

The background of the cover features a dark blue field with several large, overlapping circles. Two circles in shades of blue are positioned in the upper left, while two circles in shades of pink and light pink overlap each other and the blue circles, extending towards the bottom right. The text is centered within the white space of the central circle.

TRANS CASTING STATEMENT REPORT

ROBIN CRAIG

Acknowledgements

Commissioned by the Royal Central School of Speech and Drama, with support from Milk Presents, Outbox Theatre and The Queer House.

ROYAL CENTRAL
SCHOOL OF SPEECH & DRAMA

UNIVERSITY OF LONDON

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Contents

About the author	4
Section 1: Summary	5
Section 2: The Trans Casting Statement	6
2.1. The Statement	6
2.2 Timeline of development	7
2.3 Issues raised by Steering Group	11
2.4 Dissemination to policy makers	12
2.5 Next steps	13
Section 3: Context – Trans Casting and Performance Now	14
3.1 Methodology	14
3.2 Summary of findings	14
3.3 Data analysis	15
3.4 Cisgender actors in trans roles	16
Section 4: Trans Casting Initiatives	18
4.1. Equity and Spotlight	18
4.2 Trans-led initiatives	19
4.3 Casting guidelines	20
Section 5: Conclusion	22
Section 6: Appendix	23

About the Author

Robin Craig is a AHRC-funded PhD student with Roehampton University and Shakespeare's Globe. His thesis is titled '*The Limits of Human: Medicalised Bodies in 21st Century Shakespeare*' and focuses on trans and disabled representation in UK theatre. It is currently at the proposal stage for publication as a monograph with Routledge. His writing has been published in the academic journal '*Shakespeare*', and on websites including *VICE*, *Refinery29*, and *Exeunt Magazine*.

Section 1:

Summary

This report outlines the development of the Trans Casting Statement, a collaboration between trans community members, Outbox Theatre, Milk Presents, The Queer House, and LGBTQ Arts Review. The Trans Casting Statement proposes that cisgender actors should not be cast in trans or non-binary roles.

The Trans Casting Statement is contextualised in Section 3, which analyses current trends in trans performance and casting. This analysis is conducted through data collected from 48 productions featuring a trans or non-binary character or performer. The findings demonstrate a lack of trans performers on mainstream theatre stages.

Trans casting initiatives are outlined in Section 4, as well as pre-existing trans casting guides. The report concludes with an Appendix of productions used in the data analysis.

Key Findings:

1. Commercial or “mainstream” theatres rarely commission or host trans-led work, and explicitly trans roles are extremely limited. When these roles are present, cisgender actors are regularly hired to play them.
2. The majority of trans-led performance is occurring in self-produced productions, often at fringe venues or on tour.
3. The Trans Casting Statement is an initiative to address the lack of trans performers on stage, especially in mainstream theatre spaces. The statement proposes that trans roles should only be cast with trans actors, which would limit the amount of cisgender actors being cast in trans roles and provide more opportunities for underrepresented trans talent.

Section 2:

The Trans Casting Statement

Summary of main points of charter, narrative of how it was developed from the controversy caused by the casting of *Breakfast on Pluto* in March 2020 through a process of consultation among queer theatre-makers and trans creatives.

2.1. The Statement

The Trans Casting Statement, as of December 2020, is as follows:

This statement is a first step in our commitment to better support trans and non-binary artists. When you come to our theatre, as an audience member, actor or artist, we will support and fully welcome you.

We will never cast a cisgender person in a trans or non-binary role.

We will actively seek casting opportunities for trans or non-binary performers in any role regardless of gender, acknowledging that they are currently underrepresented on our stages.

We recognise that trans and non-binary people with intersecting identities (including and not limited to ethnicity, disability, sexuality, class) are the most excluded and underrepresented.

We recognise that white voices are often centred.

We specifically recognise that Black trans and non-binary people of all shades are the most marginalised and face the toughest barriers and we will commit to challenging this through our casting.

We recognise that representation is just one part of a bigger conversation. In our commitment to this we understand we must invest time and resources to better our understanding of the imbalance faced in the arts by trans and non-binary artists.

2.2 Timeline of development

The Trans Casting Statement was developed between March and December 2020, with contributors including Outbox Theatre, Milk Presents, The Queer House, LGBTQ Arts Review and a steering group comprised of trans creatives.

March 2020

On 9th March 2020, the casting for *Breakfast on Pluto* (co-produced by The Donmar Warehouse, Landmark Productions, Galway International Arts Festival, and the Birmingham Repertory Theatre) was announced. The production was based on the book of the same title by Patrick McCabe, adapted into a musical by Bob Kelly and Duke Special, directed by Des Kennedy.

The casting announcement included cisgender man Fra Fee as lead character Patrick/Pussy Bayden.¹ The character of Bayden is controversial and could be interpreted as a trans woman – McCabe never explicitly described the character as a trans woman, but Bayden’s narrative features a gender transition and has resonated with the trans community. However, there is a history of casting cisgender men into the role of Bayden, including Cillian Murphy in the 2005 film adaptation.

Robin Craig wrote in a response piece to the casting, published in *Exeunt Magazine*:

This production seems stuck between casting Pussy as a cis male drag queen, as many of the original readers of McCabe’s 1998 book interpreted her, or casting Pussy as a trans woman, as she has since been interpreted by the queer and trans community. [Despite casting a cisgender man as Bayden] this production clearly does recognise the story’s importance to the trans community; it hired trans actress Rebecca Root as a consultant on the production, and offered the role of Pussy’s mother to trans actress Kate O’Donnell.²

Fee’s casting prompted an outcry from the LGBTQIA+ arts community via social media, which was documented on *Pink News* and *Broadway World*.³ Trans writer, director, and actor Travis Alabanza tweeted:

1 Breakfast on Pluto (09/03/2020), ‘Breakfast on Pluto launches, with a breakfast’. Available at: <https://breakfastonpluto.ie/2020/03/10/breakfast-on-pluto-launches-with-a-breakfast/> (Accessed: 24/11/2020).

