

***Findings from a national survey on safeguarding,
wellbeing and working practices***

Executive Summary

Prepared For: Industry Professionals, Regulatory Bodies, and Stakeholders in the Performing Arts

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Introduction:

This report analyses findings from two comprehensive consultation surveys involving 619 respondents (349 parents; 270 chaperones) across the theatre, television, film, dance, and modelling sectors. The performing arts offer significant developmental benefits for children, including enhanced confidence, social skills, and professional opportunities. However, the surveys also consistently highlight systemic challenges that negatively impact child (and family) welfare and create an inequitable environment.

This report outlines key findings, identifies issues, and proposes actionable recommendations aimed at fostering a more supportive, transparent, and safeguarded industry for young performers and their families.

Executive Summary

The surveys reveal a dual narrative: positive experiences for children in terms of personal growth and professional development, juxtaposed with persistent and interconnected challenges across licensing, finance, safeguarding, communication, and overall wellbeing.

Key priorities identified for immediate action include:

- **National standardisation:** Establishing consistent national standards for licensing and chaperone training.
- **Accessible resources:** Providing easily accessible, trustworthy parent resource packs from reputable sources.
- **Financial transparency:** Offering clearer financial guidance and addressing exploitative practices.
- **SEND support:** Ensuring dedicated support for children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities.
- **Integrated wellbeing:** Embedding mental health and emotional wellbeing within all safeguarding practices and throughout the industry - from audition process to final performance or broadcast and beyond.

The overarching goal is to empower all stakeholders to be fully informed and able to advocate appropriately for the needs of the child (and themselves) to have a fulfilled, mentally healthy, and truly equitable experience of the industry.

Key findings and identified issues

The survey responses consistently highlighted several critical areas requiring urgent attention:

1. **Inconsistent licensing and chaperone standards: (~45%)**
 - **Issue:** A "postcode lottery" exists in licensing, leading to delays, job losses, and significant geographical and societal inequalities. Chaperone training lacks national consistency.
 - **Impact:** Creates uncertainty for productions, stress for families, and potential gaps in child protection.
2. **Financial exploitation and lack of transparency: (~15%)**
 - **Issue:** Opaque contracts and performing fees, agents taking commissions from parent/chaperone fees, and instances of children rehearsing and performing for extended periods with little to no pay. Hidden family costs are significant and often unacknowledged.
 - **Impact:** Financial burden on families, potential for exploitation, and a lack of fair compensation for young performers and their guardians. Leading to geographic and socio-economic inequalities.
3. **Communication breakdown and advocacy silencing: (~10%)**
 - **Issue:** Poor communication from casting agents (lack of timely responses or feedback), last-minute call sheets from productions, and a general lack of information for parents. Chaperones often feel ignored or intimidated when advocating for a child's health and safety, and parents fear speaking out due to potential negative impacts on their child's career.
 - **Impact:** Increased stress for families, compromised child welfare, and a culture where concerns are suppressed rather than addressed.
4. **Inadequate Safeguarding and Wellbeing Provisions: (~15%)**
 - **Issue:** Welfare violations such as excessive hours, insufficient education, inadequate rest, and unsuitable catering on set. Mental health and emotional wellbeing are not consistently embedded within safeguarding practices, and dedicated support for (and understanding of) SEND children is often lacking.
 - **Impact:** Detrimental effects on children's physical and mental health, educational continuity, and overall wellbeing.

Proposed recommendations

Based on the survey responses, the following strategic recommendations are proposed to address the identified issues and drive systemic change:

1. Strengthen governance, oversight and stakeholder representation:

- **Action:** Establish a Steering Committee with industry-wide representation, formally integrating parent and chaperone voices.
- **Action:** Create and widely disseminate public information on how to identify and avoid industry scams and exploitation, alongside creating and signposting robust reporting mechanisms for bad practice or safeguarding issues.
- **Action:** Make it easier to collect and discover UK-wide data about young performers and licensing.

2. Standardise child performance licensing nationally:

- **Action:** Implement a national, standardised performance licensing process across all Local Authorities.
- **Objective:** Eliminate the "postcode lottery," reduce inequality, and ensure equitable access and protection for young performers regardless of geographical location.

3. Professionalise and certify the chaperone role:

- **Action:** Formalise communication protocols requiring chaperones to send advance background information and parents to send advance child information, ensuring a smooth, prepared transition of care.
- **Action:** Implement enhanced, nationally consistent chaperone training standards, including specific modules on child mental health, advocacy and supporting neurodiverse children. Communicate this information to parents
- **Action:** Create a National Chaperone Certification Scheme, requiring all professional chaperones to pass a standardised and formal exam covering performance law, safeguarding, mental health, first aid, and SEND advocacy.
- **Objective:** Elevate the professional standing of chaperones, ensure consistent high-quality care, and enhance the safety and wellbeing of young performers under their supervision. Bring chaperone licensing and checks more in line with other childcare professions. Advocate for more respect (and mandatory crediting) for chaperones.

