

**LANCASTER
FOOTLIGHTS
&
GRAND THEATRE**
EST 1782

Lancaster Footlights & Grand Theatre

Strategy 2024-2027



Introduction

First opening in 1782, Lancaster Grand Theatre is the third oldest working theatre in the UK outside London. Operated by the Lancaster Footlights & Grand Theatre Charitable Incorporated Organisation (CIO), it is a Grade II heritage listed, 460 seat venue, that provides a diverse range of performances on over 200 occasions a year. The charity is entirely dependent on its own fund-raising to remain viable. Income is primarily generated through hosting professional acts, providing a venue for local societies, and staging its own resident 'Footlights' performances. Footlights membership provides the opportunity to participate in the full range of theatrical roles including acting, directing, producing, scenery, stage management, props, sound & lighting, costume and much more...

Led by a Board of volunteer trustees, the charity employs a full-time theatre manager, a marketing manager, and an office administrator, as well as a part-time a compliance & learning co-ordinator, box-office team and maintenance manager. During performances the majority of front and back of house roles are fulfilled by volunteers, with leadership and management being provided by paid Duty Managers.

This strategy has been produced in full consultation with Footlights membership, volunteers and staff, and sets out how the Charity intends to ensure it can withstand the challenges of these modern times, whilst at the same time continuing to evolve and provide an amazing art and culture asset for our membership, the city, and the wider communities we serve.



I. Our Purpose & Vision

Lancaster Footlights & Grand Theatre is a Charitable Incorporated Organisation (CIO). All charitable organisations have objectives overseen by the [Charities Commission](#). A summary of our objectives can be viewed under registered charity number 1198714 on the Charity Commission's website. The approved constitution is available on the [Lancaster Footlights & Grand Theatre](#) website.

Our Mission Statement is the single phrase behind which everyone can unite to ensure we are clear what our purpose is. The mission of Lancaster Footlights & Grand Theatre is:

“To be a place of joy, and a cornerstone of cultural and artistic excellence, for our community and beyond”.

To achieve this, we are dedicated to:

1. **Enriching Lives:** We strive to bring joy to, and enrich the lives of, our volunteers, staff, patrons, artists, and broader community through the transformative power of live performance, all the while fostering creativity, understanding, and empathy.
2. **Artistic Excellence:** We are committed to hosting, producing, and presenting high-quality, diverse, and thought-provoking theatrical and other performance experiences that engage, challenge, and inspire our audiences.
3. **Accessibility and Inclusivity:** We believe in providing a welcoming, diverse and inclusive environment, ensuring that everyone in our community has the opportunity to participate in, and enjoy the performing arts.
4. **Education and Outreach:** We are passionate about nurturing the next generation of artists, volunteers and audiences through educational programs and outreach.
5. **Preservation of Heritage:** We are dedicated to preserving the rich heritage of our historic theatre, maintaining it as a vibrant cultural landmark for generations to come.
6. **Sustainability:** We are committed to responsible environmental stewardship and sustainability practices, minimising our environmental impact while providing outstanding theatrical experiences.
7. **Customer Safety, Experience & Service:** We are committed to providing an entertainment space which is safe for everyone, and providing exemplary customer experience and service.



Our three-year Strategy flows from this Mission statement and ensures that everything we do is anchored back to it. Our Strategy also enables us to look forward and plan, so trustees and members can agree and share a common understanding of why the charity exists, what it is trying to achieve, and the evolving opportunities, challenges and risks it continually faces.

Our Strategy drives our Annual Plan/s. These are the actions we take every year to ensure we meet our charitable objectives in a way that is enjoyable, safe, legally compliant, and both financially and environmentally sustainable.

Our Annual Plans help shape the work we undertake within both our Board and our Operational Management Team. Our Trustees continually review how we are doing so we stay on track.



Figure 1: Overview of the 3-year planning cycle



2. Our Strategy, Our Priorities

This three-year strategy, for the period 2024-27, incorporates the following key priorities:

- 1a. Member wellbeing, satisfaction, and engagement
- 1b. Staff wellbeing, satisfaction, and engagement
2. Maintaining financial security
3. Ensuring legal compliance.
4. Acknowledging the importance of organisational culture
5. Our Contribution to the Arts & our City
6. Improving our use of Information, Communication & Technology
7. Protecting the Theatre Building
8. New Foyer project

In the following pages we will describe in more detail why we have chosen these priorities and how we intend to deliver against them. We will use these headings to update our membership on progress throughout the course of the strategy.