2 Robin Craig, *Exeunt Magazine* (11/03/2020), ‘Breakfast on Pluto: Why are theatres still slipping up on trans representation?’. Available at: <http://exeuntmagazine.com/features/breakfast-pluto-theatres-still-slipping-trans-representation/> (Accessed: 24/11/2020).

3 Vic Parsons, *Pink News* (10/03/2020), ‘A cis man has been cast as a trans woman in Breakfast on Pluto adaptation and people are furious’. Available at: <https://www.pinknews.co.uk/2020/03/10/breakfast-on-pluto-fra-fee-casting-transgender-lead-backlash-donmar-theatre/> (Accessed: 24/11/2020). BWW News Desk, *Broadway World* (21/03/2020), ‘Social Roundup: Reaction to the Casting of Fra Fee in BREAKFAST ON PLUTO’. Available at: <https://www.broadwayworld.com/westend/article/Social-Roundup-Reaction-To-The-Casting-Of-Fra-Fee-In-BREAKFAST-ON-PLUTO-20200312> (Accessed: 24/11/2020).

The most annoying thing re: #breakfastonpluto casting decision is that ofc [sic] we would complain, it's just a wrong decision. But now we are in the cycle of only ever seen in this industry when a controversy occurs. This was predictable. You could've just done the work to avoid this.⁴

In response to this backlash, on 10th March 2020 the co-producers of *Breakfast on Pluto* released a statement on the casting process. The statement asserted that the creative team had “reached out to the Irish transgender community through multiple channels, and auditioned a number of performers who identified as transgender for the role of Patrick/Pussy Bayden”.⁵ The audition process, however, had resulted in Fee being cast in the role.

The statement on the casting process also stated that Rebecca Root, a trans actor, had been involved with the production as a consultant since 2019 and advised on the script and casting process. A “young trans theatre-maker” had also been offered a placement as Assistant Director, and Lloyd (Meadhbh) Houston had been commissioned to create a wraparound programme of trans-focussed events for the performances in Galway and Dublin.⁶

On 10th March 2020, The Queer House, Outbox Theatre and LGBTQ Arts Review published an open letter to the co-producers of *Breakfast on Pluto* and invited members of the public to add their signature.⁷ The letter stated:

We were incredibly disappointed and concerned to see your recent casting of a cisgender male actor as Patrick/Pussy, in *Breakfast on Pluto*, the role of a trans woman. [...] We feel that if you really couldn't cast a trans person to fulfil the role, then it is not the right time for you to stage this production.⁸

By 12th March, the letter had received nearly 1000 signatures, and as of November 2020, the total number of signatures is 1144, including Sarah Bingham, Chief Executive and Artistic Director of the Derby Theatre and Alex Ferguson, Producer of Homotopia Festival, among other theatre professionals and creatives.⁹ This open letter was sent directly to the co-producers of *Breakfast on Pluto* on 13th March.

Milk Presents, based in Derby, and SHOUT Festival, based in Birmingham, wrote to Birmingham Repertory Theatre to express their frustration as midlands-based organisations and requested that they consider changing the casting decision.

4 Travis Alabanza [Twitter post] (@Travisalabanza, 09/03/2020).

5 *Breakfast on Pluto* (10/03/2020), ‘Statement from Landmark Productions, Galway International Arts Festival, the Birmingham Repertory Theatre and the Donmar Warehouse’. Available at: <https://breakfastonpluto.ie/2020/03/10/casting-process/> (Accessed: 24/11/2020).

6 Ibid.

7 Outbox Theatre [Twitter post] (@Outbox_Theatre, 10/03/2020).

8 Ibid.

9 Giverny Masso, *The Stage* (12/03/2020), ‘Musical theatre accused of “failing the next generation of trans performers”’. Available at: <https://www.thestage.co.uk/news/musical-theatre-accused-of-failing-the-next-generation-of-trans-performers> (Accessed: 24/11/2020).

Signature list shared via private correspondence with Ben Buratta, Ruby Glaskin, and Char Boden.

On 18th March, Milk Presents met with the Birmingham Repertory Theatre, The Donmar Warehouse and Landmark Productions to discuss the casting decision for *Breakfast on Pluto*. During this meeting, Milk Presents explained why they felt the casting decision should be changed and offered their support in finding a suitable trans actor for the role. They also offered their support for the Birmingham Repertory Theatre's aim to be more trans-inclusive. The producers were asked to publicly respond to the open letter published on 13th March.

On 20th March, The Queer House and Outbox Theatre met with the Birmingham Repertory Theatre, The Donmar Warehouse, Galway International Arts Festival, and Landmark Productions to discuss the open letter and explain why they felt the casting decision had to be changed. The co-producers were again asked to respond publicly to the open letter sent on the 13th March.

April 2020

On 2nd April, The Queer House and Outbox Theatre met with Michael Longhurst, Artistic Director of The Donmar Warehouse. Longhurst was present at the previous meeting between The Queer House, Outbox Theatre and the co-producers in March. The meeting involved discussing the casting decision and requesting for the role to be re-cast with a trans actor.

May 2020

On 5th May, LGBTQ Arts Review, The Queer House, Milk Presents and Outbox Theatre wrote to the co-producers asking when their response to the 13th March open letter would be published. The co-producers responded with an apology for the delay and stated the Galway International Arts Festival had been cancelled, and therefore the production of *Breakfast on Pluto* would no longer be going ahead in 2020. They stated they were happy to engage with the conversation on casting once they re-started conversations between producers and that they planned to do this in a timely manner.