4. **Enhance communication and resource accessibility for families:**

- **Action:** Develop and publicise accessible, trustworthy, and comprehensive online Parent Resource Packs (securing funding / sponsorship for their creation). These packs will provide clear guidance on all aspects of the industry and sector to empower parents as advocates.
- **Action:** Implement protocols requiring casting agents to provide timely 'yes' or 'no' responses to all auditions and offer constructive feedback after recalls.
- **Action:** Require production companies to provide earlier and more comprehensive call sheets and schedules, moving away from last-minute demands and recognising the child's reliance on their family structure.
- **Objective:** Improve transparency, reduce parental burden and stress, and ensure families are well-informed and supported throughout the child's professional journey.

5. **Prioritise child welfare, mental health and inclusive practices:**

- **Action:** Embed mental health and emotional wellbeing support directly within all safeguarding and on-set practice, recognising the industry's significant physical and emotional demands.
- **Action:** Mandate dedicated support and necessary adjustments for children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND). Ensure chaperones are proactively briefed on each child's specific needs and empower parents to (know how to) write access riders for their children.
- **Action:** Investigate financial exploitation, such as agents taking commission on parent/chaperone fees or pantomime production companies charging children to perform in 'professional' productions. Ensure appropriate compensation and standardised travel expenses for parents. A transparent review of child performer pay (and how it compares to adult pay) and hidden family costs is urgently needed.
- **Action:** Disseminate the messaging that 'Safeguarding Starts At Casting'.
- **Objective:** Ensure the holistic wellbeing of young performers, protect them from exploitation, and create an inclusive environment that supports all children.

Next steps and call to action

The consistent themes emerging from both surveys underscore a clear need for change. Parents and chaperones are eager for their voices to shape more supportive and equitable systems.

Summary of immediate next steps:

- **Establish steering committee:** Convene the proposed Steering Committee with diverse industry representation.
- **Secure funding:** Initiate efforts to secure funding for the development and dissemination of parent resource packs.
- **Ongoing data collection:** Set up a collection point for data from Local Authorities. Continue to regularly run the survey to build a robust evidence base for ongoing advocacy and policy development and track changes.
- **Stakeholder engagement:** Facilitate wider conversations with industry bodies, safeguarding partners, and government agencies to implement these recommendations.

Proposal: The #YoungPerformersPledge: An Industry Quality Mark

The overarching goal is to transform industry practice by incentivising leadership in child welfare, moving beyond minimum compliance. To achieve this, we propose the **#YoungPerformersPledge Quality Mark** - a comprehensive, verifiable Quality Mark scheme, closely modelled on the successful Albert environmental standard.

The **#YoungPerformersPledge Quality Mark** will serve as the national, standardised benchmark for ethical practice and child wellbeing in the entertainment industry. It shifts the campaign's focus from documenting problems to establishing and incentivising measurable action, allowing production companies, agents, and organisations to earn and proudly display their commitment to the highest standard of care.

By positioning the **#YoungPerformersPledge** as a Quality Mark, the initiative creates an external incentive for the industry to strive for excellence.

This certification will differentiate industry leaders, ensuring parental and public support is channeled toward organisations that demonstrably prioritise child wellbeing over commercial interests.

Next Steps

- Form a multi-stakeholder Steering Committee (parents, experts, and industry leaders) to own and manage the scheme.
- Initiate targeted fundraising (seeking grants, foundations, and industry investments) to secure the initial seed capital required for development and setup costs.
- Draft official certification requirements, ensuring standards are high but achievable, creating a definitive benchmark for best practice.

Limitations of the consultation

While this report provides valuable insights from parents and chaperones, there are several limitations to note:

- **Voices of Children** – The surveys were directed at parents and chaperones, and did not include direct interviews with children themselves. As such, the perspectives of young performers are represented indirectly and may differ from their own lived experiences.
- **Survey Reach and Recruitment** – The survey was shared organically and did not use paid or targeted social media promotion. This may have limited the diversity of respondents and means some groups of parents and chaperones may be underrepresented.
- **Self-Selection Bias** – Respondents chose to take part, which may mean that those with particularly strong positive or negative experiences were more motivated to contribute than those with neutral views.
- **Sector Coverage** – While responses span theatre, television, film, modelling, and dance, there are variations in response numbers across industries. Findings may therefore reflect the perspectives of some sectors more strongly than others.
- **Geographical Variation** – Licensing and safeguarding processes differ between local authorities, but not all regions are equally represented in the data.
- **Depth vs. Breadth** – The survey design prioritised breadth of coverage across many themes. This means some issues are highlighted but not explored in depth.