

dramaturgs'network

press release

Wednesday 2 June 2021

introduction

To celebrate its 20th anniversary, the Dramaturgs' Network (d'n) is launching the *d'n Dramaturgs' Contract Package*, which comprises a **recommended contract** and accompanying documents for engaging freelance dramaturgs.

It is a historic moment in the UK theatre profession: although dramaturgs have been working in the UK since 1963, this is the first time a fair contract and remuneration document has been created for them by a professional organisation.

what's happening

On **Monday, 21 June 2021**, the Dramaturgs' Network launches the *d'n Dramaturgs' Contract Package* on its website. **This is the first official recommendation created by a professional body in the UK to enable dramaturgs and producers to create fair contracts for freelance dramaturgs.**

The *d'n Dramaturgs' Contract Package* is a **set of recommended practice documents** flexible enough to be tailored to each organisation's or individual's needs, allowing managers to have a clear idea of the dramaturg's work before an engagement is made, and ensuring that dramaturgs are offered a fair deal.

The *d'n Dramaturgs' Contract Package* is a collection of useful documents (with information files and templates to use) that provide dramaturgs with all the knowledge and detail they need to negotiate fair remuneration. The package also outlines to managers and producers the range of tasks that dramaturgs may undertake in any project, in this way helping them to define the required dramaturgical services and the level of engagement for a particular work.

In addition to these documents, templates and advisory notes, the package also includes access to a workshop that provides a practical guide negotiating terms and drafting a contract.

The package will be available for purchase for individuals or organisations on the d'n website [<http://www.dramaturgy.co.uk/>] from 21 June 2021.

Marking the day of the launch, an online roundtable event will take place with invited industry professionals.

The d'n Dramaturgs' Contract Package has already been endorsed by the Literary Managers and Dramaturgs of the Americas, one of the major dramaturgs' organisations in the world, as a **breakthrough contribution to the field** (see below for their endorsement).

The *d'n Dramaturgs' Contract Package* was developed by a team of experts between 2015 and 2021, the main members of the team were: David Harris, Katalin Trencsényi, and Jarkko Lehmus. The team spent over 1200 hours with research, surveying the field and consulting with other professional organisations and legal experts. They analysed various contracts (in the UK and abroad), followed relevant legal cases, and discussed and meticulously examined every clause when developing this recommended prototype for dramaturgs' contract. The team pledged to update the contract package seven months after the launch – taking into consideration feedback from the Users.

background information

Freelance dramaturgs (as well as literary managers and creative advisers) are the unsung heroes of theatre: they contribute enormously to the theatre ecology, lending their expertise from new drama development, through staging classics, to devised theatre or dance. Through their advocacy and creative work, they help key decision-makers in the creative process.

The first dramaturg in the UK, Kenneth Tynan at the National Theatre, was appointed in 1963. Today, there are an estimated 500 theatre professionals in the UK who work regularly in the role of freelance dramaturgs. Yet, **sixty years on, there is still no existing industry-wide accepted contract, nor there is an agreement on minimum fees to protect them and improve their working conditions** – which makes these creatives some of the most vulnerable in the UK theatre ecology.

Furthermore, there is very little industry support available for dramaturgs to help negotiate their contracts for work. This is partly because the dramaturg's work is a complex, relational service, therefore it is not easy to create a contract that would encompass all that complex work. This is what the Dramaturgs' Network has recognised when developing a recommended *d'n Dramaturgs' Contract Package* to ensure that dramaturgs would be offered a fair deal.

The work started in 2015 and entailed surveying the scene and engaging in dialogues with many other organisations. The first main achievement of this work was the *Guidelines for Engagement* that the d'n published in July 2020 on its website, a suite of documents containing detailed advice for dramaturgs on how to negotiate contracts or calculate fees.

Ironically, the d'n has done this essential work without any public funding supporting their experts' work: the working group has volunteered over 1200 working hours on creating the package.

the contract package

what does it contain?

The *d'n Dramaturgs' Contract Package* contains a step-by-step **Manual, Guidelines** on what to consider when negotiating a contract, a flexible **Template** for a recommended dramaturgs' contract and three **Appendices** listing potential tasks (for New Drama Development, Production Dramaturgy, and Devised work and Dance). These job lists also rate them according to the level of expertise and involvement needed (Basic, Standard, Specialist) and difficulty to help managers understand the complex, often invisible job dramaturgs do and allow them to make informed choices when engaging a dramaturg. The package also includes a **free workshop** for up to four delegates of a theatre organisation on the dramaturg's contract.

What makes this package indispensable is that it is flexible and is created in such a way that producers can tailor the contract to the needs and specificities of their given circumstances.

is it an industry-wide agreement on minimum conditions and payments?

Unfortunately, **it is not**: the d'n is too small an organisation to have that negotiating power.

