

# **synergy theatre project**

## **Annual Report and Accounts for the year ended 31 May 2025**

# **Synergy Theatre Project**

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# **Synergy Theatre Project**

## **Trustees' Report**

### **for the year ended 31 May 2025**

The Board of Trustees' presents its report and independently examined financial statements for the year ended 31 May 2025.

#### **Reference and administrative details**

<b>Trustees:</b>	Keshina Bouri (Co-Chair) Jessica Draper (appointed September 2025) Paula Hamilton (Co-Chair) Tyrone Paul Alison Porter (resigned October 2024) Ihsan Rahim Clíona Roberts (resigned September 2025) Deborah Samuel (deceased December 2024) Gaby Sumner	
<b>Company Secretary:</b>	Esther Baker	
<b>Company number:</b>	04219146	
<b>Registered Charity number:</b>	1088692	
<b>Synergy staff:</b>	Artistic Director	Esther Baker
	General Manager	Jennie McClure
	Learning & Engagement Manager (Adults)	Kit Withington
	Learning & Engagement Manager (Young People)	Siân Henderson-Styles
	Learning & Engagement Co-ordinator (Young People)	Shane Wheeler-Osman
	Learning & Engagement Assistant (Adults)	Karl Smith
	Progression & Pathways Co-ordinator (Young People)	Olivia Fraser (until September 2024)
	New Writing Manager	Neil Grutchfield
	Development Manager	Nisha Oza (until August 2024)
<b>Registered office:</b>	G.1 Carlton Mansions 387 Coldharbour Lane London SW9 8GL	
<b>Independent Examiner:</b>	Robert McGinty Cintra Coley Avenue Woking GU22 7BT	
<b>Bankers:</b>	Triodos Bank NV Deanery Road Bristol BS1 5AS	

The trustees present their annual statutory report together with the consolidated financial statements of Synergy Theatre Project for the year ended 31 May 2025.

The financial statements comply with the Charities Act 2011, the Companies Act 2006, the Memorandum and Articles of Association, and Accounting and Reporting by Charities: Statement of Recommended Practice applicable to charities preparing their accounts in accordance with the Financial Reporting Standard for Smaller Entities.

## **OBJECTIVES AND ACTIVITIES**

### **History**

Synergy Theatre Project was founded in 2000, soon after Esther Baker won a Butler Trust Award for her pioneering work with theatre in HMPs Downview and Wandsworth. Over the 24 years since the company was formed, Synergy has developed a programme of artistic work that seeks to build a bridge from prison to social reintegration, prevent young people from entering the criminal justice system, and inspire change by capturing the imagination and affecting the feelings, behaviours and attitudes of participants and public.

### **Vision**

Synergy believes that theatre can be transformative, change perceptions, and open up new possibilities towards a more positive future. We live in a world where some of the most disadvantaged are over-represented in the criminal justice system and are more likely to suffer social exclusion. Our vision is to work through theatre towards a fairer world where those within or at risk of entering the criminal justice system can discover alternate pathways, desist from crime, and become an integral and meaningful part of society.

### **Mission**

Synergy seeks to create a ground-breaking, interrelated programme of artistic work which harnesses the energy, instincts, and life experiences of those we work with – prisoners, ex-prisoners, young offenders, and young people at risk of offending – gives them a voice and, in doing so, their dignity back. We want to inspire change by capturing the imagination and affecting the feelings, behaviours and attitudes of participants and public, whilst doing our part to influence the arts and criminal justice sectors towards systemic change.

### **Our work**

Our work provides practical opportunities which develop beneficiaries' skills, capabilities and resilience, builds a bridge from prison to social reintegration, provides vital support to rehabilitation, and seeks to prevent young people from entering the criminal justice system. Our overall aim is to support desistance from crime. We do this through:

- **Producing** high quality theatre and film across prisons, mainstream theatres and schools that uniquely brings together professional artists with prisoners and ex-prisoners to create and perform urgent and authentic work, representing unheard voices on the stage;
- Offering theatre-based training for prisoners, ex-prisoners and young people at risk of offending through **Synergy** and **Young Studios** with a focus on skills development, progression routes, and pathways into education, training and employment;
- Challenging mind-sets and offering alternate pathways for young people at risk of offending through our **Young People's Programme** of projects and productions that utilise the life experience of trained ex-prisoner facilitators;
- Offering bespoke and commissioned work through **Synergy Services**, including ex-prisoner role play training for criminal justice professionals and a range of creative collaborations, drawing on our expertise to feed into research and education and contributing to systemic change and wider public debate.

### **Public benefit**

The trustees have referred to the guidance in the Charity Commission's general guidance on public benefit when reviewing the aims and objectives and in planning future activities.

## ACHIEVEMENTS AND PERFORMANCE

***I didn't learn how to read in school. It made me nervous. I'm not a very confident person. Coming here is something I never thought I'd do. It's given me confidence.***

Prisoner participant, comedy course, HMP Thameside

In spite of the cost-of-living crisis continuing to impact the most vulnerable, including the beneficiaries of our work and their families, and increasingly fierce competition for funding with trusts and foundations overwhelmed, Synergy has managed to navigate these challenges and deliver a programme of exciting, insightful and impactful work engaging young people across London, prisoners – young and not-so-young from Devon to Staffordshire – and ex-prisoners and their families. In response to consultation with beneficiaries we extended the breadth of creative engagement opportunities and also increased activity locally by forging partnerships with youth organisations in Lambeth and building on our relationship with Southwark Playhouse in the neighbouring borough. Synergy continued to develop existing work for production and co-production, including collaborations for the following year with HAL Company and Paines Plough, and toured *Providers*, an outstanding new play commission for young people by Ambreen Razia, which culminated in our first week's run at Brixton House, a successful collaboration cementing our relationship with the venue where our company base is located.