2.1a Member wellbeing, satisfaction, and engagement

Without the ongoing support and commitment of our membership (an all-encompassing phrase for all the unpaid roles which includes trustees, volunteers and amateur dramatic members) the charity's objectives simply could not be achieved, and it is conceivable the charity and theatre might eventually falter, with a consequential and very significant negative impact on the local Culture and Arts, and with real potential to place an important heritage building at risk (of dilapidation, loss, or re-purpose). Volunteers deliver an incredibly wide range of roles including front of house management, ushering, running coffee bars, undertaking props, sound, lighting, scenery, directing, producing, performing, costumes, publishing membership items, the list goes on and on...

Over the course of this strategy, we will: Continue to place member wellbeing, satisfaction, and engagement as our joint highest priority. In addition to regular communication and engagement, we will put in place bi-annual meetings (one of which will be the AGM) to ensure our members are fully informed of the risks/challenges facing the charity and consulted on the actions being planned on their behalf to ensure its continued success. We will ensure our volunteering model links seamlessly with our paid staffing model.



2.1b Staff wellbeing, satisfaction, and engagement

In the modern era, it is simply not possible to meet the scale and scope of financial and legal challenges imposed on charitable organisations, and public entertainment venues, through the application of volunteer support alone. Without the skill, dedication, and hard work of our Operational Management Team it would not be possible to meet the logistical, organisational, financial, and legal challenges the theatre faces daily. Although historically volunteers have fulfilled some quite complex roles, some duties can now only safely and sustainably be delivered by paid roles without exposing volunteers (and thus the charity) to inappropriate levels of workload and risk. These tend to be the roles that require specific qualifications, legal responsibility, skills or just the application of a constantly high number of hours or work.

Over the course of this strategy, we will: Continue to place staff wellbeing, satisfaction, and engagement as our joint highest priority. We will periodically review the structure, size and reporting arrangements of our team in a carefully considered way, in response to emerging needs and our risk register. We will always seek to empower the volunteer model as far as possible but may at times have to recognise that certain roles need to be paid specialists who are contracted for a period, or employed, and thereafter empowered, supported, and developed to help achieve the charity's objectives. We will ensure our staffing model links seamlessly with our volunteer model.

2.3 Maintaining financial security

Just like any other charity, if we fail to manage finances, and do not operate effectively, the charity has potential to fail. In the modern era the scale and scope of financial and legal challenges imposed on charitable organisations and public entertainment venues (explained elsewhere in this strategy) means we cannot generate sufficient operating income through membership subscriptions, Footlights and other amateur dramatic society productions alone. Consequently, we must diversify and sustain our income in other ways that are consistent with our charitable objectives. We do this through contracting time in the theatre to professional acts, and by pursuing alternative sources of capital and revenue through charitable grants (when they are available and suitable). These activities also enable us to broaden our cultural offering, and the service we provide to our communities.

Over the course of this strategy, we will: Continue to produce accounts and reports and share these with members to help explain why diversifying income and hosting professional acts is a necessary part of a sustainable operating model which helps ensure we can continue to have a high-quality venue in which to stage amateur productions. We will always seek to balance the size of this component against amateur productions and the capacity of the volunteering model. We will seek new grant funding opportunities, always balancing the funding objectives to our constitution and the capacity required to apply for and sustain the grant. We may contract experts to help complete grant applications, wherever possible recovering these costs from within the resulting grant.



2.4 Ensuring legal compliance

As a 460-seat public entertainment venue, with potential to have over 500 people in the building at any one time, including performers, staff and volunteers, we are continually exposed to substantial risks and legal responsibilities. We must continually assess and reduce risk to levels which are as low as reasonably practicable, so we keep everyone safe, meet our legal duties, and protect our charity. We have to comply with legislation which includes (not exclusive by any means) Safeguarding, Fire, Health and Safety (H&S) at Work, Management of H&S Regulations, First Aid at Work, Manual Handling, Sound Regs, Display Screen Regs, Control Of Substances Hazardous to Health, Lifting Operations and Lifting Equipment Regs, Portable Appliance Testing, Wiring Regs, Licensing conditions, General Data Protection Arrangements, the Prevention of Terrorism and more.. Understanding this legislation and producing appropriate risk assessments is only half the story. The other half is bringing control measures to life through actions such as monitoring systems, policy production and dissemination, near-miss and accident reviews, and briefing and training which has to be carefully tailored to meet the differing needs of the end users.

