year 11 student who took part in this year’s Take the Lead programme.

When asked to reflect on the programme, they explained that taking part had allowed them to *‘learn many different skills needed for the workplace, like self-management and self belief. It was also very interactive, and with a lot of practice we were able to show off our skills at the very end at the Royal Bank of Canada’.*



Rowan felt that learning about elevator pitches from facilitators during their in-school workshop was a very valuable element, saying, *‘I think it was one of the most useful things that we learned in the whole of Take the Lead, because it made me think of my strengths and things that have inspired me. It’s not really something I’d thought about before’.*

Confidence was a personal skill that Rowan told us they wanted to improve before taking part in the project and they reflected that *‘it’s made me more confident in myself and in my abilities and trusting myself to challenge myself to do new things. And just go for it!’.*

Rowan highlighted the value of taking part in the final day of the programme at the Royal Bank of Canada, where students from several participating schools came together and took part in a carousel of careers activities. This helped Rowan to practise their networking skills although they admitted that *‘at first, I was really scared. But then once I started talking to new people, I started to become more comfortable with them because we would find out that we have the same hobbies, same interests, and that just made things a lot more comfortable. Then we had the elevator pitch where we shared things we want to do in the future. It’s just really interesting how we all have such different routes we want to take’.*

Shortly after the programme ended Rowan was able to directly apply their experience of taking part in mock interviews with professionals at the Royal Bank of Canada to a real-life scenario, when they had an interview for work experience. *‘The interviews showed me questions that I’ve never really thought about before. Things like problem solving, or teamwork, and if your values align with the company.’*

Whilst they have previously taken part in other projects and workshops to help improve communication and problem solving, they said they would definitely recommend Take the Lead to others, because it helps you to *‘build confidence in your own abilities to do things and to challenge yourself’.*

Returning to the three core aims of the programme, we can measure and demonstrate the impact of Take the Lead this year.

FIVE CORE EMPLOYABILITY SKILLS

Use theatre techniques to support participants to develop five core employability skills of self-belief, communication, teamwork, problem solving and self-management

The students have largely developed across all of the five core employability skills, in particular communication, teamwork and self-belief.

Communication skills were scored strongly with **94%** of students either agreeing or strongly agreeing that the programme had made them feel more confident in this area. This can be seen from the very first workshop, where a student reflected that from the workshop, they *'found the elevator pitches helped build social network and communication'* to the last workshop where another student shared that *'the very last workshop at RBC really helped me with my communication and self-belief'*. This is supported by **92%** of students either agreeing or strongly agreeing that they feel more confident about being interviewed. One student shared that they *'loved the build up to the interview process, and it made me feel more prepared'*, and another supported this and said, *'I found the opportunity to be interviewed by professionals in their field to be highly enlightening and the interview gave me practice on a real-life scenario [to help me] feel more comfortable when the time comes'*. This is also supported by teachers with **100%** of teachers strongly agreeing or agreeing that their students' communication skills have improved and again **100%** strongly agreeing or agreeing that their students feel more confident about being interviewed.

'This programme really emphasises the five core skills and it's a good reminder to think about your life experiences where you demonstrated these, so it prepares you for networking and interviews'

Student, Take the Lead

Teamwork scored particularly well, with **88%** of students strongly agreeing or agreeing they now feel confident with their teamwork skills. The last workshop in particular demonstrated how well the students from across the schools worked together, as shared by a student who commented that, *'the tasks where you teamed up with people you don't know because I got to make connections and overcome social anxiety'* and from another student who shared that *'teamwork and meeting new people'* were the most useful aspects of the programme.

Self-belief also scored highly with **80%** of students strongly agreeing or agreeing they that they now have more self-belief. We can see how working on communication and teamworking skills can support the students' self-belief, particularly when meeting new people but also in their positive interactions with other students, Old Vic facilitators and volunteers. One student shared that taking part in the programme, which initially made them nervous, had helped them to *'develop a stronger sense of self-belief because in these workshops I have gained confidence from doing activities I was originally nervous in'*. This corresponds well with **85%** of students who strongly agreed or agreed that their confidence in themselves had improved.