In terms of engagement during the year, Synergy worked with 182 prisoners and ex-prisoners (105 and 77 respectively) through our range of courses, performance, work experience and employment opportunities and reached prison audiences of 200. Through our programme for young people in mainstream education, young people at risk of exclusion and/or offending and those within the criminal justice system, Synergy engaged over 3,700 through performance and activity including 332 young people at risk and young offenders who took part in longer-term and bespoke projects and Young Studio. We engaged a further 732 of the general public, reaching total audiences of 4,632.

We are especially proud in the past year to have won The Community Award at The Stage Awards 2025 in January, an event which recognises excellence in British theatre and celebrates achievements in the industry in the last 12 months. Synergy was also a finalist for the 2025 Smiley Charity Film Awards for *Cancer Cells*, a specially commissioned short film to present research findings following a 4-year study into cancer care for prisoners by NHS and King's College London; the film was also screened at the House of Lords. We were listed as Assessors' Choice by the Off West End Awards (The Offies) for *Providers* while our Artistic Director received a Special Award from the 2025 Fringe Theatre Awards, recognising her for spearheading life-changing theatre concerning the criminal justice system.

## PRODUCING

***Electrifyingly powerful... Humorous but also moving and occasionally shocking, this work has impact well beyond the theatre stage. ★ ★ ★ ★***

Everything Theatre on *Providers*

Synergy began the year with an exciting week-long development workshop in August at the National Studio interrogating the first draft of Dexter Flanders' play exploring family courts. This informed the next draft which is with several theatres to find a potential home for a production.

A touring production of *Providers*, a brilliant new play for young people by critically-acclaimed writer Ambreen Razia, commissioned by Synergy, formed the focal point in spring. The play explores the impact of the cost-of-living crisis on young people through the lens of two unconventional families and addresses how financial pressures affect them and pull them into criminality, sparking discussions about money, vulnerability and resilience. The narrative resonated deeply with young audiences. We toured to 21 schools and PRUs across seven London boroughs with levels of high deprivation (Harrow, Brent, Ealing, Camden, Barnet, Lambeth, and Hammersmith and Fulham) and where many students face real challenges.

Following our proven model, the cast and crew comprised a powerful combination of professional creatives and individuals with lived experience of the criminal justice. The role of ex-prisoner company members proved invaluable, bringing authenticity and relatability to the

project that helped break down barriers, especially for young people struggling with behavioural and emotional challenges. Performances were accompanied by post-show Q&As, providing young people the opportunity to ask questions about the play and speak directly with the company members about their personal experience and involvement in criminality. To further enhance engagement, we delivered four creative response projects and also extended work opportunities to six young trainees as an integral part of the project.

*Providers* marked our first public run at Brixton House, where Synergy is based, engaging local Lambeth schools and youth organisations as well as new public audiences, which helped grow our local youth engagement, and cemented our partnership with the venue. We also performed *Providers* at HMP Downview which had particular significance, as one of the actors and one of the assistant stage managers had been released from there recently. Returning in a professional capacity communicated a powerful sense of possibility and transformation, resonating deeply with the women in custody. Through the tour and run at Brixton House, we reached a total audience of 3,934 including 3,419 young people, 215 teachers and 300 members of the general public.

Synergy supported Paines Plough on the development of *Ordinary Decent Criminal*, a new play by ex-prisoner writer Ed Edwards, with our New Writing Manager acting as dramaturg. Their co-production with Live Theatre, Theatre Royal Plymouth and Ellie Keel Productions, in association with Synergy, will tour from July 2025. We also provided ongoing support to Danusia Iwasko's HAL Company on *Penned Up*, her play inspired by teaching in prisons for Synergy.

In terms of commissions, we found a home in Southwark Playhouse for *Lifers*, Evan Placey's timely new play which explores the care of older prisoners with the production programmed for October 2025. In May, we travelled to HMP Littlehey with a group of actors to perform a script-in-hand reading to a group of prisoners in order to test the authenticity of the play in advance of rehearsals starting in the autumn.

## LEARNING & ENGAGEMENT

### Synergy Studio

***It made me feel alive again.*** Prisoner participant, acting course, HMP Thameside

The Government pause on prison procurement on account of the 2024 Autumn Budget and delayed Spending Review halted the tendering and bidding process for contracts for some months which impacted on our delivery in the prison estate. We did, however, manage to successfully deliver eight courses in prisons – HMPs Belmarsh, Gartree, Thameside and YO1 Werrington – and reached a range of cohorts, from young offenders to lifers as well as returning to the London Pathways Unit in HMP Brixton to engage offenders with complex psychological difficulties (with or without a formal diagnosis of personality disorder). These courses comprised Introductions to, and Advanced Acting and Playwriting in addition to Spoken Word, Stand-up Comedy and a week-long intensive performance project.

Returning to HMP Belmarsh proved a real highlight. We delivered a Spoken Word project which resonated strongly with participants who had both previous experience in music and an interest in writing lyrics. A particularly impactful element was the opportunity for a final sharing at the end of the project; sharing creative work with family members has a positive impact on strengthening relationships while individuals serve their sentences.

Continuing our longstanding collaborations with Morley College and Soho Theatre and developing our relationships with the Bush and Brixton House Theatres, Synergy delivered seven courses within the community ranging from Introductions to Acting, Playwriting and Workshop Facilitation to Spoken Word, Stand-up Comedy and a writer response project to *Dao of Unrepresentative British Experience* by Daniel York Loh. In addition, and in direct response to consultation with beneficiaries, we piloted introductory courses in filmmaking and directing.

