

Impact Case Study Template

Section A		
Institution: The Royal Central School of Speech and Drama, University of London		
Unit of Assessment: 33 Music, Drama, Dance, Performing Arts, Film, and Screen Studies		
Title of case study: Improving social equality in the British performing arts industries		
Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: 2008–2020		
Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:		
Name(s):	Role(s) (e.g. job title):	Period(s) employed by submitting HEI:
Ben Buratta	Senior Lecturer in Contemporary Performance Practice	1 April 2014–present
Gilli Bush-Bailey	Professor of Women's Performance History	1 July 2013–31 July 2017 (since then Emerita)
Tom Cornford	Senior Lecturer in Theatre and Performance	4 January 2016–present
Stephen Farrier	Reader in Theatre and Performance	18 January 2000–present
Period when the claimed impact occurred: 2014–2020		
Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? No		
Section B		
<p>1. Summary of the impact Addressing inequalities in the British theatre and performing arts industries, researchers at Central have collaborated with industry professionals to produce impacts across the sector. Ben Buratta, Gilli Bush-Bailey, and Tom Cornford have identified and interrogated inequalities in employment and representation, relating principally to gender and sexuality. Specifically, they have: 1) Improved social equality in the British performing arts industries; 2) Shaped policy debates in the performing arts sector.</p>		
<p>2. Underpinning research Since 2014, research clusters have been cultivated at Central that interleave analyses of historical inequalities in the performing arts with feminist practices and historiography (Bush-Bailey, Cornford, Damian-Martin, Delgado, Paxton), explorations of queer theory and performance advanced through Queer@Central and the Queer Shifts seminar series (Buratta, Farrier), and research into cultures of care (Abraham, Baker, Low, Stuart-Fisher). Central has a long history of research that is directly relevant to and realised collaboratively with the performing arts industries, including employing researchers with professional experience in the sector, such as Buratta, Bush-Bailey, Cornford, and Farrier. Research at Central has thereby developed a research agenda for the intersectional analysis of structural inequalities in performance-making, on which it has delivered through research-led interventions into the sector exemplified by the work of Buratta, Bush-Bailey, and Cornford.</p> <p>Buratta's practice research project <i>And The Rest of Me Floats</i> (ATROMF) (see RO2) was undertaken with Outbox Theatre, of which Buratta is director, and funded by National Lottery Reaching Communities, Arts Council England (ACE), Central, Bush Theatre, and Prime Theatre. It aimed both to generate a performance that centred the biographies of its queer cast, using utopian performatives to rebut overwhelmingly negative media portrayals of LGBTQIA+ experiences and to increase representation by creating routes into the theatre industry for queer and trans people. This project evolved through dialogue between Farrier's research and Outbox's earlier practice, in which 'the exchange of low-ranking, historically everyday knowledge among the participants led to the most profound representations in the performance' of relationships among intergenerational queer communities (RO1: 1418). From this analysis and further exchanges with participants in the Queer Shifts seminar series (co-ordinated by Farrier) came Buratta's innovation of the original conceptual and practical methodology of dance-floor dramaturgy, which served as a way of drawing on the utopic possibilities and multiplicity of the dance floor (RO2: 15–19) to re-imagine the normative apparatus of theatre to represent realities of queer lives. The practice thus enabled the performers to draw upon their experiences and present queer and trans lives authentically in a</p>		

narrative framework that did not reproduce and recirculate queer trauma, but was transformative and future-focused (RO2: 18). This practice research was shaped through inclusive collaborative workshops with 120 trans people in leading arts venues (RO2: 30), which also functioned as sites for the dissemination of its findings among the trans community, in addition to the performance's 3 runs in London and Birmingham to audiences of almost 4,000, its filming for the National Video Archive of Performance held in the V&A, and the publication in 2019 of its play-text by Oberon Books (RO2: 28–9).

