

Saxton Bampfylde

POLKA

Where Theatre Begins



Appointment brief
Appointment of Chair

July 2022

Reference: EZZDA

An introduction

Polka is a pioneering national theatre for children based in Wimbledon, South-West London. The first UK venue to be created exclusively for young audiences, the theatre celebrated its 40th anniversary in 2019 and remains one of just a handful of dedicated children's venues in the UK. Presenting a year-round programme of new work made at the theatre, visiting shows, and Creative Learning activities for 0-12 year olds, Polka continues to pioneer developments in children's theatre, nurture artistic talent, and maintain an international reputation while serving local communities.

Polka is a charity and Arts Council England National Portfolio Organisation. Its mission is to empower children to navigate their world through inspirational theatre and creative experiences. Since opening its Wimbledon home in 1979, over 3.5 million children, parents, teachers and carers have been through its doors. Over 100,000 people visit the theatre each year and a further 18,000+ take part in creative learning and community activities. Polka involves children at every stage of the creative process and leads the way in Early Years theatre for under 6s, including as part of the EU funded Mapping programme.

Inclusivity is and always has been an integral part of the company's offer. The theatre reaches a wide geographic audience, and offers opportunities for all children and families regardless of age, ability, culture or background, to engage in theatre. In 2007, Polka pioneered relaxed performances for children on the autistic spectrum, a model which has been replicated across the cultural sector. Polka's free ticketing scheme enables children from deprived areas to experience live theatre, and there are a range of initiatives to provide opportunities for children with particular access needs or who live in challenging circumstances to participate in its activities.

This is an exciting time to be joining Polka. In 2021 Polka reopened after a major redevelopment. Polka has re-imagined what a dedicated children's theatre could and should be for young audiences and their families. The organisation's state-of-the-art building now serves as a vibrant hub for future generations, right at the heart of its community.

Vision and Values

Polka's mission is to 'empower children to navigate their world through inspirational theatre and creative experiences.' We are looking for people who are conscientious, proactive, and reliable in their approach to work with a willingness to learn and ability to adapt to changes and share Polka's vision:

*Improving children's lives, bringing communities together,
creating ground-breaking theatre.*

Polka's values are:

Child-centred: placing children at the heart of everything Polka does

Community: engaging our diverse communities of children, families, educationalists and artists

Excellent: pioneering, adventurous, offering the highest quality

Memorable: creating magical, meaningful experiences

Inclusive: welcoming, accessible, nurturing, supportive, representative

For more information about Polka Theatre and our work, please visit

www.polkatheatre.com

Polka is funded by Arts Council England, London.

Registered charity number 256979



The role

PURPOSE OF THE ROLE

The Chair's role is to lead the Board of Trustees, ensuring that it fulfils its responsibilities in overseeing the development and delivery of a strategic plan and in safeguarding Polka's future. The Chair seeks to optimise the relationship between the Board of Trustees, the charity's staff and those people the charity seeks to serve – that is, children. The Chair also acts as supervisor of the two Chief Executives and as an ambassador for Polka across local and national networks.

KEY RESPONSIBILITIES

- To ensure that the Board of Trustees fulfils its duties and responsibilities for the proper governance of the charity.
- To ensure that the charity has a clear vision, mission and strategic direction and that the charity, the Trustees and the two Chief Executives are focused on achieving these.
- To act as the charity's most senior representative and ambassador.
- To be the backstop when the unexpected happens or things go wrong.

Given the breadth of role, it is envisaged a Deputy Chair will be appointed from among the Trustees to provide support and cover for the Chair when required.

DUTIES AND TASKS

The role of the Chair in any charity is a broad one and Polka is no exception. The description below highlights some of the key duties of the role. As with all governance roles, the term of office is three years and tenure is usually up to six years, with an option to extend this on an annual basis for up to a further three years.

Board

Lead the Board in ensuring that Polka's vision and goals are achieved:

- Lead the Board in meeting the aims, vision and goals of Polka, ensuring that appropriate strategies, plans, funding and governance arrangements are in place. This includes promoting and progressing Polka's environmental, social and governance activities, diversity, inclusion, equality and access.
- Ensure that the Trustees govern the charity in the long-term interests of Polka.
- Ensure the safeguarding of children and adults using Polka's facilities.
- Ensure the charity's financial dealings are systematically accounted for, audited and publicly available.
- Ensure that an environment is sustained within Polka that brings out the best from us all, and supports the charity in focusing on its objectives as a world-class children's theatre.

Ensure strong governance, for example:

- Chair meetings of the Board of Trustees and liaise with the Chairs of Board working groups.
- Ensure effective communication and implementation of Board decisions.
- Take a leading role in determining the composition, structure and development of the Board, including inducting and developing Trustees with the right mix of experience and expertise.
- Engage the Board in assessing and improving its own performance.