Stand-up Comedy has continued to feature as a popular highlight as part of our community offer. Two participants this year progressed to bursary places on Soho Theatre's Comedy Labs while several others developed and refined their routines by accessing open mic nights and gigs

across London's comedy circuit. This progression demonstrates that the course has found a strong home among Synergy's members, providing a supportive space where participants can express themselves, build confidence, and continue to develop creatively.

Other community engagement opportunities included a devising project with CEA CAPA London and a week-long performance project with Central School of Speech and Drama (CSSD). Thanks to the kind offer of free and discounted tickets we were able to arrange theatre trips for beneficiaries to see *MJ: The Musical*, *Coriolanus*, *The Hot Wing King* and *The Other Place* (National), *A Good House* (Royal Court), *The Little Foxes* and *Punch* (Young Vic), *Tambo and Bones* (Stratford East), *Speed* (Bush) and *Retrograde* (Apollo).

In terms of supporting beneficiaries into further training, work placements and progression into work, particular highlights during the year include:

- Eight ex-prisoners being employed by Synergy on *Providers* in various roles including actors, assistant director and stage managers and workshop facilitators;
- 14 working as workshop support facilitators on Synergy's young people's programme;
- Two receiving bursaries for Soho Theatre's Comedy Lab courses;
- Six being accepted onto an external advanced playwriting course;
- Five taking part in acting courses at Central School of Speech & Drama and LAMDA;
- One having a TV script in development with Boffola Pictures;
- Three being accepted onto a journalism course with Warner Bros;
- One winning Lounges.tv Best Comedy Newcomer and securing a contract with InterTalent Agency;
- One writing an episode for Dennis Kelly's new BBC TV drama, *A Life Inside*, and will also be performing in the series.

In addition to the courses, Synergy's New Writing Manager provided mentoring and one-to-one dramaturgy for 23 prisoner and ex-prisoner writers, responding to their plays at every stage of development. These include ongoing commissions by writers with lived experience of the criminal justice system and plays on the challenges of living with autism, on sex work, stigma and the law, and a comedy drama.

Synergy partnered for the seventh consecutive year on the Stage Play category of the Koestler Arts Awards, circulating the 28 entries to a range of readers for shortlisting and judging by a panel with written feedback sent to each entrant and the offer of future script development from our New Writing Manager. The winning plays were celebrated at script-in-hand readings by professional actors at HMP Thameside and the Royal Court Theatre in January 2025.

### **Young People's Programme**

***This project changed my life – I've stopped being so angry.*** Young participant on *Providers* response project

*Providers* formed a focal point of our young people's programme and provided a perfect stimulus for the delivery of activity both in the lead up to our tour and following engagement with the performances. Synergy continued to work through longstanding and effective partnerships with The Helix and Jubilee Academy PRUs as well as Whitmore High School, Salvatorian College and delivered a range of longer-term creative projects using acting and spoken word in response to *Providers*, which encouraged participants to interrogate the themes of the play including peer pressure and of familial duty. After one of the projects a teacher wrote, "I don't think you realise the power of the work you do. You've literally saved that young person's life and changed their whole outlook. Thank you so much".

Having 'D', a young woman recently released from prison, perform in *Providers* and share her story had a powerful impact, particularly on the young females in PRUs. One of them said, "The show was really good. As a young person, I can relate. I feel changed after watching. I feel like I'm going to do so much differently. 'D' inspired me, and it's given me so much hope. It's shown me that opportunities can come, and that I should keep being strong and pushing".

Our one-to-one work engaged a number of young people at Whitmore High where the school was keen for us to work with some of their more disadvantaged students. The activity focused on helping participants to prepare monologues in advance of examinations, and they demonstrated significant progress in their acting skills, enhancing their ability to connect emotionally with their characters. One participant remarked, *"I feel the workshops have helped develop my personal character as well as my understanding of how to portray emotions truthfully"*. The project further strengthened our relationship with Whitmore High; staff praised the students' progress and increased confidence, and the school is eager to extend our activity to reach more of their students, particularly those at risk.

Project activity over the course of the year has had the following impacts on young participants:

- 99% did not get arrested within a year;
- 82% reported positive changes to self-concept and positive impact on future aspirations;
- 85% reported high confidence at the end of their course;
- 90% demonstrated improved team working, interpersonal skills, improved ability to articulate ideas, listening skills, improved timekeeping and attendance.

In addition to our group and one-to-one work, Synergy was approached again by Saracens High School to deliver another day of participatory workshops as part of their Deep Learning Day.

### **Young Studio**

***Being part of this project showed me I can actually do something. I didn't think people like me got those chances.*** Young Studio participant

Continuing to build on the previous work of our Young Studio programme to engage young people who have taken part in our activity in PRUs, YOTs and through one-to-ones, we delivered a range of group projects during the year, extended our work placement opportunities and piloted provision for those at the upper age range of 18-25 years. We also built on a highly beneficial relationship with Southwark Playhouse, a venue in the neighbouring borough which provided not only a vital space nearby, but also opportunities for beneficiary progression. Synergy continues to be an active member of Lambeth Made and the Harrow Culture Forum, and we have further deepened our community connections through regular attendance at the Harrow Youth Violence Partnership meetings, contributing to discussions on reducing violence and increasing young people's access to creative opportunities.

Particular highlights include our first-time collaboration on our young people's work with Southwark Playhouse last summer. The offer of space in-kind for an acting project at a leading London fringe and, more importantly, a recognisable venue enabled us to introduce young people from Lambeth to their local theatre and subsequently refer those interested to the organisation's young theatre company, mirroring past projects in north London at Kiln theatre. Following this highly successful pilot, our relationship has gone from strength to strength in the form of collaborations and support in-kind on two further Young Studio projects.