Arriving at Central in 2013, **Bush-Bailey** expanded earlier research conducted at Royal Holloway, University of London (RO3) that established an intellectual foundation for generating revisionist histories of women's performance. The key extension of her work at Central has been to interweave historical analysis with insights from her lived experience of negotiating gendered working conditions as an actress (RO4, RO5). Publications articulate how, as cultural history, the research has 'been shaped by my twenty-five year acting career' (RO5: 113), a perspective from which **Bush-Bailey** has re-mapped the past, shifting the emphasis from the occlusion of individual female playwrights in literary, 'canonical' terms, to the centrality of women as playwrights and actress/managers in the 'dramatic repertoire' of commercial theatre culture over 400 years (RO4). In demonstrating the uninterrupted success of women as theatre practitioners and the significance of their legacy to contemporary female theatre practice, her research has contributed to the revival of lost plays by women, particularly through her role as historical consultant and dramaturg for theatre companies (including the Royal Shakespeare Company (RSC) and Northern Stage). Extending her research to the twentieth century through her collaboration with Tonic Theatre resulted in research on gender equity, economics, and labour (RO4, RO5, and a book chapter on Mabel Constanduros developed at this time but published after **Bush-Bailey** became Professor Emerita, in Maggie B. Gale and Kate Dorney (eds). 2019. *Stage women, 1900–1950: Female theatre workers and professional practice*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, pp. 262–85). This work has stimulated 'a larger discussion about new understandings of women in theater and their crucial role in training the next generation of performers' (RO4: 247), which has provided important context for the historical structures and decision-making mechanisms that continue to marginalise women in the theatre and performance industry (RO4, RO5). **Bush-Bailey**'s research demonstrates the industry's gendered inequalities by exposing both their historical contingency and their dialogue with the lived experiences of female workers; her findings therefore offer theatre professionals opportunities to change the story of 'how things are' in the theatre.

Cornford's research into the practices of theatre production is likewise historical in focus. Early research into the career of director Katie Mitchell (RO6) was undertaken during his collaboration with the campaigning organisation Parents in Performing Arts (PIPA), and initial findings relating to the changing position of women in the British theatre since the 1980s (RO6: 139, 142) fed directly into the research into caring responsibilities he conducted with PIPA (S4).

Cornford's monograph, *Theatre Studios: A Political History of Ensemble Theatre-Making* (RO7), analyses theatre's systems of production, exploring the practices of key examples of experimental theatre organisations in the twentieth century. The wider focus of this work is on organisational formation and the ways in which these experimental groups both challenged and reaffirmed the politics of conventional processes of cultural production. The research also foregrounds the reproduction of gendered inequalities, elucidating, for example, how female theatre workers' careers have been commonly structured around marriage and childcare, and by gendered conceptions of the various functions of theatre production (RO7: 68–71, 117–121). Of further significance are his insights into how variously hierarchical or democratic relations of production directly mould aesthetic products (RO7: 106–117, 199–209, 275–295, 302–307, 309–323). The findings of what director Sean Holmes calls **Cornford**'s 'rigorously compelling examination' (RO7) were shared with industry partners prior to their formal dissemination, including Holmes' Secret Theatre company at the Lyric, Hammersmith (2013–2015) (RO7: 307–324) and PIPA, as **Cornford** progressed the research towards publication.

The interwoven trajectories of this research exemplify the methodological and historical breadth and the depth of work at Central that critically engages questions of equality, diversity, and inclusion (EDI), as well as its close collaboration and interaction with industry partners.