LGBTQ Arts Review, The Queer House, Milk Presents, and Outbox Theatre responded to say they would update the signatories of the open letter that conversations had occurred with the co-producers, but as yet there was no indication that the casting of Fee would change. They also indicated that they were going to create a Trans Casting Charter for theatres to sign up to.

The co-producers responded on 20th May and requested two weeks before the signatories were updated, and during this time they informed the organisations that the production was officially cancelled but they wished to continue a dialogue around trans inclusion. The co-producers sent a further email on 25th May requesting a further two weeks before signatories were updated.

LGBTQ Arts Review, The Queer House, Milk Presents, and Outbox Theatre responded on 28th May stating that they would be open to continued conversations to improve trans inclusivity and that they planned to develop a Trans Casting Charter and invite the co-producers to sign it. Landmark Productions requested the organisations to wait until the end of the day to publicly

announce the charter as they had developments they wanted the organisations to be aware of, namely that due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Landmark and Galway International Arts Festival 2020 production of *Breakfast on Pluto* and its subsequent planned UK tour had been cancelled altogether.

On 29th May the organisations publicly announced they were developing a Trans Casting Charter, which was named the Change Up Charter.¹⁰

June 2020

In early June, the first draft of the Trans Casting Statement was produced. It was written by teams from The Queer House, Milk Presents, and Outbox Theatre. These teams included both cisgender and transgender people. Through a social media callout and personal networks, 20-30 trans creatives registered to attend a Zoom session to review the statement, edit and give feedback.

On 19th June the Change Up Charter Zoom meeting was held to review and edit the casting statement. Two trans theatre-makers were employed to chair the meeting, while one representative from The Queer House represented the Change Up Charter organisations and took notes. The cisgender members of the organisations were present at the beginning of the meeting to give context on the Change Up Charter and then left the meeting, so that it was a trans-only space.

During the Zoom meeting, an incident occurred in one of the break-out groups that made some of the Black steering group members feel unsafe. Following this incident, a processing space with a psychotherapeutic counsellor was offered to Black group members. Three Black members participated in the space.

July 2020

LGBTQ Arts Review stated they no longer had the capacity to be involved in the Change Up Charter, leaving Milk Presents, Outbox Theatre, and The Queer House to consider the next stage of development.

It was decided that budget would be put towards paying a focus group of four Black trans people, who had attended the first Zoom meeting, to meet and re-write the casting statement. The initial Zoom steering group meeting had made it apparent that Black trans voices should be front and centre in the further development of the statement. The focus group was selected partially by voluntary sign-ups (2 people) and partially by personal request (2 people), and it comprised Kim Tatum (also known as Mzz Kimberly) and three other Black trans artists.

10 Outbox Theatre [*Twitter post*], 'We're asking producing organisations to cast trans actors in trans roles. Let's build a charter, created by/centering the trans community, to guide the sector. Help rebuild an inclusive industry by signing up or help us write it @MilkPresents @TheQueerHouse @lgbtqarts' (@Outbox_theatre, 29/05/2020).

It was also decided the organisations would continue to support the Change Up Charter and casting statement administratively, but would tread carefully regarding the writing and editing of the documents as they did not want to claim ownership over the Charter or statement.

September 2020

On 2nd September the focus group met, with a representative from The Queer House chairing, and developed a second draft of the casting statement. It was agreed that the group members would take some time away from the statement and meet again in the coming months to make final edits and sign off on the statement for circulation.

October/November 2020

One edit to the second draft of the statement was made and it was sent to the steering group for approval.

2.3 Issues Raised by Steering Group

Issues raised by the steering group included:

- The statement and Charter need to centre Black trans voices, as Black trans individuals are the most systemically marginalised demographic of trans people.
- The casting statement is addressing one small part of a much wider problem across the arts sector. The lack of trans inclusion needs to be addressed in all areas, including backstage crew and theatre staff. The problem does not begin and end with who is on stage.
- The statement should not be owned or belong to any organisations and must be a collaborative document produced by the community.
- Trans people should not do the labour of collating or disseminating the statement, as trans people have already done a large amount of unpaid work in the theatre industry.

The organisations coordinating the statement and Charter prioritised ethical treatment of the steering and focus group over quick development. This meant pausing the statement's development when the focus group of Black trans individuals needed time to consider the edits and paying members of the focus group for their time. It also meant providing a therapeutic processing space for the Black trans people affected by an incident in a steering group break-out room. The statement's development, therefore, has been a slow, in-depth process that prioritised ethical treatment of the trans community and it has not been owned by any individual or organisation. This proved difficult at times, especially with regard to the challenge of creating a statement developed by the trans community while being conscious of not exploiting that community's unpaid labour.

2.4 Dissemination to policy makers

In late November 2020, the draft statement was disseminated to theatres and production companies known for their trans allyship to collate agreements to support the draft statement before finalising it with the steering group. Once it has been finalised, it will be disseminated to more theatres and production companies.

The theatres and production companies contacted were:

The Gate Theatre
Fuel Theatre
The Bush Theatre
Contact Theatre
Royal Exchange Theatre
Northern Stage
The Marlborough Theatre
The Mac Belfast
HOME Manchester
The National Theatre
China Plate Theatre
Theatre Deli
Artsadmin
Battersea Arts Centre
The Yard Theatre
Derby Theatre
Oxford Playhouse
Camden People's Theatre
Attenborough Arts Centre
The Royal Court Theatre
Warwick Arts Centre

As of 15th December, the theatres and production companies that have agreed to support the finalised statement when it is released:

The Gate Theatre
Contact Theatre
Royal Exchange Theatre
Theatre Deli
The Yard Theatre
Derby Theatre
Camden People's theatre
Warwick Arts Centre

2.5 Next steps

A representative from The Queer House will follow up on communications with the contacted theatres and production companies over the last working days of December 2020.