In autumn 2024 Synergy expanded its offer and trialled an acting course for 18-25-year-olds, marking an exciting development and a new target age range. The course had a waiting list of applicants and attracted a diverse group of participants eager to develop their acting skills. It was an opportunity to engage vulnerable young adults at a significant transitional phase in their lives, and when they are exploring career paths and creative outlets. There was some fluctuating attendance, but participants demonstrated resilience in adapting and showed remarkable growth in their acting abilities. As a result of its success, we intend to continue developing work with this age range and are in discussion with a number of organisations which can offer placements and roles to young people over the age of 18 in order to build meaningful pathways into employment, education and further training for this particular cohort.

Opportunities for further training, work experience and employment within our organisation and beyond during the year have included:

- Two young participants from a PRU returned to mainstream education;
- From our Young Studio cohort:
  - Eight joined our creative development panel, developing *Providers* in early draft;



- Three joined Southwark Playhouse Young Company;
- Six gained work placements as trainees (actor, film makers, stage managers and assistant directors) on our production of *Providers*;
- One worked as a trainee on our National Theatre Studio R&D on *Three Children*;
- Two gained work as actors in a short film;
- One is now a trained workshop support facilitator;
- One is undertaking an apprenticeship with Warner Bros.

Building on our pilot in the previous year of work placement opportunities, one highly successful outcome during this reporting period was our young trainee programme. Six trainees developed professional skills during our tour of *Providers*, gaining hands-on practical knowledge and experience in workshop facilitation, acting, filmmaking and directing. One trainee has since gone on to secure a creative apprenticeship with Warner Bros. (as above), highlighting our programme's impact in supporting entry into the industry.

## SYNERGY SERVICES

***In their workshops, collaborations and mentoring projects, they [Synergy] dissolve the 'us' and 'them' of mainstream society and the penal system, causing all who participate to think deeply about personal choices and the broader, societal structures in play.***

Director of Theatre Education (London), CEA CAPA

In terms of our work within the prison estate Synergy secured eight commissions for course delivery at HMPs Belmarsh, Brixton, Gartree, Thameside and YOI Werrington. The pause on procurement during the year had an adverse effect on delivery, and Synergy's levels of earned income dipped slightly as a result, but as the tendering process restarted we secured a number of commissions for the coming year.

Our continuing relationship with King's College London involved a further commission to collaborate on a workshop as part of their wider research into the risk assessment of violent re-offending on release from prison, whether violent recidivism is affected by educational factors and if these factors can help improve the predictability of violence risk assessment tools. The workshop involved a group of ex-prisoners discussing their early educational histories and other risk factors leading to re-offending such as homelessness, unemployment, trauma and isolation.

Synergy was commissioned to support the sourcing of 15 actors for the creation of two informational films; one for the National Crime Agency as part of their campaign in March to combat the threat posed to teenage boys by financially motivated sexual extortion (FMSE), and the other for the UK Government, BT, O2 and Virgin Media to raise awareness of landlines switching to digital and the impact on telecare alarms. We were also commissioned by CEA CAPA Global Education Network's London Centre to collaborate for another year on a devising project in the autumn term with their international students in response to Synergy's work and beneficiaries' lived experiences, culminating in performances of each group's work.

## ORGANISATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

***Thank you, Synergy, for providing work crafted for young people and continuing your brilliant ethos of employment [of ex-prisoners].*** Off West End Awards Assessor

The unexpected death last December of one of our board members, a former beneficiary, was a devastating loss for the organisation. Having survived a traumatic history, she was an inspiration to many while her passionate support for women in the criminal justice system won her an award as part of the National Probation Service Team in 2018, the same year she joined Synergy's board. In light of this, and in order to ensure that women's as well as men's lived experience of the CJS remains at the heart of our board, and also to bring new expertise and knowledge, we look forward to welcoming new members: Sue Sandeman (former beneficiary), Sarah Brown (Creative Director of Drama, STV) and Jessica Draper (Head of Creative Engagement, Soho Theatre) in 2025/26.

During the year we experienced significant difficulty in recruiting a permanent fundraiser due to the shortage of skilled individuals at the salary level that small organisations such as ours can

offer. We recently engaged a highly experienced freelance fundraiser and, while this offers only a short-term solution, we intend to gain significant ground through this expertise before attempting further recruitment drives.

Building on our highly skilled team in February we contracted a Marketing Manager with 20 years' experience, bringing new expertise to deliver the company's marketing and audience development campaigns, highlight our impact and develop positively our reach and reputation.

## **FUTURE PLANS**

***I have had lots of chats with the men since where they have reflected on how much they enjoyed the project, and how surprised they were at how much they felt able to come out of their shells. Not easy to do with anyone, particularly some of the people on the [Offender Personality Disorder] unit, so thank you again for creating that space for everybody.*** Prison officer, performance project at HMP Brixton

During the coming year, and with our producing ambitions front and centre in terms of scale and reach, we have a commission by one of our Associates for production in London alongside two co-productions touring regionally, and intend to continue delivering our learning and engagement programmes through longstanding partnerships while further expanding the breadth of our offer following consultation with both young and adult beneficiaries and piloting creative activity to engage new cohorts, including older offenders, in response to insights evolving out of our work.