3. References to the research (*Indicates output was peer reviewed)

- RO1.** *Farrier, S. 2015. 'Playing With Time: Gay Intergenerational Performance Work and the Productive Possibilities of Queer Temporalities', *Journal of Homosexuality*, 62 (10): 1398–1418. Submitted in REF2021.
- RO2.** *Buratta, B. 2020. *And The Rest of Me Floats*. Practice Research Project, ISBN: 978-1-8383967-3-2. Submitted in REF2021. Multi-component submission including practice documentation and Buratta, Ben. 2020. 'Dance-Floor Dramaturgy: Unlearning the Shame and Stigma of HIV through Theatre', *Theatre Topics*, 30(2): 57–68. doi:10.1353/tt.2020.0029
- RO3.** *Bush-Bailey, G. 2011. *Performing Herself: Autobiography and Fanny Kelly's Dramatic Recollections* (Manchester: Manchester University Press). ISBN: 9780719079214. Submitted in REF2014.
- RO4.** *Bush-Bailey, G. 2014. 'The Gerbini Letters; or a Tale of Two Mothers', in *Stage Mothers*, ed. by Laura Engel and Elaine McGirr (Lewisburg, PA: Bucknell University Press), pp. 233–249. Submitted in REF2021.
- RO5.** *Bush-Bailey, G. 2014. 'Shifting Scenes: The Child Performer and Her Audience Revisited in the Digital Age', in *Entertaining Children*, ed. by Gillian Arrighi and Victor Emeljanow (New York: Palgrave Macmillan), pp. 111–127. Submitted in REF2021.
- RO6.** *Cornford, T. and C. Svich (eds). 2020. *Contemporary Theatre Review*, 30 (2), special issue: 'Katie Mitchell'. Supported by SCUDD David Bradby Award (2017). Submitted in REF2021.
- RO7.** *Cornford, T. 2020. *Theatre Studios: A Political History of Ensemble Theatre-Making* (Abingdon: Routledge). Supported by Society for Theatre Research Award (2018). Submitted in REF2021.

4. Details of the impact

Systemic social and gendered inequalities are historically endemic within the British performing arts industries; research by **Buratta**, **Bush-Bailey**, and **Cornford** has exposed their operation and developed strategies to address them, producing two key impacts. Their research has 1) generated mechanisms for wider inclusion, leading to improved social equality in the British performing arts industries; 2) shaped policy debates in the British performing arts sector.

1. Improving social equality in the British performing arts industries by generating mechanisms for wider inclusion

Central's research has generated mechanisms within the performing arts industries to address issues of EDI for groups marginalised as a consequence of their gender and/or sexuality. In the context where 'just 6% of regular characters in broadcast scripted primetime programming' identified as LGBTQ (S9: 18) and there is widespread dissatisfaction among queer communities about their representation in the performing arts, **Buratta**'s work with Outbox aims 'to increase representation of queer and trans* performers, and develop routes into the theatre industry promoting education, empathy, and understanding around gender identity, presentation, and transition' (RO2: 9). Consultation conducted by Outbox showed that trans people have the most significant need and least access to support services and creative training schemes. In direct response, **Buratta** engaged 7 queer and trans performers in *ATROMF* (RO2: 9), whose 'sustained involvement in the show making processes' also enabled them 'to instigate their own creative projects as a result of working with Outbox' (S9: 24). A further 40 trans people took part in a summer school based on the show's creative processes, of whom 11 were mentored and offered developmental support with their own projects and a showcase, resulting in 2 receiving commissions from High Tide Theatre to take their work to the Edinburgh Festival (RO2: 30). That **Buratta**'s work has led to increased inclusion in the performing arts industries more widely is evidenced by the establishment, following the first iteration of *ATROMF* in 2017, of The Queer House, an artists' agency and producing house for queer actors, writers, and makers, by Outbox producer Char Boden and associate artist Yaz Zadeh. They now represent 27 LGBTQIA+ artists, 23 of whom had no previous representation; their artists have worked at the Royal Court, in the West End, and on an Amazon Prime TV series; they are now an associate company at the Gate Theatre and High Tide Theatre; and their debut producing double-bill of *Pink Lemonade* and *Since U Been Gone* (picked up from Outbox's mentoring scheme) was included in *The Stage* 18 best shows (22 August 2019) and *The Guardian* top picks of the Edinburgh Fringe (12 August 2019), with *Pink Lemonade* securing a 2021 transfer to the Bush and being developed for TV. A Queer House artist attests that they now have 'access to an acting career that I never thought

would be possible. I am an out Trans performer who finished a national main stage tour and is now a series regular in an HBO show' (S12).

