

FEATURES AND KEY ISSUES, FROM THE GRAND THEATRE BUSINESS PLAN, 2005 TO 2008

From architecture to theatre: a cultural marker of historical and social importance for the twenty-first century

- The Grand Theatre is, with Blackpool Tower and the Winter Gardens, one of the three architectural masterpieces of Blackpool
 - The Grand Theatre is in the top 8 per cent of all listed buildings in England
 - The Grand Theatre is one of thirty listed buildings in Blackpool
 - The Grand Theatre is one of only nine large theatres listed Grade II* or above, north of London
 - The Grand Theatre holding capacity: 1163 seats: 301 Gallery, 256 Upper Circle, 226 Dress Circle and Boxes, 380 Stalls.
 - The Lawrence House Studio Theatre (built 1992) holding capacity: 80

The Grand Theatre is both a product and symbol of the late nineteenth-century boom in theatregoing and the expansion of live entertainment at Blackpool, Britain's biggest show town after London's West End. This monument to pleasure is a very special form of 'public space'. More than most theatres of whatever age, the Grand's post-Baroque neoclassical architecture creates an emotionally charged atmosphere in which 200,000 theatregoers each year learn about life, culture, politics and romance, through what is shown and implied and what is both said and suggested on stage. The popular entertainments, dramas, operas, circuses, ballets, dances, pantomimes and music presented at the Grand contain archetypes that represent ideals, possibilities and pitfalls, whilst the opulent Grand Theatre housing them reflects a tangible expression of hope and dreams.

With Blackpool Tower and the Winter Gardens, the Grand Theatre is one the three crowning architectural achievements of Blackpool. The Grand exterior is *a visual landmark* of the town centre; whilst inside, the decorations and four-tier, horseshoe-

shaped auditorium creates an intimate atmosphere of festive spirit for what is also a *cultural landmark*. Going to the Grand Theatre is almost as important as the shows people come to see: from the moment theatregoers arrive to collect their tickets, there is a sense of something special, a feeling that to step inside is to enter another time and place...

The Grand Theatre was built in 1894 by the greatest British theatre architect, Frank Matcham, who between 1879 and 1912 designed 150 theatres, over twice as many as his nearest rival and nearly a quarter of all theatres built in the same period. Only 24 of his theatres survive today. Elsewhere in the North West only his Olympia at Liverpool survives (a former circus-theatre). His theatres in Blackburn, Bolton, Bury, Liverpool, Manchester, Morecambe, Rochdale, St Helens, Southport, and Stockport have been demolished. The Grand Theatre, Blackpool shows the genius of Frank Matcham at the height of his powers. He built more spaces in Blackpool than any town outside London: being responsible for the (first) Opera House (1889), Tower Circus (1894) and Tower Ballroom (1894).

The Grand was built for Manager Thomas Sergenson, with investment from Blackpool businesspeople; the £20,000 cost of construction would be £1,000,000 today or twice the target of our current refurbishment Appeal in 2005. Sergenson ran this theatre independently for fifteen years. This was unusually enterprising for a large provincial touring house at this time, when syndicates or theatre chains operated the majority. In 1909, the Grand was sold for the equivalent of £2,375,000 to Blackpool Tower Company and thus it was merged with the many other competing theatres in the town. The Tower Company (later acquitted by EMI) ran the theatre until the 1970s, when it was threatened by demolition. A community fundraising and grassroots campaign saved the theatre, and Blackpool Grand Theatre Trust Limited took ownership of the theatre in autumn 1980. Now in its twenty-fifth year of community ownership and operation, it is a significant achievement that our second phase of standalone, local ownership has outlasted that of Thomas Sergenson. And especially so in the past ten years, when over 28 other touring theatres in England have moved from local management to the syndication of conglomerates such as Clear Channel or Ambassador Theatre Group. This continued independence of the Grand Theatre is largely due to the magnificent contributions of volunteer time by the Friends of the Grand - they provide the 'largest subsidy' – the theatregoing public, and Blackpool Council that has invested a small revenue grant for 25 years. We are a present-day success story because we have developed our first role as professional touring house with that of community-and-educational theatre.