In terms of commissions, we found a home in Southwark Playhouse for *Lifers* by Synergy Associate, Evan Placey, a new play which offers a powerful and deeply human look at ageing behind bars. The production in October 2025, with accompanying panel discussion to explore the issues raised, marks our most ambitious and largest venue to date and will enable us to engage greater audiences with our work. Our association with Paines Plough, Live Theatre and Theatre Royal Plymouth on the production of *Ordinary Decent Criminal* by Ed Edwards, performed by award-winning comedian and political satirist Mark Thomas, will result in a tour from July 2025, stopping off at Edinburgh Fringe Festival and travelling up and down the country until early December. We will also support HAL Company's production of *Penned Up* by longstanding playwriting tutor Danusia Iwaszko, borne out of her teaching experience in prisons for Synergy, touring regionally from September to October 2025. Following highly positive feedback, a raft of 4-star reviews and high demand from schools, we also plan to revive and tour *Providers* in autumn 2026 with a three-week run at Brixton House, further strengthening our partnership with the venue and enabling greater engagement with local and wider audiences.

Our learning and engagement programme for adults will comprise acting, stand-up comedy and playwriting courses in the community in collaboration with longstanding partners, Morley College and Soho Theatre. In response to beneficiary feedback, we also intend to trial new artforms including podcasting as well as series of masterclasses for each of our young and adult cohorts. Again, reflecting interest and demand gauged from consultation, we aim to develop creative activity to engage prisoners' families in addition to older offenders as result of the scoping and audience development work we have been undertaking surrounding *Lifers*.

Following the restart of procurement, we have fortunately secured several commissions for delivery in the prison estate at HMPs Hollesley Bay, Thameside, Wayland and Whatton and will continue to bid for additional contracts. Further to the government's announcement in December of sweeping changes, primarily to tackle the court backlogs and prison overcrowding crisis, we await to see the effect these will have on the criminal justice system and the beneficiaries of our work.

## **STRUCTURE, GOVERNANCE AND MANAGEMENT**

### **Structure**

Synergy Theatre Project is a charitable company limited by guarantee governed by its Memorandum and Articles of Association dated 18 February 2001. It is registered as a charity with the Charity Commission. In the event of the company being wound up members are required to contribute an amount not exceeding £1.

### **Trustees**

As set out in the Articles of Association all of the trustees shall retire from office at the Annual General Meeting. Retiring trustees may then offer themselves for immediate re-election. Trustees are recruited according to the range of skills and experience required to ensure the organisation's objectives are achieved. New trustees, alongside the existing Board members, apply their knowledge and expertise to Synergy's long-term strategic planning and implementation.

The following trustees were in office at 31 May 2025 and served throughout the year:

Keshina Bouri (Co-Chair)

Paula Hamilton (Co-Chair)

Tyrone Paul

Ihsan Rahim

Clíona Roberts

Gaby Sumner

Company Secretary: Esther Baker

### **Trustee induction and training**

New trustees undergo a briefing on their legal obligations under charity and company law, the content of the Memorandum and Articles of Association, the committee and decision-making processes, the strategic plan and recent financial performance of the charity. Trustees are encouraged to attend appropriate external training where these will facilitate the undertaking of their role.

### **Organisation**

The board of trustees meets quarterly and determines policy. An Artistic Director and General Manager manage the day-to-day operations of the charity with support from the Learning and Engagement Managers (Adults and Young People), Learning and Engagement Co-ordinator (Young People), Learning and Engagement Assistant (Adults), New Writing Manager and Development Manager. To facilitate effective operations, they have delegated authority, approved by the trustees, for operational matters including finance, employment and artistic performance related activity within the agreed annual budget.

## **FINANCE AND FUNDING**

### **Key management personnel**

Key management personnel are the Board of Trustees who do not receive remuneration for their services and the senior management team (Artistic Director and General Manager). The pay of the senior staff is reviewed annually and normally increased in accordance with average earnings. In view of the nature of the charity, the trustees benchmark against pay levels in other theatre companies of a similar size.

### **Risk Management**

The trustees review the risks to which the charity is exposed on a regular basis and is working on the creation of a formal risk register. Where appropriate, systems or procedures have been established to mitigate the risks the charity faces. Particular attention is focused on risk assessment of the charity's activities in schools and regulations and policies concerning the protection of children. A key element in the management of financial risk is the setting of a reserves policy and its regular review by trustees.

### **Financial review**

The financial performance of the charity showed a reduction of £81,562 (14.4%) in total income and a decrease of £81,422 (14.4%) in total expenditure. This resulted in an increase of £183 in unrestricted reserves.

The principal funding sources were AB Charitable Trust, Arts Council England, Didymus Charity, Garfield Weston Foundation, Hedley Foundation, Henry Smith Foundation, John Lyon's Charity, National Lottery Community Fund, Pickwell Foundation and Rayne Foundation to whom Synergy would like to extend its sincere thanks.

The balance sheet on page 16 shows that, at 31 May 2025, Synergy held net current assets of £216,540 (2024: £216,357).

### **Reserves Policy and going concern**

The charity operates controls that ensure costs are allocated to each grant supported project. Grant prepayments represent donations allocated to ongoing projects scheduled for completion in subsequent reporting period(s). The charity commences virtually all of its projects after obtaining and receiving grant funding. This means that the charity has historically always maintained high levels of liquidity. The salaried personnel, contracted performers and professionals are fundamental to the continued delivery of projects and also obtaining grant funding. The charity expends all grant income on the relevant projects and their strategy is to build up reserves from the unrestricted income it generates, largely from fees, and meet our target of 3 to 6 months' costs

However, the level of reserves held, and what should be the ideal level held for the charity, will be kept under constant review in the coming year.

The Trustees are of the view that the charity is a going concern and have determined that there is no material uncertainty that casts doubt on the charity's ability to continue as a going concern.