Bush-Bailey's collaboration with industry partners has informed and supported strategies to confront structures and unconscious biases that continue to impede equal representation and the expansion of female-led theatre practices. Director of Tonic Theatre, Lucy Kerbel, writes that the team of Central researchers, led by **Bush-Bailey**, who were the academic partners of their Advance Project (2014, 2016) 'deepened and greatly enhanced the programme, bringing a dimension of academic rigor alongside an expert knowledge of both theatre and gender' (S11). **Bush-Bailey** was supported by Dr Katharine Low, whose research in participatory methodologies shaped the project's approach to delivering change. In 2016, Dr Lisa Woynarski was employed by Central as an embedded postdoctoral researcher at Tonic (1 February–31 July). The Paul Hamlyn Foundation-funded 2014 project focused on understanding what was 'preventing talented women in the performing arts industries from rising to the top' and 'tasked 11 leading theatres from across England to proactively explore how they could achieve greater gender equality on their stages' (S1i). It led to a second ACE-funded iteration of Advance (2016), which was expanded to include dance and opera companies. A key tool generated by Advance was the 'gender tracker', enabling organisations to identify crucial inequalities, which formed the basis of bespoke inquiries embedded in their day-to-day practices, and focused on constructing and implementing mechanisms to rectify them. Following Advance, 13 ACE National Portfolio Organisations introduced new policies or initiatives: altering approaches to recruitment (Clean Break), focusing artist-development activities on women/female-led companies (Cast, Northern Stage), engaging women in leadership roles (Northern Ballet, Royal Opera House, Sadler's Wells) (S2: 7–8). In 2018, Tonic formed the Advance Network, with 17 performing arts organisations collaborating on 'a programme designed to support them across all their work on equality, diversity and inclusion' (S1ii). Data gathered via the Network shows that engagement with Advance has led to a significant increase in the proportion of female playwrights commissioned and programmed at Chichester Festival Theatre (+28%), Headlong (+13%), and Leeds Playhouse (+12%), and increases in the proportion of other female creatives employed at the RSC (+22%), Mahogany (+33%), and New Wolsey (+14%) (S2: 7).

Cornford's research into gender and organisational structures led to his invitation to be lead researcher for Parents and Carers in Performing Arts' (PIPA) Best Practice Research Project (2016–2017), funded by ACE and Creative Scotland, and delivered collaboratively with 15 leading theatres across England, Scotland, and Wales. This project identified barriers and challenges to working in theatre for people with caring responsibilities and evolved strategies to remove them, demonstrating that 'substantial, systemic changes are possible' within theatre production (S4: 8). It formed the basis of PIPA's Best Practice Charter (launched in 2018), which aims 'to increase business resilience by working towards the 10 Charter points, attracting and retaining a more flexible and diverse workforce', providing 'participating organisations with a tried and tested framework, comprehensive toolkit and ongoing support as well as PIPA accreditation' (S6). To date, PIPA has worked with 26 theatre companies through this charter programme, including 13 regional theatres across England, Scotland, and Wales; 3 touring companies; 6 London theatres; and 4 national companies: the National Theatre, National Theatre of Scotland and National Theatre Wales, and RSC. As part of the Charter agreement, each organisation undertakes a review of their processes mapped against **Cornford**'s Best Practice Research Project, conducting baseline surveys and establishing an internal focus group to evaluate the needs of staff and managers, and generate a bespoke action plan, which they are supported by PIPA to deliver. Kate Sirdifield, HR Manager at the RSC, testifies that this process is 'incredibly useful [...]. Simply the act of working through the questions helped us remind ourselves what we already do that's great, and challenge ourselves on what more we can do in future — as well as sparking new ideas and creative approaches we hadn't considered before' (S6).

2. Shaping policy debates in the performing arts sector

After Tonic's 2014 Advance initiative, leading theatre journalist Lyn Gardner wrote in *The Guardian* that 'it could transform the theatrical landscape forever' (S5ii). As a result of their collaborations with Central researchers, the establishing of Tonic as a charity in 2015 and of PIPA as a limited company supported by its charter programme (2017) and then as a charity

(2020) has positioned both organisations prominently within the UK performance industries and enabled them to shape policy debate about inclusive working practices. This impact is attested to by *The Stage* who, in 2018, reported that ‘thanks largely to the efforts of PIPA and its strategic and research partners, the theatre industry is finally waking up to these issues’ and that ‘what PIPA has accomplished in just over two years — the number of big-hitting strategic partners, the ambition and imagination of the measures being trialled — is impressive’ (S5i). Both PIPA’s Best Practice Research and Tonic’s diversity-focused Planning Tool were cited in the 2017 *Workforce Review of the UK Offstage Theatre and Performing Arts Sector*, commissioned by UK Theatre and the Society of London Theatres (S3), and have led to further work in the sector, exploring inclusion in relation to gender and caring responsibilities. These include PIPA’s *Balancing Act Survey* (2019), which recommends changes to policy to break ‘the link between caring responsibilities and career progression in the performing arts’ (S7: 4).