PAUL ILES

Manager & Chief Executive

MISSION AND GOALS

OUR MISSION

The mission is to continue our historic success in conserving the integrity of the irreplaceable Grade II* Listed Victorian theatre, welcoming theatregoers by presenting a discerning programme of popular, thought-provoking and progressive theatre for Blackpool and the North West

OUR GOALS

1. To promote the art of the theatre through programming innovating and rousing popular entertainment, drama, opera, ballet, dance, pantomime and music
2. To promote The Grand Theatre as the National Theatre of Variety, from 2006
3. To identify new long term partnerships with professional theatre-makers, producers and promoters whose theatrical vision we venerate
4. To host the productions of amateur theatre companies and community hirers
5. To find and develop theatregoers for different art forms from all sectors of our population
6. Through an education programme including theatrical activities in the Lawrence House Studio at the Grand Theatre, to involve members of our communities of all ages as audiences and participants
7. To maintain a commitment to the support, motivation and progress of all paid and volunteer staff working at The Grand Theatre
8. To operate a policy of equal opportunity throughout The Grand Theatre
9. To maintain and develop our affiliations with the Friends of the Grand
10. To foster the great affection held for The Grand Theatre by the people of Blackpool and our communities
11. To maintain relationships and foster new partnerships with stakeholders: Blackpool Council, Arts Council England, Equity, Heritage Lottery Fund, English Heritage, Blackpool Urban Regeneration Company ('ReBlackpool'), Lancashire and Blackpool Tourist Board, North West Regional Development Agency, European Regional Development Fund, Foundation for Sport and the Arts and others, whether investors for revenue or capital
12. To affiliate with business sponsors, philanthropic trusts and foundations, educational organisations and all other encouragers of The Grand Theatre
13. To make available The Grand Theatre as a performing arts resource for all people of the Fylde Coast and our communities
14. To promote tourism and economic regeneration, in association with Blackpool agencies
15. To operate The Grand Theatre on commercial principles as a well-managed business, optimising the net financial contributions from all income generating aspects of the theatre, remaining connected at all times to the realities of theatrical management

THE GRAND THEATRE TODAY

The Grand Theatre is an invaluable community organisation: we have a new programming ambition and plan continuous physical improvements to the heritage theatre through a range of organisational development objectives:

1. The Grand Theatre is operated by Blackpool Grand (Arts & Entertainments) Limited, a second not-profit company
2. The Grand Theatre opens 50 weeks in each year, staging 425 performances. This is one of the highest utilisation rates in any British theatre. The programming is well-integrated from all performing art forms
3. The Grand Theatre sells approximately 200,000 tickets annually, although heavily dependent on the summer season show/s
4. The Grand Theatre has been designated National Theatre of Variety: a partnership with Equity begins in 2006
5. The National Theatre of Variety is a window for new inventive forces on the mainstream British stage: we will present popular entertainment from old and new oeuvres, from classical drama and Variety to new circus
6. The Studio Theatre has been renamed 'The Lawrence House Studio at The Grand Theatre': a new theatre skills programme starts in summer 2005, extending to outreach activities in 2006
7. The Grand Theatre Academy, our youth theatre, is at the heart of our Learning and Education programme
8. The National Theatre of Variety will include an Education programme for training young variety artistes: we will work in partnership with Blackpool & The Fylde College, Blackpool Circus School and Blackpool Pleasure Beach to organise validated courses for jugglers, acrobats, magicians, trapeze artists, clowns, ventriloquists, comedians, chanteuses, street performers, new circus and other speciality acts

