

European Year of Skills

Shortages of skills in technical, production and administrative functions in the live performance need to be urgently addressed

Press statement

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At the Pearle* members conference in Oslo on 11 and 12 May, employers from across Europe reiterated their concerns about serious skills shortages and skills gaps in the live performance sector. According to Eurostat, about 1,3 million¹ people work in the sector, which is a conservative figure².

The pandemic caused a major impact on the labour supply in the sector. About two years of standstill due to closure or limited activity led to an exit of people from technical, production, marketing/communication and business administration. Whilst the sector could finally resume activities in the course of 2022, this has not led to a significant return of those who left the sector in 2020 and 2021. In a number of countries, some people also retired earlier than they would have normally done.

A lack of skilled staff may lead to slimming down on projects and a number of performances, sometimes even resulting in the cancellation of productions³. Yet, at the same time, many also report positive and very positive audience figures, reaching pre-Covid levels. As audience behaviour has become quite unpredictable, there is a great need to further understand trends in audience participation in live events and better connect to different groups in society. Therefore, live performance organisations must be able to recruit the best-talented data analysts, communication and marketing experts.

In the technical⁴ area, there are skills shortages in the following professions: electricians, wiremen, rigging, site crew and front of house engineers/backline/systems technicians, production and stage managers⁵ as well as in costume, wigs, hair and make-up.

In some countries or regions of Europe, theatre technicians are listed on shortage occupation lists⁶. Training, re-training or upskilling people signifies an important investment for employers. In general, preference is given to industry-led training of technicians, in combination with on-the-job learning. In Germany alone, the number of “event technology

¹ Eurostat Figures of 2019, scope EU-27, UK and EFTA, economic activity NACE 90.

² In 2019 the UK theatre ecosystem alone supports 204,993 workers, i.e. employees and freelancers, the majority in technical and production roles. Source: Economic impact assessment of UK theatre sector, Sound Diplomacy, December 2022.

³ Source: <https://www.nrc.nl/nieuws/2023/05/10/minder-theatervoorstellingen-door-hoge-kosten-en-personeelstekorten-a4164340>. “Less theatre performances due to high costs and lack of personnel”.

⁴ Source: https://www.plasa.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/PLASA_WeMakeEvents_Survey_Report_2022_2023.pdf.

⁵ Source: <https://www.creativeindustriesfederation.com/index.php/news/solt-and-uk-theatre-publish-theatre-workforce-review>.

⁶ Source: <https://www.vdab.be/sites/default/files/media/files/Knelpuntberoepen2023.pdf>, p.37.

specialists” apprentices beginning training in 2020 /2021 diminished by 37,5%. This means that almost 40% fewer technicians than usual will have completed their training and be available for the market in 2024.⁷

In the administrative departments, there is a lack of marketing and communication people, press & pr, sponsorship & fundraising, data analysts, bookkeepers/accountants, HR advisors, production leaders, and even management.

Employers agree that a major scaling-up effort is needed for the sector to be on top of technological evolutions, ensure innovation and meet the demands of the audiences. It's been observed that enterprises and sectors compete to recruit skilled persons, in particular people specialised in marketing, communication, sales, data analysts and other IT functions, finances & accounting. This is worrying, as those specialists are much needed in the sector.

The [European Year on Skills](#) is much welcomed as it allows to focus on sectoral needs, such as through [social partner activities](#), the [pact for skills](#) flagship initiative and sectoral large-scale partnerships.

For Pearle* members it is obvious that those Europe-wide initiatives go hand in hand with making available funding for skills development on the job and targeted industry-led trainings in all countries across Europe. It also means that governments must provide sufficient funding for culture so that the sector can offer competitive wages to attract the right skills and talents and have funds to undertake targeted campaigns to attract people. This requires a multi-annual approach, as it is expected that it will take several years to cope with skills shortages and reduce the number of open vacancies.

The pandemic learned how important access to culture is for society as a whole, and for people's health and well-being. It shows that investment in culture pays off. As recovery funds are made available across the economy, it is the right time for governments to commit to supporting the live performance sector.

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About Pearle*

Pearle*- Live Performance Europe is a European federation representing through its members more than 10,000 theatres, theatre production companies, orchestras and music ensembles, opera houses, ballet and dance companies, festivals, concert halls, venues and technical suppliers and sole traders within the performing arts and music sector across Europe.

Pearle* is recognised as the only European association representing employers in the European sectoral social dialogue committee “live performance”.

Pearle* curates on its website over 100 job platforms across Europe and beyond.

⁷ Source : <https://www.dihk.de/de/themen-und-positionen/fachkraefte/aus-und-weiterbildung/ausbildung/zahlen-daten-fakten-ausbildung-2638>.