The Gate Theatre and Camden People's Theatre responded to the draft statement and requested clarification around the wording that seemed to relate to colourism in the statement. A representative from The Queer House will take the statement to the Black trans steering group in January 2021 to edit the wording in order to add clarity.

Warwick Arts Centre have also queried how theatres that host touring productions will adhere to the statement. This will be discussed further in January 2021.

The National Theatre has not yet agreed to support the statement, but the Head of Creative Diversity has organised a meeting between National Theatre casting staff and representatives from Outbox Theatre, The Queer House, and Milk Presents in January 2021. The organisations will discuss possible collaboration with the National Theatre as a steering partner and how organisations that have agreed to support the statement will be held accountable going forward. They will also enquire about the National Theatre publishing the statement on their website.

In January 2021, the Black trans steering group and The Queer House, Milk Presents, and Outbox Theatre representatives will make a small edit to the casting statement. This will likely involve adding a clarifying footnote detailing why the intersection of Blackness and transness is the focus of the statement, rather than transness and disability, class, or other vectors of marginalisation.

The ongoing consultation with the Black trans steering group is focused on developing the statement in the most ethical form, including an appropriate range of contributing voices, is more important than the speed of its dissemination. The statement is not owned by any person or organisation(s), but will remain a collaborative community effort.

Once the statement has been altered, it will be disseminated to further theatre and production companies to seek their agreement. How the agreement will be formatted is still under consideration – whether it will be a letter that theatres sign, a policy they publish on their website, or some other format.

Section 3:

Context – Trans Casting and Performance Now

3.1 Methodology

This report analyses a selection of 48 productions featuring trans performers or characters. The productions were all based in the UK and performed in the period since 2015, with the majority also developed and produced during this time. It should be treated as a representative selection of trans casting rather than a definitive list.

Research on trans representation is complicated by the politics of who is “out” as trans, and the ethical implications of naming trans performers who may not necessarily wish for their trans status to be public. This report, therefore, only includes examples from trans performers who have spoken publicly about their trans identity.¹¹

3.2 Summary of findings

The data demonstrates a large amount of trans performance happening in the UK since 2015, as well as a large amount of trans actors and creatives developing new work. However, the majority of trans-led performance work is hosted or commissioned by fringe venues, such as Camden People’s Theatre in London and the Marlborough Theatre in Brighton. More commercial or “mainstream” theatres rarely commission or host trans-led work, and explicitly trans roles are extremely limited. When these roles are present, cisgender actors are repeatedly hired to play them, as in the examples of Fra Fee being cast as Patrick/Pussy Baden in *Breakfast on Pluto*, or Ayden Morgan being cast as La Cienega in the UK tour of *Bring It On: The Musical* (as announced in March 2020).

11 Any performer wishing their name to be removed from this report should contact research@cssd.ac.uk.

3.3 Data Analysis

69% of productions involving trans representation were self-developed by trans artists in some way, compared to 31% developed by cisgender people (see fig. 1). Self-developed is used here to mean written, produced, or directed by trans people. Not self-developed indicates that the directors, writers, and producers were cisgender, and simply cast a trans actor in a role.

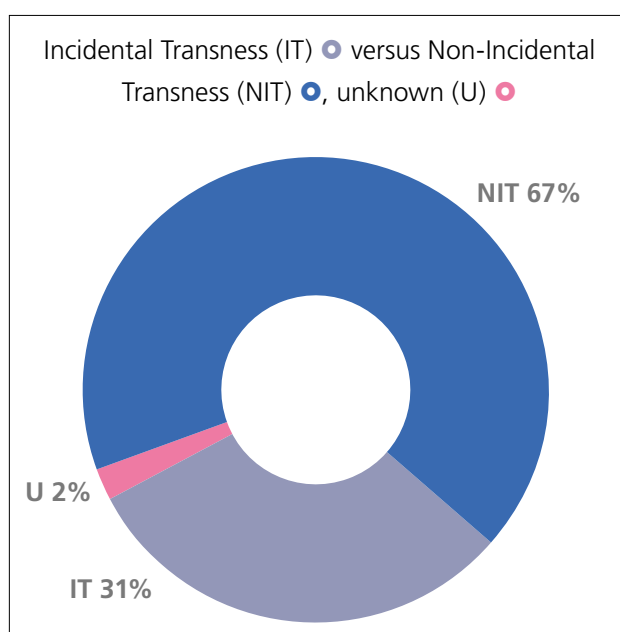
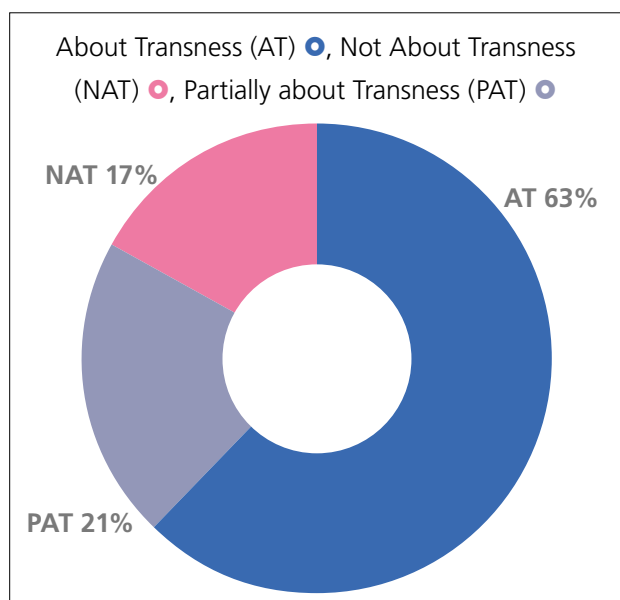
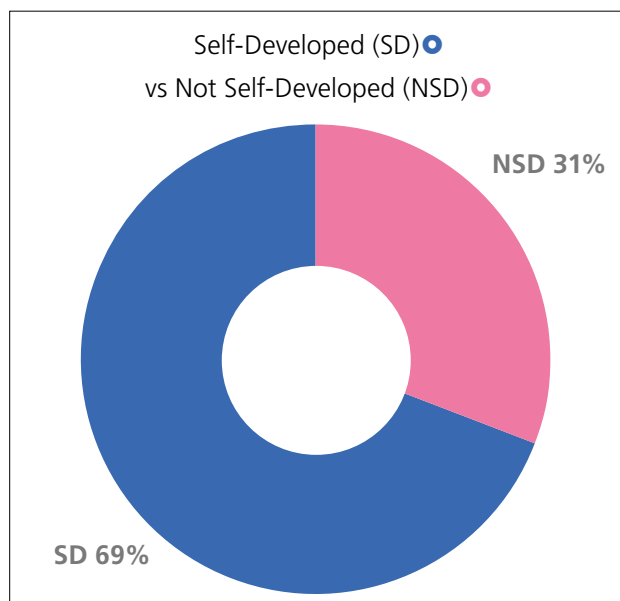
Out of 48 productions involving trans performers or characters, 33 were self-developed by trans people in some form (*Since U Been Gone*, *A Generous Lover*, *Urinal Residency*, etc.), compared to 15 not developed by trans people (*Redefining Juliet*, *Egg and Spoon*, *Rotterdam*, etc.).