9. The Grand Theatre will pursue new programming partnerships: affiliations with touring companies such as Northern Broadsides, Manchester Camerata, North West Dance and festival promoters
10. The Grand Theatre will consider conservation, preservation and transfer of its extensive archive to Lancashire Record Office, and offer interpretation for students via new resource packs and digitisation
11. Phase Two of the Glorious Grand refurbishment programme, to be implemented from mid-2006 will include reseating of the auditorium, new auditorium livery and improved physical access for patrons, at a cost of £500,000
12. Phase Three of the Glorious Grand refurbishment programme, will seek to include acquisition of shops in Church Street, parts of which will be reintegrated into the Grand Theatre buildings. This would provide a new corporate hospitality suite, extended Dress Circle kitchen and bar, and cloakroom. New rents would eventually contribute to income generation through retail premises which would be remodelled to blend with the entire footprint and external aesthetic of the Grand Theatre buildings
13. The critical success factors for implementing these strategies include an increase in business sponsorship for the activities, improved programming and marketing, new capital grants and donations, and a higher, better-articulated profile for the entire enterprise
14. To translate these creative and level-headed plans into fact, the Grand Theatre also needs an increase in public sector investment, for revenue and capital

THE PROGRAMME: TOWARDS THE *NATIONAL THEATRE OF VARIETY*

Our key objective in programming The Grand Theatre is to continue to strike a balance between approachable programming that maintains box office income, and a heightened engagement with innovating and thought-provoking productions across a range of performed art forms, to serve the public for whom The Grand Theatre is operated.

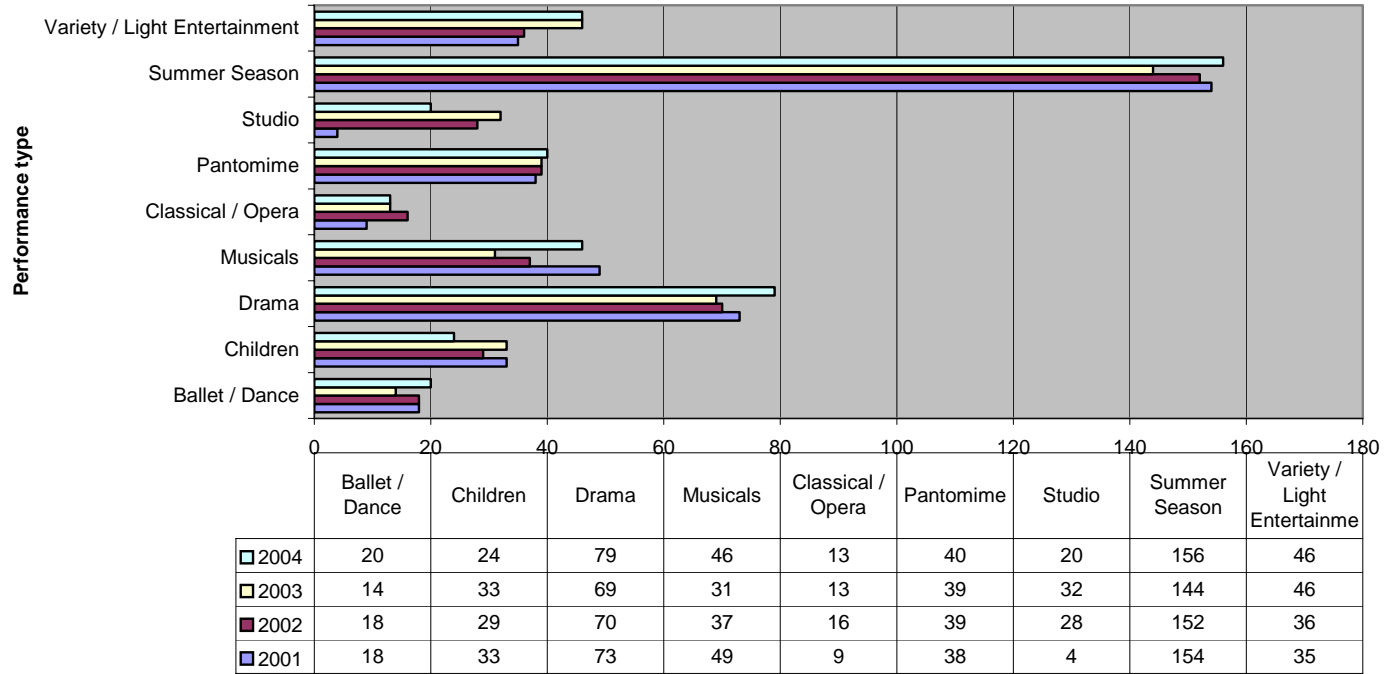
Equity has designated the Grand as 'National Theatre of Variety' from 2006: this is the most exciting programme development in the Trust's 25-year stewardship of The Grand Theatre, and anticipates the centenary of the Variety Artistes' Federation in 2006.