The *d'n Dramaturgs' Contract Package* is not a negotiated contract or a set industry-wide agreed minimum, it is a **recommended fair practice document** that is flexible enough for organisations and individuals to tailor it to their needs.

It is suggested and desired that organisations adopt these recommendations, and the d'n welcomes any feedback on its use. **The d'n is planning to adjust and update the package in February 2022, according to the feedback of the UK theatre industry.**

why is this launch important?

It's a landmark event in the UK theatre history, acknowledging the work of these highly skilled experts who have been in the UK for sixty years, contributing to the theatre and dance scene with their important work, and offer them equivalent treatment to other members of the Creative Team (directors, playwrights, choreographers, and designers).

about the Dramaturgs' Network

Established in 2001, the Dramaturgs' Network (d'n) is the only organisation in the United Kingdom dedicated solely to supporting practitioners, developing and sharing the practice and theory of dramaturgy.

Many of the d'n's projects tackle **structural change** in the ecology of the UK theatre industry to promote equality, diversifying the field, and increasing the opportunities for people from lower socio-economic backgrounds. This work starts with those who are making decisions in the theatre building and those who work with them as advisers.

On its 10th anniversary, the d'n established the Kenneth Tynan Award – the only award in the UK rewarding the work of dramaturgs. The most recent KTA Winner was Suzanne Bell, Dramaturg at the Royal Exchange, Manchester.

To mark its 20th anniversary, the organisation has created a recommended contract package to be used by individuals and organisations. This is the first contract package for dramaturgs in the UK.

For more information on the work done by the d'n: <https://www.dramaturgy.co.uk/our-story>

related events

Towards Fairer Contractual Practices for Freelancers Working in Theatre - a roundtable discussion on freelance artists' contracts with invited industry professionals from the UK, Europe and the US.

When: 21 June, 2 pm - 3.30 pm, on Zoom

FREE EVENT

More information to be released on the [events page](#) of the d'n website.

Three more in-depth workshops in the autumn of 2021 will be available to choose from for those who purchase the package.

endorsements

Literary Managers and Dramaturgs of the Americas (LMDA):

"The Dramaturgs' Contract Package also clearly outlines to managers and producers the range of tasks that dramaturgs may undertake in any project, in this way helping them to define the required dramaturgical services and the level of engagement for a particular project. It's a win-win tool. [...] In solidarity with our cousins across the sea, the Literary Managers and Dramaturgs of the Americas recommends the d'n Dramaturgs Contract

Package as an essential and invaluable resource for managers and producers to engage dramaturgs productively."

Katalin Trencsényi

d'n Board member, dramaturg, and author of *Dramaturgy in the Making. A User's Guide for Theatre Professionals* (Bloomsbury Methuen Drama, 2015)

"Doing dramaturgy is a complex work that requires a specialist's skills, a great deal of knowledge and expertise, and an incredible amount of competence in negotiations and diplomacy. Through being a critical friend to the creatives, the impact dramaturgs can make on a project is enormous. That's why behind many innovative projects a dramaturg can be found, and that's why dramaturgs are regularly employed to support high-risk projects. The value of a good dramaturg's work on the artwork is indispensable. Yet their essential advisory and creative work often remains invisible. Dramaturgs don't gain any benefits from the success of the show, for their creative input they don't receive royalties, moreover, their contribution often remains unacknowledged. It is time that at least one part of this poor equation be remedied: that dramaturgs' would be offered a fair contract – just like everyone else in the theatre industry."

Jarkko Lehmus

dramaturg, producer

"The contract package is the result of a very long process of volunteered, unpaid working hours invested in making the position of dramaturgs more understandable and also legally more secure. The resulting documents provide a framework to help both dramaturgs and managers engaging them in contractual discussions. The work schedules provided in the contract package are a very valuable tool for all parties to understand what the work of a dramaturg entails in any particular project they are engaged in."

David Harris

company secretary, manager and d'n Board member

"Self-employed or freelance workers in the gig economy have tolerated poor pay and conditions in return for so-called flexibility and freedom. It has been a poor bargain and freelancers have been treated badly in comparison to their colleagues who are fortunate to enjoy the luxury of employment on a payroll. With the challenge of the Uber and the Pimlico Plumbers cases, the tide was beginning to turn. In the creative sector, the pandemic has left many freelancers: directors, designers and dramaturgs, forgotten and there is now a large body of theatre professionals demanding major improvements in fees, terms and conditions. The d'n Dramaturgs' Contract Package is a suite of documents that prepares freelance dramaturgs to negotiate a fair deal that reflects their skills, experience and commitment."

further press information

The Dramaturgs' Contract Package was developed from 2015-2021 by **David Harris, Katalin Trencsényi** and **Jarkko Lehmus** (2018 onwards), in dialogue with other service organisations.

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the press release ends here.