Productions about transness formed 63% of the productions, compared to 21% which were partially about transness and 17% that were not about transness at all (see fig. 2).

30 productions were directly about transness in some form, such as autobiographical performances by trans creatives (*Burgerz*, *You've Changed*, *Trans Fats*, etc.); trans talent showcases (*100 Trans Voices*, *Transpose: The Future*); or productions where transness was a dominant theme (*Hir*, *Summer in London*).

10 productions were partially about transness, indicating productions that were not solely focussed on trans experiences, but had scenes or points where transness was the focus (*Fierce Sisters*, *A Generous Lover*, etc.).

8 productions were not about transness at all and featured a trans character or cast member in a way that did not draw attention to their trans status (*Sandwich*, *Egg and Spoon*, *The Snow Queen*, etc.).



Similarly, 31% of productions featuring trans cast members or characters contained incidental transness (see fig. 3). Incidental transness is defined here as the presence of a trans character or cast member in a way that is incidental to the production and not highlighted in the marketing or promotional material (*Inextinguishable Fire*, *Affection*, *I Tried to Fuck Up the System but None of my Friends Texted Back*, etc.). 15 productions contained incidental transness.

67% of productions contained non-incidental transness which was featured in the production's marketing material (& *Juliet*, *Rotterdam*, *We Dig*, etc.), ranging from the production synopsis on theatre websites to promotional interviews with cast members playing trans roles. 32 productions contained non-incidental transness.

One production, *Overflow*, was listed as unknown as the production had been announced one day prior to data collection and the entirety of the production's marketing had not yet been released.

3.4 Cisgender actors in trans roles

There were 4 examples of cisgender actors being cast in trans roles – *Mercutio Loves Romeo*, & *Juliet*, *Breakfast on Pluto*, *Bring It On: The Musical* – and all four productions featured non-incidental transness. Cisgender male actor Ayden Morgan was cast as trans woman character Le Cienega in the 2020 UK tour of *Bring It On: The Musical*. Writer Jeff Whitty stated in one interview with Playbill that 'I just never want to really bring [transness] up and never discuss it in the script', and therefore position La Cienega as incidental transness.¹² However, the script features La Cienega singing the lines "Got pretty eyes but thunder thighs / It ain't no thing, yeah! / I'm daddy's little big surprise!" The ostensible comedy of pretty eyes versus thunder thighs, and the double entendre of "daddy's little big surprise" draw attention to the perceived disjuncture between La Cienega's body and her identity as a woman, and therefore cannot be considered incidental transness.

The concept of trans women being a "surprise" plays directly on transphobic stereotypes of trans women tricking cisgender heterosexual men into sex, or of being generally duplicitous in hiding their trans background. 2016 Brighton Fringe production *Mercutio Loves Romeo* featured cisgender woman Victoria Coker as the trans woman character Merc. The casting call for one of the other characters read: "Tyson (30), a homophobic club bouncer at the club who mistakes Merc for a woman and reacts badly when he discovers the jupe [*sic*]"¹³. The framing of Merc's transness as a "dupe" and being mistaken for a woman solidifies the stereotype of trans woman as predatory or duplicitous.

12 Jeff Whitty interviewed by Adam Hetrick, *Playbill* (15/08/2012), "'It Ain't No Thing': *Bring It On: The Musical* Cheers On Broadway's First Transgender Teen Character'. Available at: <https://www.playbill.com/article/it-aint-no-thing-bring-it-on-the-musical-cheers-on-broadways-first-transgender-teen-character-com-196686> (Accessed: 17/11/2020).

13 *Starnow* (2013), 'Actors casting call "Mercutio Loves Romeo" Brighton Fringe 2016'. Available at: <https://www.starnow.co.uk/listing/756261/actors-casting-call-mercurio-loves-romeo-brighton-fringe-2016/> (Accessed: 17/11/2020).