We will work with the actors union to develop a centre of excellence for popular theatrical entertainment, with allied training, education and interpretation projects from the great traditions of music hall and variety, and latter-day forms of 'new variety' and 'new circus'. The National Theatre of Variety is a project initiated by an Equity taskforce in 1999. The Arts Council considers variety to be an art form worthy of public support, especially for transferring skills to new generations of artists working in street performance and contemporary circus. We will work with Equity to seek new public investments and corporate sponsorship for our programme.

Meanwhile, because Variety with a small 'v' connotes diversity, *all* Grand Theatre programming can now be differentiated and articulated through the designation of 'National Theatre of Variety'. We will endeavour to develop performing art forms through affiliations with important companies. At March 2005, The Grand Theatre's operating company has a designated programming reserve of £60,000, for the underwriting of adventurous productions. (The entrepreneurial fund was £100,000 in 2003, but has not been replenished).

These are the number of performances staged over the past four years, according to the diverse art forms:

**The Grand Theatre, Blackpool
Performances by Artform category, 2001-2004**



Number of Performances

GRAND THEATRE LEARNING AND EDUCATION

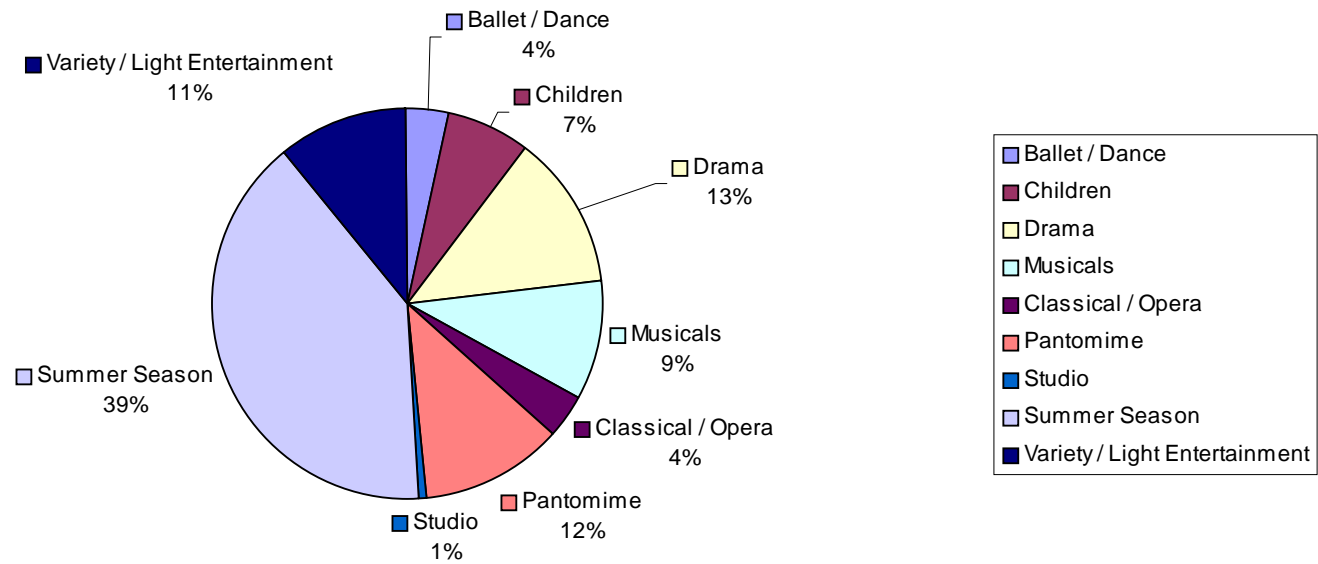
The Grand Theatre Learning and Education policy invests in the community to develop partnerships in order to build a dedicated and informed audience for the future. For instance, we aim to enable all children in Blackpool and neighbouring localities to come through the doors of the Grand Theatre by the time they are sixteen. We will provide them with a range of projects and events to enhance the experience of theatre attendance and to offer insights into the working life of this theatre. The Grand Theatre is dedicated to working in all communities and across all age groups and socio-economic backgrounds, offering activities for individuals, families, schools, further and higher education students, senior citizens and other groups. We see education as a life-long process. Projects will be planned to correspond with as much of the main-stage programme as possible, involving theatregoers who come to see a show: we will schedule workshops led by visiting professional companies. The image and profile of the Grand Theatre Learning and Education activities will be fully integrated into our strategic direction. The aim is to mirror and contextualise the quality and diversity of the programme on-stage, to contribute to an understanding of the *mise-en-scène*. A cornerstone of the policy is our new investment from the trustees of the Lawrence House School: in 2005, the Studio has been renamed The Lawrence House Studio at the Grand Theatre. A theatre skills access programme will be financed over a ten-year period with a grant totalling £150,000, received in one lump sum from the trustees of Lawrence House School. The programme will include half-term schools' outreach schemes for disadvantaged students.