### **Trustees' responsibilities in relation to the financial statements**

The charity trustees (who are also the directors of Synergy Theatre Project for the purposes of company law) are responsible for preparing a trustees' annual report and financial statements in accordance with the applicable law and United Kingdom Accounting Standards (United Kingdom Generally Accepted Accounting Practice).

Company law requires the trustees to prepare financial statements which give a true and fair view of the state of affairs of the charitable company at the end of the financial year and of its surplus or deficit for that period. In preparing those financial statements the trustees are required to:

- select suitable accounting policies and then apply them consistently;
- observe the methods and principles in the Charities SORP;
- make judgments and estimates that are reasonable and prudent;
- state whether applicable UK Accounting Standards have been followed, subject to any material departures disclosed and explained in the financial statements; and
- prepare the financial statements on the going concern basis unless it is inappropriate to presume that the charity will continue in business.

The Trustees are responsible for the maintenance and integrity of the charity and financial information included in the charity's website in accordance with legislation in the United Kingdom governing the preparation and dissemination of financial information.

The trustees are responsible for maintaining proper accounting records which disclose with reasonable accuracy at any time the financial position of the charitable company and enables them to ensure that the financial statements comply with the Companies Act 2006. The trustees are also responsible for safeguarding the assets of the charitable company and hence for taking reasonable steps for the prevention and detection of fraud and other irregularities.

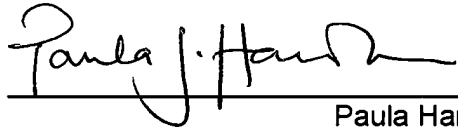
**Members of the Board of Directors**

Members of the Board of Directors, who are directors for the purposes of company law and trustees for the purposes of charity law, who served during the year and up to the date of this report are set out on page 3.

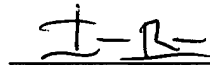
**Approval**

These accounts are prepared in accordance with the special provisions of Part 15 of the Companies Act 2006 relating to small companies and constitute the annual accounts required by the Companies Act 2006.

Approved by the Board of Directors on 15 January 2026 and signed on their behalf by:



Paula Hamilton  
Director and Trustee



Ihsan Rahim  
Director and Trustee

## **Independent examiner's report to the members on the unaudited accounts of Synergy Theatre Project**

I report on the financial statements of Synergy Theatre Project for the year ended 31 May 2025 which comprise the Statement of financial activities, Balance Sheet and Statement of cash flows with the related notes set out on pages 15 to 22.

### **Respective responsibilities of trustees and the independent examiner**

As described on page 12 the charity's trustees, who are also the directors of Synergy Theatre Project for the purposes of company law, are responsible for the preparation of the accounts in accordance with applicable law and United Kingdom Accounting Standards, and they consider that the company is exempt from an audit under section 144(2) of the Charities Act 2011 and that an independent examination is needed. The charity's gross income exceeded £250,000 and I am qualified to undertake the examination by being a qualified member of the Institute of Chartered Accountants in England and Wales.

Having satisfied myself that the charity is not subject to audit under company law and is eligible for independent examination, it is my responsibility to:

- examine the accounts under section 145 of the 2011 Act;
- to follow the procedures laid down in the general Directions given by the Charity Commission under section 145(5)(b) of the 2011 Act and;
- to state whether particular matters have come to my attention

### **Basis of independent examiner's report**

My examination was conducted in accordance with the General Directions given by the Charity Commissioners. An examination includes a review of the accounting records kept by the charity and a comparison of the accounts presented with these records. It also includes consideration of any unusual items or disclosures in the accounts and seeking explanations from you as trustees concerning any such matters. The procedures undertaken do not provide all the evidence that would be required in an audit and consequently no opinion is given as to whether the accounts present a 'true and fair view' and the report is limited to those matters set out in the statement below.

### **Independent examiner's statement**

In connection with my examination, no matter has come to my attention

- (1) which gives me reasonable cause to believe that in any material respect the requirements:

- to keep accounting records in accordance with section 386 of the Companies Act 2006; and
- to prepare accounts which accord with the accounting records, comply with the accounting requirements of section 386 of the Companies Act 2006 and with the methods and principles of the Statement of Recommended Practice: Accounting and Reporting by Charities have not been met; or

- (2) to which, in my opinion, attention should be drawn in order to enable a proper understanding of the accounts to be reached.



**Robert McGinty, FCA**  
**Chartered Accountant**  
Cintra  
Coley Avenue  
Woking  
Surrey GU22 7BT

**15 January 2026**

# Synergy Theatre Project

## Statement of financial activities for the year ended 31 May 2025

	Note	Unrestricted Funds £	Restricted Funds £	Total 2025 £	Total 2024 £
<b>Income:</b>					
Donations and grants	2	21,127	371,555	392,682	461,376
<i>Income from charitable activities:</i>					
Admission charges		4,717	-	4,717	-
Fees		80,480	-	80,480	85,701
Theatre tax relief		-	-	-	12,630
Investment income		5,684	-	5,684	5,418
<b>Total Income</b>		<b>112,008</b>	<b>371,555</b>	<b>483,563</b>	<b>565,125</b>
<b>Expenditure</b>					
Cost of raising funds	3	31,745	-	31,745	51,386
Expenditure on charitable activities:	4	80,080	371,555	451,635	513,416
<b>Total Expenditure</b>		<b>111,825</b>	<b>371,555</b>	<b>483,380</b>	<b>564,802</b>
Net Income/(expenditure) for the year		<b>183</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>183</b>	<b>323</b>
<b>Reconciliation of funds</b>					
Total Funds brought forward		216,357	-	216,357	216,034
<b>Total funds carried forward</b>		<b>216,540</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>216,540</b>	<b>216,357</b>

The statement of includes all gains and losses for the year.

All income and expenditure is from continuing activities.