'I have been involved in the project over a number of years now and it is superb! The leaders and facilitators are excellent throughout – the activities are engaging and well-paced and support all students. The programme supports the development of core employability skills in a fun way. I still can't quite believe that we get such a broad and enriching programme for free!'

Teacher, Take the Lead

NEXT STEPS

Support young people to take ownership over their next steps after school and prepare them for the working world of the future

With **87%** of students either strongly agreeing or agreeing that they feel better equipped to take their next steps (for example into employment, higher education or apprenticeships) we feel confident that the programme has helped students to prepare for their next steps after school. This was supported by comments shared by students who said, *'this programme has helped me build confidence to apply for further steps in the future through improved self-belief and communication'* and, *'I feel much more empowered in the core skills and in taking my next steps'*. Teachers have also supported this, with one teacher sharing that *'our students have gained a huge range of skills that they can use throughout their education and hopefully their careers, post-16'*, and *'through each workshop students were encouraged to build upon their skills and given the confidence to use them in a safe space. The tasks were broken down in a way that students were completing them without realising they were using these real-world big skills'*.

Students particularly reflected on the importance of networking with 79% strongly agreeing or agreeing they are good at networking after taking part in the programme, and that this would help them when meeting people in the future. One student commented that *'I have managed to talk to a lot of people, I met someone who works in the sector I want to work in in the future, and I feel better, and I feel like I have contacts, and my dreams are starting to become more tangible'*. Whilst another student reflected on how the programme had helped them prepare for an apprenticeship, *'it has helped me with my communication skills for an interview to do a degree apprenticeship as a solicitor'*. This is also supported by 88% of teachers who strongly agreed or agreed that their students feel confident about applying for work. A teacher supports this with the following statement, *'the students were engaged throughout the programme and it helps to encourage them to step out of their comfort zone, meeting new people, having interviews, preparing and presenting pitches and building confidence'*.

There is still some work that is required when supporting young people with how confident they feel with their self-management (e.g. timekeeping, working to deadlines, reliability), as only **67%** strongly agreed or agreed with this statement. This will be explored further, in particular how we can better connect this skill from theatre practice to employability skills.



MENTAL HEALTH

Supporting the mental health and wellbeing of young people through engagement with the arts

The programme has really focused on how to support young people with their mental health and wellbeing. The age group of 15–18 years are still experiencing the substantial effects of Covid-19, and in a world where anxiety and frustration amongst young people is particularly high, as highlighted in the Covid Public enquiry ['Life changed so quickly': Major new research reveals pandemic's profound impact on children and young people as Inquiry prepares for Module 8 hearings — UK Covid-19 Inquiry](#). Take the Lead has proven that it is making a positive impact on young people with **85%** of students either strongly agreeing or agreeing that their confidence in themselves has improved by participating in the programme. This is also supported by **73%** of students, who strongly agreed or agreed that they did something they didn't know they were capable of.

The programme introduces students to strategies found in theatre that can support students in any stressful situation with techniques such as four-square breathing to help calm and regulate breathing, as well as preparing your voice and body before communicating with someone (just as actors do to prepare themselves for auditions and performances). One student commented that *'this programme encourages calmness without reducing seriousness, which is the ideal I need for work'*, as supported by another student who shared that *'the programme has broken down any worries and has emphasised that it isn't very nerve-racking'*.

Teachers have also commented how participating in the programme has supported their students' wellbeing with **100%** of teachers strongly agreeing or agreeing that during this project their group/students did something they didn't know they were capable of. This is supported by a teacher who shared that *'All of our pupils conducted their interviews with such confidence and professionalism; and when required, remembered to use their breathing techniques to remain calm. It was such a proud moment. The whole Take the Lead journey was such an amazing experience for our students. Their personal growth and maturity is wonderful to see. It was lovely to hear that they all felt very proud of themselves. They represented our school beautifully and are fantastic ambassadors for our school'*.

