

# Complimentary Tickets

## Basic Principles

Complimentary tickets (“Comps”) are an established part of the theatrical lexicon that can translate as “free tickets”. This, however, is not an accurate description of their function organisationally. They are an essential part of ensuring the theatre’s ongoing success in the development of organisational and regional profile, developing strategic partnerships, broadening experience of the arts with low engagement groups and ensuring high quality service and artistic product.

## Reasons Complimentary Tickets should be allocated

There are, broadly speaking, six reasons why complimentary tickets should be allocated.

- Organisational Profile  
Increasing the profile of the organisation is essential in ensuring the theatre’s continued sustainability through ticket sales, sponsorship and working to bring the highest calibre artists to Flintshire. Complimentary tickets might be allocated to members of the press (for reviews of productions), key contacts for tourism (for example Destination Management or Visit Wales) or potential collaborators (for example star actors or writers we want to work with in the future).
- Regional Profile  
The theatre needs to play a key role in developing the profile of Flintshire and North Wales as a centre for economic growth as part of regional regeneration, encouraging an influx of business investment into the area by showcasing the high quality cultural offer alongside the stunning landscape and high standard of living. Complimentary tickets might be allocated to support Flintshire County Council’s department for Economic Growth in promoting the region.
- Strategic Partnership  
Sponsorship and collaborative working with private and public sector organisations allows Theatr Clwyd to help fulfil regional objectives by running projects such as Justice In A Day (raising awareness of the consequences of crime for ages 13 – 14), Arts From The Armchair (supporting those with early onset memory loss) and Behind Slammed Doors (working to engage teenage daughters promoting mental well-being and addressing youth employment and disengagement) . Complimentary tickets would be allocated to enable relationships to be nurtured both with potential sponsors or collaborators and with those with limited economic means to fulfil the project and deepen engagement.
- Low Engagement Groups  
We recognise that we serve Communities First areas within Flintshire and it is therefore essential that the theatre remains price accessible which is why we strive to have lower price tickets as part of our pricing strategy. This is, of course, balanced against financial targets and the need to ensure sustainability. However for some groups we might work with, these prices, although reasonable, are beyond their financial capabilities (for a 21 year old on Job Seekers Allowance a £10 ticket would represent 17% of their weekly income). Complimentary tickets might be used in conjunction with an outreach project to ensure

access to theatre for vulnerable people in our community.

- Developing Customer Services

There has been a huge shift in emphasis for public facing organisations to strive for high quality customer service. This includes (but is not limited to) ensuring staff are knowledgeable, can offer insight on what is being sold and can therefore be effective advocates for the work of both the theatre and the region. Customer service and audience experience will feed very heavily into our onward business planning in ensuring returning audiences and economic growth. This ensures the theatre remains a sustainable world-class asset for the county and region. All staff who engage with the public (either directly or through the promotion or operations of the organisation) should be allocated complimentary tickets on a regular basis to ensure a depth of knowledge, pride in the work we produce and understanding of the ethos of the organisation.

- Ensuring quality of Artistic product

Theatr Clwyd has an international and national reputation as a leading producer of theatre which benefits the region, Wales and UK. When other companies and artists visit Mold our creative and programming team needs to see shows to assess and support company development and ensure that our high standards are upheld.

For our produced work where shows run for 3 weeks or longer the creative teams need to have regular access to the show to ensure its continued quality - a director for example will often tweak the show throughout the first week to ensure it's perfect for the press performances – this has a knock on effect for other creatives working on the show. It's also important that our staff and associate artists can talk knowledgeably about what we produce (so box office, for example, can recommend the show and give customers insight). One of Theatr Clwyd's strengths is its long serving staff who are able to offer insight to all our stakeholders to enhance and support the overall experience.

### **The “Complimentary” relationship.**

Complimentary tickets are important across the organisation – however they are not a one-way transaction – it is a two-way relationship, using that ticket ultimately to enhance the show and the audience experience. A journalist returns reviews enhancing the profile of the theatre, Board members return with advocacy and a greater understanding of the organisation, box office team members develop understanding to better sell the show.

### **How do we manage the numbers allocated?**

Inevitably a natural worry is how to ensure that we are not losing income as a result of complimentary tickets. Current policy is that complimentary tickets are unavailable for sold out shows (i.e. Fewer than 10 tickets unsold). Comps are non-transferrable ensuring that they are for staff only. All audience development allocations for developing new audiences are signed off by the Director of Marketing & Communications and Artistic Director and decisions are made with a long term view for the overall development of the organisation. Comp usage is, invariably, much higher towards the beginning of a production's run when the necessity both artistically and organisationally is at its most important. Finally, for high-yield productions such as the Pantomime exclusion periods apply to ensure the highest possible box office income.

### **Public “Free Ticket Offers”**

As an organisation we should never offer free tickets publicly in an untargeted manner. Offering free tickets to anyone, irrespective of circumstance or context, on Facebook, Twitter or the Council Intranet sends a perceivably clear message that we do not place a value on our tickets. This can perpetuate, grow and in some extreme cases lead to reduced audiences, unwilling to commit to purchasing in advance, waiting for the free ticket.

Our tickets have a high value and are priced at a cost that aims to balance accessibility and ensure high income. Our pricing policy will be reviewed over the next 12 months to ensure that we are using pricing to build both new audiences and continued sustainability.

### **Should the Board have comps?**

Yes. It is of vital importance to the effective governance of the organisation that the Board has a clear understanding of the shows we produce and also the customer experience. The Board’s support, understanding and advocacy for the arts, theatre and Theatr Clwyd helps drive the organisation forward to seek new opportunities, to develop and to maintain its status as a world-class resource for the region and for Wales. Complimentary tickets should not be considered a benefit – attendance should be considered a duty and an active part of supporting the leadership of the organisation.

### **Is our description incorrect and how do we clarify their usage?**

Part of the problem with “Complimentary Tickets” is how they are recorded; the terminology we use must accurately assess their purpose. As part of our review of pricing and concessions over the next 12 months this will be assessed and amended to something more appropriate for a transparent, 21<sup>st</sup> century theatre.

**Tamara Harvey** | Artistic Director

**Sam Freeman** | Director Of Marketing & Communications