Roles such as trans woman Patrick/Pussy Baden in the 2020 production of *Breakfast on Pluto* and non-binary trans-feminine May in the 2019 production *& Juliet* did not actively embrace the transphobic stereotype of duplicitousness, but trans activists have pointed out the potential harm in casting a cis man in a trans role. TRANSform Hollywood, a US-based organisation campaigning for greater trans inclusion in film and TV, wrote a 2018 guide to trans casting that “when a cis man playing a trans woman takes off the wig and dress, it sends the message that underneath it all trans women are wearing costumes and still ‘really men’”.¹⁴

14 TRANSform Hollywood (2018), ‘A guide to creating trans-inclusive culture’. Available at: <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5a2aae629f8dce58e6249575/t/5b68c0476d2a73cbec26512d/1533591624832/5050by2020+-+TRANSform+Hollywood+-+Color.pdf> (Accessed: 16/11/2020).

Section 4:

Trans Casting Initiatives

4.1. Equity and Spotlight

Equity is the UK trade union for creative practitioners and Spotlight is the UK's leading casting website. Spotlight collaborated with the National Theatre on a casting event for trans actors on 15th April 2019, supported by Equity and the Old Vic. The event lasted for one day and gave trans actors the opportunity to record monologues to upload to Spotlight and use for auditions, as well as meeting members of the National Theatre and Old Vic's Casting and Creative Diversity teams. The day culminated in an open discussion panel, chaired by trans actor Tigger Blaize, on what the theatre industry can do to support trans actors.

The opportunity was only open to professional actors, and the promotional flier for the event read "This is the first event of its kind" in regard to inviting trans actors to meet with theatre staff. Ian Manborde, Equalities and Diversity Organiser for Equity stated that "The National Theatre's co-operation with Equity's initiative and its agreement to host an open casting session with trans performers in April is a significant first step in the right direction".¹⁵ There has not been a similar event hosted by Spotlight or the National Theatre since, and it is currently unclear whether there are ongoing plans to continue hosting such events.

Later in 2019 Equity published 'Guidelines for Entertainment Professionals Working with LGBT+ Performers', which featured guidelines on hiring trans actors.¹⁶ The report recommended "seeking out LGBT+ performers for LGBT+ parts" and acknowledged the structural difficulties trans actors face in the theatre industry:

Lots of transgender performers are making their own work, as they are being consistently overlooked in mainstream and commercial work. There are theatre companies and venues - both more mainstream and off the beaten track - that champion or specialise in queer-led work.¹⁷

Manborde stated that the trans casting event at the National Theatre contributed to the report.¹⁸

15 Georgia Snow, *The Stage* (25/02/2019), 'National Theatre to host casting event for transgender actors'. Available at: <https://www.thestage.co.uk/news/national-theatre-to-host-casting-event-for-transgender-actors> (Accessed: 16/11/2020).

16 Equity (2019), 'Guidelines for Entertainment Professionals Working with LGBT+ Performers'. Available at: https://www.equity.org.uk/media/3465/equity_lgbt-casting-guide.pdf (Accessed: 16/11/2020).

17 Ibid., p. 6.

18 Quoted in Georgia Snow, *The Stage* (25/02/2019), 'National Theatre to host casting event for transgender actors'. Available at: <https://www.thestage.co.uk/news/national-theatre-to-host-casting-event-for-transgender-actors>

In October 2020 Spotlight relaunched its platform and improved Spotlight Link, the system that categorises general casting call-outs, to “include more options for the way disability, gender and appearance is presented”.¹⁹ The relaunch included the option for actors to list themselves as non-binary or transgender from “an improved choice of options”, including the option not to post their gender publicly.²⁰ However on 15th November 2020, one trans Twitter user noted that actors cannot currently register with Spotlight as non-binary or transgender, and instead must register as male or female and then alter their gender from their account settings.

4.2 Trans-led initiatives

Outbox Theatre company, funded by National Lottery Reaching Communities and supported by the Royal Central School of Speech and Drama, ran a series of acting workshops for trans, non-binary, and gender non-conforming people in 2019. These included:

- 8 workshops for LGBTQIA+ youth with a total of 89 participants;
- 4 workshops with in collaboration with TransActing, reaching 51 participants;
- 1 three-day acting summer school hosted at the Southbank Centre with 25 participants.²¹

The summer school was led by 2 Outbox workshop leaders and 4 visiting artists, all of whom were LGBTQIA+. The three days culminated in a sharing on the stage of the Purcell Room for friends and family, where participants presented their own writing and work.

In addition to these workshops, Outbox trained 2 additional workshop leaders who are trans, to ensure acting workshops were trans-led.²²

Similarly, the TransActing Project is an ongoing project that “engages with trans and/or non-binary people’s place within the creative and cultural sector”.²³ The project is a collaboration between trans charity Gendered Intelligence and the Royal Central School of Speech and Drama and was established in July 2015 with a 5-day series of workshops. The project aims to “create safe, gender-inclusive spaces where trans and/or non-binary people can participate in voice, movement, text, improvisation and audition workshop sessions”.²⁴ Approximately 200

[transgender-actors](#) (Accessed: 16/11/2020).

19 Spotlight (2020), ‘Promoting inclusivity in our industry’. Available at: <https://www.spotlight.com/the-small-print/promoting-inclusivity-in-our-industry/> (Accessed: 17/11/2020).

20 Spotlight (2020), ‘Find out about our refreshed platform!’. Available at: <https://www.spotlight.com/news-and-advice/find-out-about-our-refreshed-platform/> (Accessed: 17/11/2020).

21 Royal Central School of Speech and Drama (2019), ‘Progress Update: Year 1, Outbox Theatre’. Available at: <https://www.cssd.ac.uk/sites/default/files/Outbox%20Year%201%20Evaluation%20-%20Jan%202020.pdf> (Accessed: 17/11/2020).