Develop a Close Working Relationship with the Executive:

- Create a meaningful and productive working relationship with the Chief Executives to ensure a harmonious working relationship and be able to hold them to account for the delivery of Polka's strategic aims and objectives.
- Together with the Board, guide, monitor and support both the Chief Executives and Senior Management Team, particularly to manage the financial performance of Polka within the relevant financial constraints.

- Ensure both Chief Executives are fully equipped and supported to undertake their roles, including seeing that appropriate performance review and succession planning arrangements are in place and operated in the proper manner.
- Ensure that the management of Polka and its procedures (including audit procedures) is effective and appropriate.
- Understand the non-executive nature of the role, supporting and mentoring but not interfering with the work of the Chief Executives and Senior Management Team.

Act as a Strong Advocate:

- Act as principal ambassador and advocate for Polka in its search for funding within the public and private sectors.
- Build and develop relationships with Chairs and leaders of other theatres
- Develop an understanding of the publicly funded context of Polka and support constructive relationship with government via Arts Council England, and with the London Borough of Merton
- Work with the Chief Executives and Senior Management Team to ensure that Polka is suitably accountable to its donors and sponsors, subject to maintaining the charity's continued focus on its artistic objectives.



Person specification

Personal qualities

The Chair should be altruistic, confident, focused, open and an active and reflective listener. They should also be organised, flexible, respectful, and empowering, as well as demonstrating:

- The highest standards of integrity and probity, both personally and in relation to Polka, ensuring that Polka aspires to the highest standards in all its dealings.
- The ability to achieve consensus through balanced discussion at Board level.
- A passion for the performing arts, community engagement and an empathy for Polka's mission.
- Strong leadership and interpersonal skills, dealing effectively with internal and external relationships.
- Clarity not just about their role, but the level and quality of their commitment to Polka; the Chair needs to be able to see the 'big picture', collaborate well, handle contentious issues and dissension positively and be assertive and constructive in clarifying any issues.

Skills and experience

The successful candidate will ideally bring all or most of the following:

- An understanding of governance and board leadership and development, ideally gained through prior experience in a chairing or non-executive capacity whether in the commercial or charity sector.
- A track record of leadership and the management skills required to support an excellent executive team.
- The willingness to play a role in fundraising activities (please note that there is no requirement for the Chair to be a significant donor themselves).

- The willingness to be an outstanding ambassador and advocate for the Theatre and its mission and to play a role in fundraising activities.
- Capacity for strategic thinking to support the ambitions and long-term development of Polka.
- A demonstrable commitment to diversity and inclusivity.



Terms of appointment

This is an unpaid role, though reasonable expenses may be claimed.

There are four Board meetings per year. The Chair is expected to serve on at least one committee which would involve a further 4 meetings a year. There is regular engagement with senior management. It is estimated that time commitment will be on average 1-2 days a month.

Polka Theatre is committed to creating a workforce which is representative of our society and to bringing together those with a variety of skills and experiences to help shape what we do and how we work. We are particularly keen to hear from people with ethnically diverse backgrounds and those who identify as disabled. Applicants with disabilities who opt in are guaranteed interviews where they meet the essential requirements of the role as set out in the role description.

Equal Opportunities

Polka's commitment as an equal opportunities employer means it is keen to encourage applications from people of colour, people across the gender spectrum and people who self-identify as disabled, who are under-represented in this sector.

Polka's newly redeveloped venue is accessible for wheelchair-users and prams/buggies; most spaces can be accessed step-free.

As a children's theatre Polka is generally open during the daytimes and weekends, rather than evenings, making it well suited to people who have families and/or other caring responsibilities.

As an important part of the local community in Wimbledon and the London borough of Merton, Polka is also well suited to people who live nearby and are looking for roles locally, rather than travel into or through central London.





How to apply

Saxton Bampfylde Ltd is acting as an employment agency advisor to Polka Theatre on this appointment.

Candidates should apply for this role through our website at www.saxbam.com/appointments using code **EZZDA**.

Click on the 'apply' button and follow the instructions to upload a CV and cover letter, and complete the online equal opportunities monitoring* form.

Applications will be considered on a rolling basis, with applications closing once we have found a suitable candidate.

For an informal conversation please reach out to Mairi Brewis, Trustee of Polka Theatre who is running the recruitment process (mairiwhite@outlook.com)

* The equal opportunities monitoring online form will not be shared with anyone involved in assessing your application. Please complete as part of the application process.

GDPR personal data notice

According to GDPR guidelines, we are only able to process your Sensitive Personal Data (racial or ethnic origin, political opinions, religious or philosophical beliefs, trade union membership, genetic data, biometric data, health, sex life, or sexual orientation) with your express consent. You will be asked to complete a consent form when you apply and please do not include any Sensitive Personal Data within your CV (although this can be included in your covering letter if you wish to do so), remembering also not to include contact details for referees without their prior agreement.

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