The Education activities may be increased with further funding, especially small projects of short duration that may appeal to sponsors. However, whereas the Grand had engaged a fulltime Education Manager to 2003, we regret that this post (and much of the concomitant programme) ceased upon the termination of external funding. There had been no exit strategy. The Grand therefore welcomes the Lawrence House scheme. Occasional freelance theatre practitioners, from companies such as Royal Exchange Theatre Company, DV8, National Youth Theatre, Red Ladder Theatre Company and Oldham Coliseum, will augment the Academy Director. These practitioners will offer a range of workshops, covering audition techniques, improvisation with music, theatre design, puppet theatre making, stage management and lighting design, and acting technique for classical drama. The tasks will include fostering relationships with corresponding education departments in visiting subsidised companies and – further - collaborating with other theatres, arts and education agencies and theatre-makers in the North West to ensure a balanced and comprehensive range of education and outreach work. Where possible, the programme will be integrated with the main stage programme, especially to encourage Academy members' attendance. The Grand Theatre's own education work will also include the development of a Heritage Trail and complementary archive. We will enquire about the feasibility of Lancashire Record Office

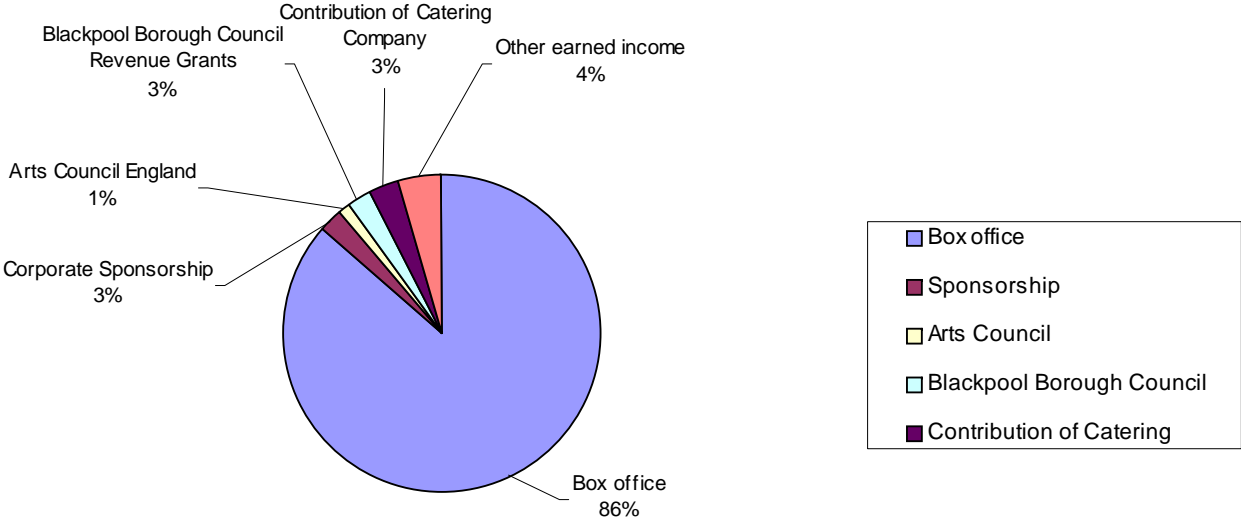
or Blackpool Council housing our collections, for conservation, digitisation and cataloguing. The Grand Theatre Honorary Archivists and Manager will develop the Grand archive as an academic and historical resource. We will seek to co-curate or contribute material for displays of Variety and Blackpool show business at the Grundy Art Gallery, Blackpool. In time, the archives – that may be combined with the Blackpool Tower Company and Blackpool Pleasure Beach records – will be a primary source for the organising of a lecture series and developing links with history societies, lifelong learning, further and higher education. In the next four years, resources will also focus on the development of imaginative projects with sections of the annual programme not covered by education programmes in the subsidised companies. These weeks predominantly comprise the summer variety production, annual pantomime, musicals and one-off events; thus, we will target commercial producers and our intended programming of regular children's theatre, to organise teachers' seminars and produce resource packs. Work with community groups offers tremendous potential for growth and development. This will be achieved by identifying areas of need and potential and by extensive consultation with community leaders, including those involved with groups of people with disabilities.