22 Ibid.

23 TransActing Project (2019), ‘Index’. Available at: <http://transacting.co.uk/index.html> (Accessed: 18/11/2020).

24 Ibid.

trans and non-binary people have participated in over 20 classes since 2015, including sessions hosted at the Bristol Old Vic, the Birmingham Repertory Theatre, the West Yorkshire Playhouse, and the Royal Court Theatre.²⁵

In terms of agencies, The Queer House represents a large proportion of UK trans creatives including Krishna Isha, Kate O'Donnell, and Reece Lyons. The Queer House produced *Pink Lemonade*, written and performed by trans actor Mika Onyx Johnson, and is currently producing *Dear Young Monster*, written and performed by trans actor Pete MacHale.²⁶

4.3 Casting guidelines

Equity's 2019 Guidelines for Entertainment Professionals Working with LGBT+ Performers is one of the most comprehensive and recent casting guidelines available with a specific focus on trans casting. The guide recommends:

In light of the structural disadvantages experienced by LGBT+ performers, as with other minorities, we advocate actively seeking out LGBT+ performers for LGBT+ parts. Not only is this a first vital step towards levelling the playing field, it also acknowledges and values the lived experience LGBT+ actors can bring to those characters.²⁷

In 2015 Equity realised an Inclusive Casting Policy that called for "greater incidental portrayal – where the artist's personal characteristics are incidental to the role – providing real opportunities to increase diversity on stage and screen".²⁸

Spotlight partnered with Gendered Intelligence staff member Jezza Donovan to publish the blog post 'Understanding Trans and Non-Binary Casting with Gendered Intelligence'.²⁹ Elsewhere, Viviana Vargas authored 'Best Practices for Inclusive Casting', which is hosted on the *TheatreArtLife* website.³⁰

Jay Stewart, founder of Gendered Intelligence, wrote a blog posted titled 'Trans representation and casting: where are we at?' which, while not authored as a set of guidelines for inclusive casting, included a statement on trans casting in light of the Donmar's casting announcement for *Breakfast on Pluto*:

25 Royal Central School of Speech and Drama (2020), 'TransActing Project'. Available at: <https://www.cssd.ac.uk/content/transacting-project> (Accessed: 18/11/2020).

26 The Queer House (2020), 'Dear Young Monster'. Available at: <https://www.thequeerhouse.com/dear-young-monster> (Accessed: 18/11/2020).

27 Equity (2019), 'Guidelines for Entertainment Professionals Working with LGBT+ Performers'. Available at: https://www.equity.org.uk/media/3465/equity_lgbt-casting-guide.pdf (Accessed: 16/11/2020).

28 Equity (2015), 'Equity Inclusive Casting Policy'. Available at: <https://www.equity.org.uk/getting-involved/campaigns/play-fair/equity-inclusive-casting-policy/> (Accessed: 16/11/2020).

29 Jezza Donovan, *Spotlight* (Date unlisted), 'Understanding Trans and Non-Binary Casting with Gendered Intelligence'. Available at: <https://www.spotlight.com/news-and-advice/understanding-trans-and-non-binary-casting-with-gendered-intelligence/> (Accessed: 25/11/2020).

30 Viviana Vargas, *TheatreArtLife* (Date unlisted), 'Best Practices for Inclusive Casting'. Available at: <https://www.theatreartlife.com/acting-singing/inclusive-casting-best-practices/> (Accessed: 16/11/2020).

Some people may feel that the casting decision far outweighs any other positive endeavour. It sends the wrong message and ultimately is highly inappropriate, especially given our current climate of increasing toxicity in the media. Some believe that there are talented trans people out there and more efforts need to be made to cast them into these important high-profile roles. Others have highlighted how damaging it is to have cis performers playing trans roles. Whilst others still feel that it should be trans people telling trans stories. In short, a line needs to be drawn: no more cis actors for trans parts.

I want to say that I applaud these sentiments.³¹

There are also multiple guides for trans-inclusive casting that have been published in the USA. In 2013 MJ Kaufman published 'Don't call me ma'am: On the politics of trans casting' on arts website *Howlround* which read "Theatres need to cast trans actors in trans roles and educate themselves about trans issues".³²

TRANSform Hollywood's 2018 'Guide to Creating Trans-Inclusive Culture' which stipulated "when cis actors play trans characters it perpetuates this belief that trans people aren't real".³³

In 2018, *Transparent* creator Jill Soloway led an open letter to Hollywood companies to demand better transgender representation and sought pledges of commitment from major studios and networks.³⁴ Soloway stated:

We're creating a moment where a producer or a studio might think to cast a cis person in a role as a trans person and say, 'I read that letter and it's actually not okay anymore... the moral code has changed around this'.³⁵

In 2018 James Washburn published 'How to make your theatre production more trans inclusive' on the GLAAD website.³⁶

31 Jay Stewart, *Gendered Intelligence* (12/03/2020), 'Trans representation and casting. Where are we at?'. Available at: <https://genderedintelligence.wordpress.com/2020/03/12/trans-representation-and-casting-where-are-we-at/> (Accessed: 16/11/2020).

32 MJ Kaufman, *Howlround* (29/09/2013), 'Don't Call me Ma'am: On the politics of trans casting'. Available at: <https://howlround.com/dont-call-me-maam> (Accessed: 16/11/2020).

33 TRANSform Hollywood (2018), 'A guide to creating trans-inclusive culture'. Available at: <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5a2aae629f8dce58e6249575/t/5b68c0476d2a73cbec26512d/1533591624832/050by2020+-+TRANSform+Hollywood+-+Color.pdf> (Accessed: 16/11/2020).

34 Ricardo Lopez, *Variety* (07/08/2018), 'In an Open Letter, Hollywood Companies Pledge to Improve Transgender Representation'. Available at: <https://variety.com/2018/film/news/open-letter-transgender-hollywood-1202896495/> (Accessed: 16/11/2020).