Impacts from the research can also be seen in the development of casting policies. Following the success of Advance in highlighting gendered inequalities of representation, Tonic were commissioned by Equity, UK Theatre, and the Society of London Theatre to create the Theatre Casting Toolkit (S8), launched in Autumn 2019. Following Buratta’s ‘Trans-Acting Workshops’, a Trans Casting Statement was produced from March–November 2020 by Outbox Theatre, the Queer House, and Milk Presents, led by trans creatives of colour. It highlights the absence of policies to address the exclusion of trans people from commercial or mainstream theatres, which ‘rarely commission or host trans-led work’ (S10: 5), and commits producers to ‘never cast a cisgender person in a trans or non-binary role’ (S10: 6). By December 2020, 8 UK theatres (including the Gate, Manchester’s Contact and Royal Exchange, Derby, Warwick Arts Centre) had agreed to implement the statement (S10: 12), demonstrating the ongoing, transformative impact of this research on policy-making in the sector.

5. Sources to corroborate the impact

S1 Tonic Advance Websites: i) www.tonictheatre-advance.co.uk [accessed 25 March 2021], ii) <https://www.tonictheatre.co.uk/work/advance/> [accessed 25 March 2021]

S2 Low, K. and G. Vivas-Martínez. 2021. ‘Ahead of the Curve: Impacts of Tonic Advance on Gender Equity in the Performing Arts, 2014–2020’ (Central for Tonic) <http://www.tonictheatre-advance.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/Tonic-Theatre-Report-Ahead-of-the-Curve-March-2021-1.pdf>

S3 Smith, A. and Nordicity. June 2017. *Workforce Review of the UK Offstage Theatre and Performing Arts Sector*, Final Report, produced for UK Theatre and the Society of London Theatres

S4 Cornford, T. and T. Whittaker. 2017. *PIPA Best Practice Research Project Final Report* <http://www.pipacampaign.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/PIPA-Best-Practice-Research-Project-Final-Report-03-11-17-online-2.pdf>

S5 Press Reports: i) J. Caird. 2018. ‘How Parents in Performing Arts is giving theatre a creche course in caring’, *The Stage*, 23 January <https://www.thestage.co.uk/features/how-parents-in-performing-arts-is-giving-theatre-a-creche-course-in-caring> [accessed 25 March 2021]; ii) L. Gardner. 2014. ‘Theatre’s gender inequality is shocking – but change is in the air’, *The Guardian Theatre Blog*, 22 September

<https://www.theguardian.com/stage/theatreblog/2014/sep/22/theatre-gender-inequality-tonic-advance> [accessed 25 March 2021]

S6 PIPA, ‘Charter Programme’ <https://pipacampaign.org/charter-programme> [accessed 25 March 2021]

S7 PiPA. 2019. *Balancing Act Report* <https://pipacampaign.org/uploads/ckeditor/BA-Final.pdf>

S8 Tonic. 2019. Theatre Casting Toolkit <https://www.theatrecastingtoolkit.org/> [accessed 25 March 2021]

S9 Outbox Theatre 2015–18, Project Evaluation, May 2018

S10 Craig, Robin. 2021. *Trans Casting Statement Report* <https://www.cssd.ac.uk/Research/Research-Outputs-and-Projects/Current-Research-Projects/trans-casting-statement-report> [accessed 25 March 2021]

S11 Testimonial from Lucy Kerbel, Director of Tonic Theatre, 6 August 2020

S12 Testimonial from Char Boden and Yaz Zadeh, co-directors of The Queer House, 22 March 2021