We will also seek sponsorship to support a series of creative fellowships, whereby theatre makers – especially Variety artistes - and critics might reside at the Grand for short periods, or be formally associated with 'Grand Theatre Learning and Education' in other ways.

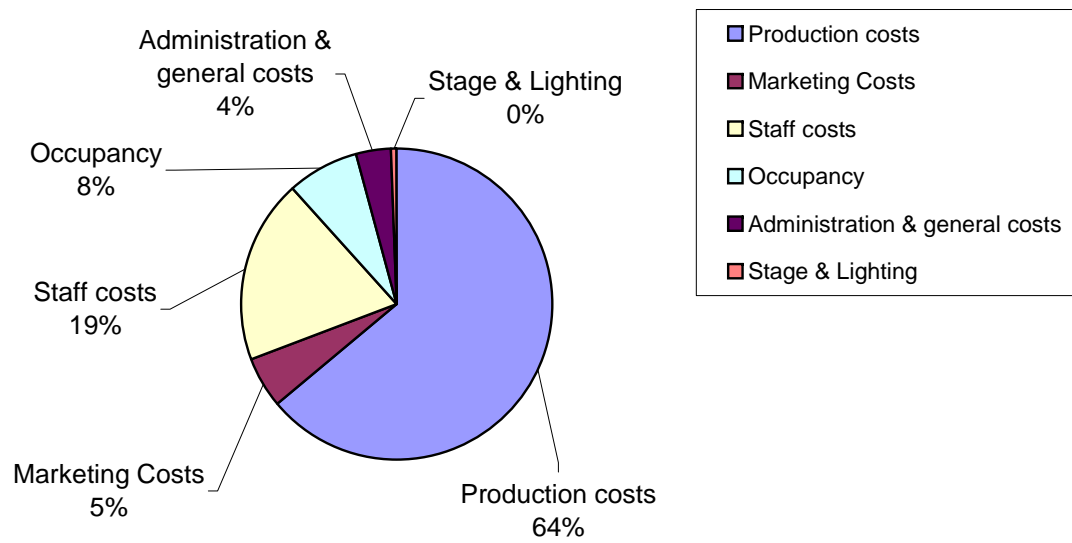
The Grand Theatre, Blackpool
Seats sold by artform category 2001 - 2004