Over the course of this strategy, we will: Continue to develop and refine how we meet our regulatory responsibilities through a combination of volunteer and paid roles.



2.5 Acknowledging the importance of organisational culture

You cannot turn on the news today without seeing examples of where a poor culture has led to an organisation deteriorating, and the subsequent impact this has had on its reputation, the wellbeing of its members and staff, and the quality of the services it is then able to provide to the wider community it serves. This happens when organisations are not ‘culturally aware’ and have failed to acknowledge the importance of culture on every part of their activities.

“The culture of an organisation is its personality and character. Organisational culture is made up of shared values, beliefs, and assumptions about how people should behave and interact, how decisions should be made and how work/volunteering activities should be carried out.”¹

Over the course of this strategy, we will: Place increasing emphasis on the importance of having a united, and supportive culture to ensure that the theatre is always a happy, diverse, and inclusive place to perform, work and volunteer. To support this, we will:

- i) Take time to inform, engage and consult our membership, listening to feedback.
- ii) Introduce a simple set of values based on the ACTORS acronym, that describe how everyone should expect to experience Lancaster Footlights & Grand Theatre
- iii) Focus on inclusivity, diversity, values and behaviours during staff and volunteer recruitment, induction, and development
- iv) Underpin our determination to lead the healthiest possible culture through supporting and developing our staff and volunteers and [*only where necessary*]
- v) apply recognised misconduct principles where behaviour inconsistent with our values has adversely impacted other people (or has the potential to do so).



Lancaster Footlights & Grand Theatre Values

Everyone wants to have a happy work, volunteer, and visitor experience.

It's a theatre after all, so why not think about the word '**ACTORS**'? Are you:

- A** Approachable
- C** Courteous
- T** Trusting
- O** Open-minded
- R** Respectful
- S** Supportive

¹UNDERSTANDING ORGANISATIONAL CULTURE.

2.6 Our Contribution to the Arts & our city

In the context of the theatre, Art is the application of creative processes to express ideas and emotions through a medium such as dance, music, comedy, opera, drama and so much more. Although it is intangible, it makes people feel alive, brings joy and a sense of wonderment, a sense of belonging, as well as providing education and purpose. In short, it is phenomenally valuable to the health, physical and emotional wellbeing of our volunteers, staff, performers, workshop attendees, our City and wider District – and we must never forget that. We must also remember our sense of 'Place'. We are a historic theatre, in the midst of a historic and diverse university city, with a vibrant community and hugely interlinked and interdependent economy. But place is not just physical anymore, we also have our own place in the digital world, and in the social communities that exist on-line. For us to remain relevant, needed, valuable and successful we must remember all these things and take time to understand our audience and community's needs and always consider how best to respond to them.



Over the course of this strategy, we will: Commit time and resource to understanding the needs of our communities and audiences, being prepared to tailor our offerings accordingly. These offers will always be broader than performances, and will include activities such as education opportunities, workshops, historic visits, and coffee mornings etc. We will recognise the importance of being networked with key players in our city and relevant organisations within it and beyond, and online, so we recognise opportunities when they come along and by doing so continually evolve and maintain our relevance. We will undertake audience surveys to increase our understanding of their needs and to evaluate whether our offerings are meeting them. We will use data led digital marketing techniques to ensure we use our finite resources carefully. At all times we will conform to GDPR requirements.

2.7 Continually improving our use of Information, Communication & Technology (ICT)

The theatre operates in a complex environment. It's trustees, members, volunteers, and staff are physically dispersed, and demographically diverse. Ensuring we meet everyone's needs and run the charity as economically and effectively as possible across a wide range of activities (including recruitment, rotas, training, sub-groups etc) places heavy reliance on effective use of communication and technology. Similar challenges exist in the way the theatre engages its guests, surveys their needs, markets productions, takes bookings, scans tickets etc. In short, the more effectively the theatre utilises communication and technology, the better it becomes.