The students who participate in the programme are not necessarily students who are studying drama at school, and by participating in the programme we are not only exposing them to the importance of the arts, and how they can support your wellbeing, but also offering a possible career path within the arts industry, as supported by one student who said, *'as I am interested in pursuing a career in the theatre industry, preparing an elevator speech and practising communication with professionals and others has helped me feel more confident and ready for auditions, interviews and networking'*. Another student who wishes to pursue a career in theatre also shared that, *'I plan to go into theatre, so getting working advice from people in theatre and being able to experience it all makes me feel confident'*.

It should be noted that students are asked to complete their feedback at the end of the last workshop, and so for many of the students they have not yet seen a production at The Old Vic, which is scheduled for Mar and Apr. This may help to explain why only **58%** of students either strongly agreed or agreed they would now like to attend the theatre regularly, and why **64%** of teachers either strongly agreed or agreed their group/students would now like to attend the theatre regularly. We will take the timing of seeing a show at The Old Vic into consideration and hope to schedule this earlier, so that students can complete the programme with a better connection to the theatre, seeing many of the skills they have learnt in practice on stage.

'Thank you very much! This cohort were so shy and quiet when I first met them in September — they are completely different now and a huge part of that is Take the Lead'
Teacher, Take the Lead



Take the Lead will return in the academic year 2026–2027.

We will look to make the following changes to the programme:

WORKSHOP DEVELOPMENT

This year we increased the number of SEND and Alternative Provision groups, with a quarter of all groups (10) from non-mainstream schools. This had a very positive impact on the programme, for all students, and we will now ensure that at least 10 groups on the programme are from non-mainstream educational environments, as we understand the importance of young people networking, communicating and connecting with one another. This helps support all young people, but particularly those with additional barriers when preparing for the working world and next academic steps.

We are pleased with the content of the workshops but recognise that more work needs to be incorporated to support young people with their self-management skills. We will explore ideas to help students work on in their own time exploring organisational skills essential to theatre practice and how this further links to their employability.

With the opening of Backstage in autumn 2025, we have the potential to welcome school groups and teachers on site as part of the programme and create a deeper connection to the theatre. This could be explored in the Learn Your Part or Build Your Company workshop.

‘There was a range of students at the launch events and the workshops and the leaders were so supportive of all students, really supporting them and guiding them in a focused and caring way – it was wonderful to watch!’

Teacher, Take the Lead

IDEAS FOR THE FUTURE

We are hoping to host a careers day in summer 2027 which will incorporate the learnings from the Take the Lead and Schools Club programmes with support from the Student Forum. The careers day will build on the brilliant progress both programmes have made to support young people with their futures and explore opportunities to work in the creative industry.

We will continue to start the programme with the launch events at the theatre, which has been a great way to establish the programme, and for the school groups to understand that the programme is created and delivered by The Old Vic. We would like to make the launch events bigger by reducing them from two days to one day, and have more groups attend a session. This will not only help students and teachers understand the magnitude of the programme but will also create further excitement and ownership of the building for the students, who will be able to attend an event with many peers in the auditorium. We are exploring the potential to do this for 2026–2027.

We will continue to develop ways that we can better support young people with their wellbeing on the programme, in particular their connection to theatre. By offering drama workshops, we can better support students and teachers across the drama curriculum. We are aware of the latest curriculum review and will take advantage of the recognition of the importance of the arts, equipping ourselves to best support students and teachers to incorporate creativity and theatre within their school culture and everyday learning.

‘Thank you for running, organising and leading such a successfully inclusive programme! I am incredibly grateful that we were part of this experience so thank you again for allowing my students to take part and evolve into the confidently creative human beings that they are becoming. Take a bow, Old Vic!’

Teacher, Take the Lead



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The Old Vic Theatre Trust 2000 Charity No. 1072590
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