The Grand Theatre, Blackpool
The proportionality of income: 2001-2004



Grand Theatre Expenditure Proportions, for the years 2001-2004



STRENGTHS OF THE GRAND THEATRE	WEAKNESSES OF THE GRAND THEATRE
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Grand Theatre as a 'masterpiece' Grade II* listed building • Status with promoters and good relationships (intimacy as No 2 theatre <i>and</i> No 1 theatre – advantage of ineffable categorisation) • Grand Theatre is in top 8 per cent of all listed buildings in England • Grand Theatre is one of only nine large theatres listed Grade II* or above, north of London: thus more eligible for heritage grants and protection • Exceptional design quality of Grand Theatre; stage-audience relationship excellent for most performed art forms • Grand Theatre is optimum size for large drama touring in North West England (c.f. inadequacy of 4 x 1,900+-seat lyric theatres in Manchester-Salford-Liverpool axis) • Good studio theatre, with Grand Theatre Academy • Small ring-fenced entrepreneurial programme budget for occasional 'new/adventurous' work • Historically shrewd understanding of financial realities when treating with producers and promoters • Commercial Manager (and senior management team) control expenditure well, and keep to budget; succinct financial reporting to board • Good cash-flow position • Longer-term buttressed by Grand Theatre's Property Renovation Reserve/Theatre Expansion Fund/A& E Asset Fund • Good reputation as comfortable, friendly, welcoming and clean theatre • Prudent governance: separation of freehold from operating company • Articles of Association amended in 2004; new annual schedule for board meetings and improved management reporting 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cramped front of house areas • High maintenance costs of heritage theatre • Small stage for large productions • Small capacity of sunken orchestra pit • Stability and management team competence notwithstanding, reactive, bland artistic programming based on minimising risk • Perception of low artistic ambition • Absence of effective long-term programming strategy means opportunities for enhanced performance are undeveloped; audiences 'attracted' rather than 'led' • No dedicated full-time education staff, other than Youth Theatre Director; critical development constraint • New programming strands might be dependent on increases in Blackpool Council operating subsidy • Very low local authority revenue funding base relative to other touring houses • With low turnover, staff have insufficient injections of new ideas and energy prompted by incomers • Recent operating deficits for A & E, caused by under-achieving box office income • Absence of evening life in town centre; except in summer, when centred upon heavy drinking • Located on coastal periphery of Lancashire; Grand Theatre might tend to insularity • Grand Theatre seems dead in the day times; only occasional post-performance bars; inappropriate for a lively theatre today • Unitary local authority inhibits Lancashire County Council investment • Lack of operating investment from adjacent Fylde and Wyre

STRENGTHS OF THE GRAND THEATRE	WEAKNESSES OF THE GRAND THEATRE
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Effective Board officer meetings with Manager • Knowledgeable, experienced and committed boards of directors • Accentuated 'community ownership' • Time contributed by board and officers • The voluntary staffs • The Friends of the Grand • Long term, sustained commitment of Blackpool Council • Grand Theatre as component of Blackpool Council arts strategy • Town centre location, adequate public transport links • Good Blackpool Council car park opposite theatre entrance • Adjacency to town centre shopping and restaurants • Subsidy per seat sold is very low • Experienced staff in all departments; high motivation • Good theatregoer welcome, at box office and front of house • Corporate sponsorship/member programme, with specialist staff member • Strong organisational 'entity' • Grand Youth Theatre (Academy) • Stable attendance over time (200,000 per annum) • Good awareness of market conditions • High level of local media interest 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> local authorities • Perceptions of unsafe, menacing town centre at night • Threatening street environment of unsafe town centre at night • Loss of core revenue funding (£50K per annum) from Arts Council England; uncertainty of future project grants substitution