Over the course of this strategy, we will: Continue to review and develop how we use ICT to further the achievement of all the other objectives in this strategy. Whilst doing this we will be careful to consult and plan the implementation of new approaches, so all our members, volunteers, staff and guests feel included and supported, and experience an improvement in services not worsening.



2.8 Protecting the Theatre Building

First opened in 1782 the Grand is the third oldest provincial theatre in the UK. It is Grade II listed which means although it looks exceptional, our volunteers and staff who look after the building have a raft of additional challenges, and expense, wrapped up in listed building consent and close working with local conservation officers. Almost every act that visits the theatre marvels at the décor and ambience. That beauty hasn't happened by accident, and it won't stay that way through good luck. The building has been lovingly maintained and restored through careful allocation of funds raised through our own charitable activities, and a small number of volunteers working exceptionally hard to secure and progress heritage action zone grants which have been available to improve the exterior façade, associated signage and lighting. Similar works are continually ongoing internally.

One of the biggest downsides of such a historic building, and one we are feeling most acutely at time of writing this strategy, is the cost of energy. Running theatre heating, lighting and water supplies does not come cheap and we are always looking at ways to reduce out energy usage and in-tun our carbon footprint.

Over the course of this strategy, we will: Continue to invest in protecting our precious heritage asset so we can pass it on to generations to come. We will not wait for things to go wrong and undertake costly and disruptive one-off repairs when they do, instead we will think ahead and put in place a suitable program of protective planned maintenance.

2.9 New Foyer project.

As beautiful and amazing as our historic theatre is, there are modern needs and issues the designers back in 1782 simply weren't thinking of! Whilst the theatre allows us to fulfil many of our charitable objectives, it does give us certain limitations that a new foyer would help overcome. For example, a new foyer would assist accessibility for guests and performers living with a permanent or temporary disability, it would give us rehearsal and workshop spaces that could be opened economically without having to heat the whole theatre, and it would provide opportunities to raise income that would help protect the charity for generations to come. In short it would ensure our generations recognise what is needed to help future generations to continue to enjoy the theatre as much as we do. The project is challenging as, although fund-raising has gone well, the projected build costs continue to rise and if we were to access certain capital funding sources we would need to offer more activities which are relevant to specific objectives of say, the Arts Council, and other potential sources of grants.

Over the course of this strategy, we will: Continue to fund raise for a new foyer and develop our plan for doing so. Where possible and appropriate (aligned with our charitable objectives) we will seek to diversify our fund-raising activities to include application for appropriate grants and opportunities that may arise.



3. Bringing Our Strategy to Life

Strategies are just pieces of paper – without buy-in and actions, they are meaningless.

With appropriate actions however, they are incredibly powerful and can help ensure everyone in an organisation shares a vision for what it is trying to achieve and how they can contribute.

Consequently, we will work hard to bring this strategy to life by:

- Briefing and consulting extensively with our members, staff, patrons, and community
- Undertaking six-monthly progress reviews
- Publishing annual updates based on the headings in the strategy
- Creating plans which give direction to the work of our paid and volunteer roles
- Undertaking appraisal conversations to ensure we develop and support our teams
- Reviewing our strategy every three years

4. Summary Of Our Commitments

Over the course of this strategy, we will:

- **Place member wellbeing, satisfaction, & engagement as our joint highest priority**
- **Place staff wellbeing, satisfaction, & engagement as our joint highest priority**
- **Continue to explain the underpinning reasons for our operating model**
- **Continue to achieve and improve how we meet our regulatory duties**
- **Place increasing emphasis on the importance of organisational culture to ensure the theatre is always a happy, diverse, and inclusive place to perform, work and volunteer**
- **Commit time and resource to understanding the needs of our communities and audiences, being prepared to tailor our offerings accordingly**
- **Improve how we use ICT to enhance every other area of this strategy**
- **Continue to invest in protecting our precious heritage asset so we can pass it on to generations to come.**
- **Continue to fund raise for a new foyer and develop our plan for doing so**