35 Ibid.

36 James Washburn, *GLAAD* (15/11/2018), 'How to make your theatre production trans inclusive'. Available at: <https://www.glaad.org/amp/how-to-make-theatre-productions-trans-inclusive> (Accessed: 16/11/2020).

Section 5:

Conclusion

It is evident that there are many trans performers active in the UK at the moment, but the question is whether trans performers are being welcomed to mainstream performance spaces. The contextual evidence outlined in section 4 demonstrates that the majority of trans performance is occurring in self-produced productions, often at fringe venues or on tour. It is rare for a trans performer to be employed in a mainstream theatre production, and even rarer for mainstream theatres to produce trans-led work.

There are several reasons for the lack of trans performance in mainstream spaces, but that is outside of the remit of this report. Some potential reasons include barriers to formal acting training, economic difficulties faced by trans people discouraging them from acting careers, and transphobia among theatre staff.

The Trans Casting Statement is an initiative to address the lack of trans performers on stage, especially in mainstream theatre spaces. The statement proposes that trans roles should only be cast with trans actors, which would limit the amount of cisgender actors being cast into trans roles and provide more opportunities for underrepresented trans talent.

Section 6:

Appendix

The Gospel According to Jesus, Queen of Heaven, directed by Susan Worsfield, 2009-ongoing, multiple venues.

Hookup, directed by Ben Buratta, 2015, Hackney Showroom and Contact Manchester.

Trans Scripts, directed by Jo Bonney, 2015, Edinburgh Fringe.

Milk Presents: Self Service, created by Ruby Glaskin, Leo Skilbeck, and Adam Robertson, 2015, Summerhall.

Rituals for Change, created by Emma Frankland, Eilidh Gaskill, and Myriddin Wannell, 2015-2018, multiple venues.

Inextinguishable Fire, created by Cassils, 2015, Southbank Centre.

Sex Worker's Opera, directed by Clare Quinn, 2015-2018, multiple venues.

Galatea, devised by company as part of the Before Shakespeare project, 2016-2018, multiple venues.

JOAN, directed by Leo Skilbeck, 2016, Edinburgh Fringe.

The Little Prince, directed by Rubyyy Jones and Nick Connaughton, 2016, Arcola Theatre.

Affection, directed by Ben Buratta, 2016, The Glory and AE Harris.

Mercutio Loves Romeo, directed by Elizabeth Mienert, 2016, Latest Music Bar.

The Bear/The Proposal, directed by Leo Skilbeck, 2017, The Young Vic.

Left Outside Alone, created by Travis Alabanza, 2017, Tate Britain.

Hir, directed by Nadia Fall, 2017, Bush Theatre.

Summer in London, directed by Rikki Beadle-Blair, 2017, Theatre Royal Stratford East.

Bullish, directed by Leo Skilbeck, 2017, multiple venues.

Burgerz, directed by Sam Curtis Lindsay, 2018-2019, multiple venues.

Urinal Residency, created by Creature Cramps, 2018, LADA.

Sandwich, created by Victoria Sin, 2018, multiple venues.

Redefining Juliet, directed by Robin Norton-Hale, 2018, The Pit at the Barbican Centre.

Transpose: The Future, 2018, The Pit at the Barbican Centre.

You've Changed, created by Kate O'Donnell, 2018, Contact Theatre.

Hearty, directed by Emma Frankland, 2018-2020, multiple venues.

A Generous Lover, directed by Lauren La JohnJoseph, 2018-2019, multiple venues.

Fierce Sisters, directed by Lina Johansson, 2018, Shakespeare's New Place.

Egg and Spoon, directed by Patrick Lynch, 2018, Lyngo Theatre.

The Snow Queen, directed by Roman Stefanski, 2018-2019, Polka Theatre.

Trans Fats, created by Fat Cabaret, 2019, Marlborough Theatre.

And the Rest of Me Floats, directed by Ben Buratta, 2019, Bush Theatre.

I Tried to Fuck Up the System but None of my Friends Texted Back, directed by Travis Alabanza, 2019, Wellcome Collection.

Motherland, directed by Raz Weiner, 2019-2020, multiple venues.

Rotterdam, directed by Donnacadh O'Brian, 2019 tour, multiple venues.

Dead Reckoning, created by Clumsy Bodies, 2019, Katzspace Studio Theatre and The Vaults.

100 Trans Voices, directed by Kate O'Donnell, 2019, Royal Exchange Theatre.

Since U Been Gone, directed by Tabby Lamb, 2019, Camden People's Theatre.

We Dig, created by Emma Frankland and company, 2019, OvalHouse.

Drone, directed by Rob Jones, 2019, Summerhall.

Pink Lemonade, created by Mika Onyx Johnson, 2019-2020, multiple venues.

Umbilical, created by Niya B, 2019, Sluice Gallery.

& Juliet, directed by Luke Shepherd, 2019-ongoing, multiple venues.

Red Palace, 2019-2020, directed by Celine Lowenthal, The Vaults.

Trans Voices Cabaret, 2019-2020, The Other Palace.

Breakfast on Pluto, directed by Des Kennedy, 2020 (cancelled), Donmar Warehouse.

Bring It On: The Musical, directed by Guy Unsworth, originally 2020 (cancelled), postponed to 2021, multiple venues.

Romeo and Juliet, directed by Ola Ince, 2020 (cancelled), Shakespeare's Globe Theatre.

The Music of Annabel Mutale Read, 2020, Barn Theatre: Free Barn Theatre at Home.

Glamrou: From Quran to Queen, directed by Seif Abel Salam, 2021 (upcoming), multiple venues.

Overflow, directed by Debbie Hannan, 2020, Bush Theatre.