OPPORTUNITIES	THREATS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Framing renewed artistic vision for Lancashire's leading theatre • Articulating new policy Equity/Variety Artistes Federation designation National Theatre of Variety • Large number of programming strands available in main house and Lawrence House Studio at the Grand Theatre • Developing the Lawrence House Programme for Theatre Skills • Promoting the synergy between the 'Matcham masterpiece building' and its 'programmes' • To quickly improve staff morale, after 'protracted' restructure year • Refurbishments will increase popular appeal through restoration, comfort, circulation and good design • To upgrade orchestra pit, longer term • Acquisition of shops on Church Street, for income generation (applied to maintenance and other capital improvements, in Phase Three) • Developing the education and learning programme, through strategic alliances with education sector, e.g., Blackpool & The Fylde College, University of Central Lancashire, Lancaster University, Blackpool Circus School • Improving reputation of the Grand Theatre by networking with promoters and theatre fraternity beyond Blackpool • Affinities with other standalone touring houses • Improving marketing processes and 'branding' of the Grand Theatre, through website and brochures • For marketing the twenty-fifth anniversary of Trust ownership and operation, in October 2005 • Making the programmes attractive to a large population outwith the Fylde Coast 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A number of competitors who are responding to the market leading to possible over-supply and displacement, including Opera House at Blackpool, Guild Hall and Charter Theatre at Preston (city status), refurbished King George's Hall, Blackburn and, in future, new casino at Blackpool, with or without lyric theatre • Fylde Borough Council's possible upgrading and new programming at higher subsidised Lowther Pavilion, already costing £113K per annum • A number of well designed or refurbished theatres in the secondary market, e.g., Theatre by the Lake, Keswick; competing for patrons and (especially) attractions • Arts Council massively increased funding to Lowry Centre: massive squeeze on negotiating ability for attracting best companies to The Grand Theatre • Renaissance of Liverpool (City of Culture 2008) and Greater Manchester (new International Festival on horizon); sense that Lancashire is now marginal to Arts Council strategy • Five years' after opening Lowry Centre, Salford poised to overwhelm other mainstream touring in North West, after Arts Council favour 1000 per cent revenue grant hike to £1million+ • Reductions in supply and increases in demand on UK touring circuits for quality touring attractions: 14 new touring houses added to 74 in 1994 (700+ new performance weeks to fill, nationally) • Growth of theatre conglomerates and their control of attractions: 44 touring houses under Clear Channel or Ambassador Theatre Group syndication; new syndicates in formation/expansion • Pressure from producers to force high-risk guaranteed fees, as Grand Theatre competes for attractions on tour • Long running summer season show decline parallels drop in visitor numbers; loss of long-term producer's theatre hire income

OPPORTUNITIES	THREATS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Making the programmes attractive to residents in deprived Blackpool neighbourhoods • Recruiting new board members, and succession planning • Return of 'all day' activities, through opening Bar/s for lunch hour meals, subject to profitability • High levels of public interest and nostalgia for the Grand Theatre; refurbishments fire public imagination • External capital funding from Heritage Lottery Fund, and other sources • Historical significance of the Grand Theatre; cultural memory must fuel private sector fundraising • Archives strategy • Heritage Trail • Fit with Blackpool Council Heritage Strategy • Building staff capacity to manage these opportunities • For recruiting new board members, as part of succession planning and skills requirements, from public sector, business, fundraising &c • Grand Theatre as part of revitalisation of the town centre • New partnerships with public sector, for capital <i>and</i> operations: Lancashire and Blackpool Tourist Board, North West Regional Development Agency, Blackpool Urban Regeneration Company, especially share of £1.5billion investment in town centre and tourist attractions • Economic and social impact study of the Grand Theatre, as advocacy tool • To attract diverse population of Blackpool to the Grand Theatre, e.g., LGBT, with appropriate attractions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Amateur theatre-making base in decline • Failure to redefine and promote objectives for Grand Theatre operations would frustrate refurbishment plans • Social and economic deprivation in the catchment area • Lower than average levels of disposable income at Blackpool • Lower than average propensity to eat out • Substitute leisure activities • Increasing theatregoer/customer expectations • Failure to maintain and improve a clear mutual understanding of expectations of the relationship with potential external funders, especially Arts Council England, North West would frustrate programming development plans beyond triennial grant agreement: recently overtures threatening end of Arts Council grant, with no exit strategy at the Grand • External funding bodies becoming more and more demanding: red tape increasing at Blackpool Council and elsewhere • New charities legislation • Challenge of raising balance for Sam Lee Appeal is critical to successful refurbishment plans • Disability Discrimination Act: large number of costly physical improvements may be required/desirable