# Synergy Theatre Project

## Balance Sheet as at 31 May 2025

	Note	2025 £	2024 £
<b>Current Assets</b>			
Debtors	7	9,000	11,643
Bank Account		371,004	324,864
<b>Total Current Assets</b>		<b>380,004</b>	<b>336,507</b>
<b>Current Liabilities</b>			
Creditors due within one year	8	(163,464)	(120,150)
<b>Net Current Assets</b>		<b>216,540</b>	<b>216,357</b>
<b>Net Assets</b>		<b>216,540</b>	<b>216,357</b>
<b>The funds of the charity:</b>			
Unrestricted income funds		216,540	216,357
<b>Total Charity Funds</b>		<b>216,540</b>	<b>216,357</b>

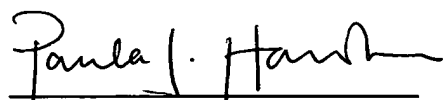
For the year ending 31 May 2025 the company was entitled to exemption from audit under section 477 of the Companies Act 2006 relating to small companies. The members have not required the company to obtain an audit in accordance with section 476 of the Companies Act 2006.

The directors acknowledge their responsibility for complying with the requirements of the Act with respect to accounting records and for the preparation of accounts.

These accounts have been prepared in accordance with the provisions applicable to companies subject to the small companies regime.

The notes on pages 18 to 22 form part of these accounts.

Approved by the trustees on 15 January 2026 and signed on their behalf.



Paula Hamilton  
Director and Trustee



Esther Baker  
Company Secretary



## Statement of cash flows for year ending 31 May 2025

	2025	2024
	£	£
<b>Cash provided by operating activities</b>	<b>40,456</b>	<b>21,645</b>
Interest income	5,684	5,418
<b>Change in cash in the year</b>	<b>46,140</b>	<b>27,063</b>
 Cash at the beginning of the year	 324,864	 297,801
Cash at the end of the year - bank account	371,004	324,864

### Reconciliation of net movement in funds to net cash flow from operating activities

	2025	2024
	£	£
Net income for the year per the financial statement	183	323
Deduct interest	(5,684)	(5,418)
Decrease (increase) in debtors	2,643	11,403
Increase (decrease) in creditors	43,314	15,337
<b>Cash provided by operating activities</b>	<b>40,456</b>	<b>21,645</b>

## Notes to the financial statements for the year ended 31 May 2025

### 1. Accounting policies

The principal accounting policies adopted, judgements and key sources of estimation uncertainty in the preparation of the financial statements are as follows:

#### a) Basis of preparation

The financial statements have been prepared under the historic cost convention with items initially recognised at cost or transaction value unless otherwise stated in the relevant accounting policy note.

The financial statements have been prepared in accordance with Accounting and Reporting by Charities: Statement of Recommended Practice applicable to charities preparing their accounts in accordance with the Financial Reporting Standard in the UK and Republic of Ireland (FRS 102) (effective 1 October 2019) – (Charities SORP (FRS 102), the Financial Reporting Standard applicable in the UK and Republic of Ireland (FRS102) and the Companies Act 2006.

The charity constitutes a public benefit entity as defined in FRS 102.

#### b) Preparation of accounts on a going concern basis

The charity has a sound financial position and maintains regular contact with its principal donors. The trustees have considered the requirement that the financial statements should be prepared on a going concern basis.

#### c) Income recognition

All income is recognised once the charity has entitlement to the income, there is sufficient certainty of receipt and so it is probable that the income will be received, and the amount of income receivable can be measured reliably.

Donations and interest on funds are recognised when they are received. Restricted Grants and Donations received in advance of performance or provision of other specified service is deferred until the criteria for income recognition are met.

#### d) Donated services

Donated services are recognised as income when the charity has control over the item, any conditions associated with the donated item have been met, the receipt of the economic benefit from the use of the item by the charity is probable and that economic benefit can be measured reliably. On receipt, donated services are recognised on the basis of the value of the gift to the charity which is the amount the charity would have been willing to pay to obtain services of equivalent economic benefit on the open market: a corresponding amount is recognised in expenditure in the period of the receipt.

#### e) Interest receivable

Interest on funds held on deposit is included when receivable and the amount can be measured reliably by the charity: this is usually upon notification of the interest paid or payable by the Bank.

#### f) Fund accounting

Unrestricted or general funds are available to spend on activities that further the purposes of the charity. Restricted funds are income which the donor has specified are to be used solely for a specific project or area of the Trusts work.

#### g) Expenditure and irrecoverable VAT

Irrecoverable VAT is charged against the expenditure heading for which it was incurred. Liabilities are recognised as expenditure as soon as there is a legal or constructive obligation committing the charity to that expenditure, it is probable that settlement will be required and the amount of the obligation can be measured reliably.

Expenditure is classified under the following activity headings:

- costs of raising funds include salaries of staff associated with generating donated income
- Expenditure on charitable activities are the cost artistic productions, learning and engagement, training services and young people's projects undertaken to further the purposes of the charity.

**h) Allocation of support and governance costs**

Support costs are those functions that assist the work of the charity but do not directly undertake charitable activities. Support costs include office administration, staff and premises costs, and governance costs, which support the charity's development programmes and activities. These costs have been allocated between the cost of raising funds and expenditure on charitable activities. The basis on which support and governance costs have been allocated are set out in note 5.

**i) Tangible fixed assets and depreciation**

Individual fixed assets costing more than £5,000 are capitalised at cost. Depreciation is charged from the year of acquisition on a straight-line basis over their estimated useful life of four years.

**j) Debtors**

Trade and other debtors are recognised at the settlement amount due. Prepayments are valued at the amount prepaid.

**k) Cash at bank**

Cash at bank represents such accounts and instruments that are available on demand or have a maturity of less than three months at the date of the acquisition.

**l) Creditors and provisions**

Creditors and provisions are recognised where the charity has a present obligation resulting from a past event that will probably result in the transfer of funds to a third party and the amount due to settle the obligation can be measured or estimated reliably.

**m) Pensions**

The company operates a defined contribution pension scheme. The pension charge represents the amounts payable by the company to the fund in the year into a separate entity. Once the contributions have been paid the company has no further payment obligations. The contributions are recognised as expenses when they fall due. Amounts not paid are shown in accruals in the balance sheet. The assets of the plan are held separately from the company in independently administered funds.

**n) Funds structure**

The substantial majority of income is from grants from other charitable trusts. Other sources of income are fees from workshops, performances and courses as well as Theatre Tax Relief and donations.

Restricted funds are funds used in accordance with specific restrictions imposed by the donor or trust deed. There is a restricted fund for each donor.

Unrestricted income funds comprise those funds which the trustees are free to use for any purpose in furtherance of the charitable objects. Unrestricted funds include designated funds where the trustees, at their discretion, have created a fund for a specific purpose.

## 2. Donations and grants

	Unrestricted Funds £	Restricted Funds £	Total 2025 £	Total 2024 £
AB Charitable Trust	18,000	-	18,000	18,000
Arts Council England	-	29,700	29,700	24,300
BBC Children in Need	-	-	-	25,093
Chesterhill Family Trust	500	-	500	500
Comic Relief Walkers Smiles Fund	-	-	-	89,438
Didymus Charity	-	10,000	10,000	-
Field Family Charitable Trust	-	2,000	2,000	-
Garfield Weston Foundation	-	60,000	60,000	-
Harrow Change Makers	-	-	-	10,660
Hedley Foundation	-	3,000	3,000	-
Henry Smith Foundation	-	70,000	70,000	40,000
John Lyon's Charity	-	40,000	40,000	40,000
John Lyon's Charity Cultural Capital Fund	-	40,000	40,000	40,000
Lloyds Bank Foundation	-	-	-	35,583
National Lottery Community Fund: RC London and South East Region	-	99,463	99,463	91,584
Pickwell Foundation	-	4,976	4,976	6,659
Rayne Foundation	-	25,000	25,000	25,000
Other via CAF Online	2,627	-	2,627	1,929
Donated Services	-	17,251	17,251	16,603
Accruals & deferred income carried forward	-	(29,835)	(29,825)	31,610
	21,127	371,555	392,682	461,376

## 3. Expenditure on raising funds

	Unrestricted Funds £	Restricted Funds £	Total 2025 £	Total 2024 £
Staff costs	31,745	-	31,745	51,386

## 4. Expenditure on charitable activities

	Artistic Productions £	Learning & Engagement £	Training Services £	Young People £	Total £
Direct costs:					
Fees	43,280	34,546	27,473	20,823	126,122
Staff	43,577	96,720	4,534	55,199	200,030
Other	29,740	24,996	695	4,509	59,940
Support costs	9,003	19,985	938	11,408	41,334
Governance costs	5,272	11,705	550	6,682	24,209
	130,872	187,952	34,190	98,621	451,635

## 5. Support & Governance costs

	Support	Governance	Total	Basis of Allocation
	£	£	£	
Staff cost	14,321	7,240	21,561	Staff time
General Office	27,013	13,657	40,670	Staff time
Fees	-	312	312	Governance
Accountancy services	-	3,000	3,000	Governance
	<u>41,334</u>	<u>24,209</u>	<u>65,543</u>	

## 6. Employees and Staff costs and remuneration of key management personnel and Trustees

The charity considers the directors/trustees, Artistic Director and General Manager to be key management personnel.

No trustees received any remuneration in respect of their services in the year (2024: nil), neither were they reimbursed expenses during the year (2024: nil).

No employee earned over £60,000 during the year. The total remuneration of the key management personnel was £97,055 (2024: £94,390).

Staff cost during the year were

	2025	2024
	£	£
Salaries and wages	229,301	257,155
Social security	18,495	19,162
Pensions	5,540	5,527
	<u>253,336</u>	<u>281,844</u>

The average number of full-time employees during the year was 6 (2024: 7)

## 7. Debtors

	2025	2024
	£	£
Grants receivable	3,000	-
Other debtors	6,000	11,643
	<u>9,000</u>	<u>11,643</u>

## 8. Creditors due within one year

	2025	2024
	£	£
Tax & social security	9,938	11,106
Trade creditors	3,318	20,470
Grant prepayments	150,208	88,574
	<u>163,464</u>	<u>120,150</u>

## 9. Analysis of movement in funds

	At 1 June 2024 £	Incoming £	Outgoing £	At 31 May 2025 £
<b>Restricted funds:</b>				
Donations and grants	-	371,555	(371,555)	-
<b>Total restricted funds</b>	-	<b>371,555</b>	<b>(371,555)</b>	-
<b>Unrestricted funds:</b>				
General funds	216,357	112,008	(111,825)	216,540
<b>Total unrestricted funds</b>	<b>216,357</b>	<b>112,008</b>	<b>(111,825)</b>	<b>216,540</b>
<b>Total funds</b>	<b>216,357</b>	<b>483,563</b>	<b>(483,380)</b>	<b>216,540</b>

## 10. Analysis of assets between funds

	General Funds £	Restricted funds £	Total funds £
Current assets	229,796	150,208	380,004
Creditors due within one year	(13,256)	(150,208)	(163,464)
<b>Total net assets</b>	<b>216,540</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>216,540</b>