Jerwood Royal Court Commissioning Scheme

With support from the Writers Guild of Great Britain

Guidance for applicants, 2026-27

Contents

Overview	p2
Aims of the Scheme	p3
How it Works	p4
How to Apply	p6
Eligibility	p7
Criteria & Assessment	p9
Successful Applications & Grant Conditions	p10
Terms & Conditions	p12
More information & FAQs	p14

Overview

The Jerwood Royal Court Commissioning Scheme is a new open-application national fund to encourage ambitious play commissioning – increasing investment and support for new writing on stages across the UK.

Every year, the Royal Court Theatre will award **six grants of £4,000-£6,000** to underwrite first instalment payments (the 'Signature fee') for six new play commissions, led by theatres and producing companies across the country.

The Scheme expands our approach to commissioning, looking beyond the Court's own stages to share resources for writers everywhere. It's never been harder for programmers and producers to push for the riskier choice, avoiding revivals and adaptations for the thrill of the new. We want to help turn the tide for a generation of artists and audiences.

We know that the first commission payment can be the hardest to fund from stretched artistic budgets – typically non-recoupable, made before there's a script to consider for production. Through this scheme, we're underwriting that risk for theatres and producers everywhere.

Launched for the Royal Court's 70th anniversary in 2026 and now running annually, the Jerwood Royal Court Commissioning Scheme welcomes joint applications from a playwright and a producing venue or company, whether subsidised, independent or commercial. All the producer has to do is commit to the future delivery payment, and share a clear ambition towards full production – and we'll help make it happen.

Applications for the 2026-27 funding round will open via the **online portal on our website, www.royalcourttheatre.com, with a deadline of Monday 11th January 2027 at midday.**

Who we are

A Royal Court programme, managed and delivered by the English Stage Company Ltd, trading as the Royal Court Theatre, supported by funding from Jerwood Foundation.

Additional thanks to the Writers Guild of Great Britain (WGGB), who are working with us to ensure fair terms on commissioning agreements. WGGB's own one-off 'New Play Commissioning Scheme', in partnership with UK Theatre and ITC, led to eighteen commissions and provided the inspiration for this new annual programme, supporting writers across the country.

Aims of the Scheme

The Royal Court is the UK institution most responsible for championing new theatre writing. We support and platform playwrights bringing new approaches, ideas and forms to the stage – and expressing themselves with freedom and confidence. At the Royal Court, we articulate this through our ***artistic values*:**

1. **Freedom.** Platforming controversial views, mess and uncertainty, ahead of public and peer consensus.
2. **Innovation.** Encouraging experimentation and risk, and protecting artists' right to fail.
3. **Dissonance.** Finding strength in contradiction and contrast, from our establishment name to sharing our stages with incendiary work and conflicting voices.
4. **Ambition.** Rigorously and abundantly supporting big imaginations and bold artistic visions, acting as the antidote to a wider culture of creative austerity.

But increasingly, we think if we only focus on plays for our own stages in London, we're not doing our job.

Through this Scheme, we want to give ***a more diverse range of nation-wide writers*** the space to write ambitious, risky, adventurous and challenging new plays – and for those plays to have ***routes to production at more theatres across the country***.

We're aiming to support proposals that will genuinely ***thrill and surprise audiences***, that have the potential to push forwards conversations in our society and in our artform, and that represent ***a cost or a risk that otherwise wouldn't be possible*** at commissioning stage.

We want plays not just to be commissioned, but produced. That's why this Scheme is for partnerships between writers and producers, and asks for an initial idea of ***how and when a full production could be resourced and achieved***, if the commission is a success.

We're looking to fund commissions that contain ***artistic and producing risk and ambition***. We know that risk and ambition can mean different things in ***different contexts and scales***, and we're open to anything – from pitches for major national stages to independent venues and smaller companies, and from community-based practice to commercial propositions.

We can't wait to hear from you, to read about your plans and plays, and how our aims and values resonate with the context you're working in.

How it Works

Grants & commissioning agreements

The Jerwood Royal Court Commissioning Scheme (JRCCS) will provide six grants of £4,000-£6,000 each, to support theatre companies and venues commissioning new plays.

Grants will be based on a **joint proposal from a company/venue (the Producing Partner) and writer (the Playwright) for an agreed new play (the Play) to be commissioned** with the goal of future production.

The JRCCS grant is intended to cover the first ('Signature') payment of a full new commission between the Producing Partner and Playwright. **If successful, the Producing Partner will then be liable for full payment of the relevant delivery fee to the Playwright, for which no additional funding will be available through this Scheme.**

Grants will be paid directly to the Producing Partner, with a brief letter of agreement between the Royal Court, Producing Partner and Playwright, which must be agreed by 31st March 2027. The Producing Partner will be responsible for entering into a direct commissioning agreement with the Playwright, and payments will only be released to the Producing Partner once this agreement is in place and approved by the Writers Guild of Great Britain (WGGB).

Successful supported commissions, and all rights and options therein, will belong entirely to the Producing Partner and Playwright to be managed independently. Funds are granted to support the wider commissioning of new work across the UK, and are not a commission from the Royal Court, nor with the expectation of production at the Royal Court Theatre or any other control of future rights or decisions.

Grant amounts & commission rates

Grant amounts are designed to cover the full costs of the first (Signature) payment for a full-length play at the relevant minimum rate agreed by the WGGB under UK Theatre, ITC or TNC agreements (or an acceptable equivalent), plus a small additional amount to allow for annual increases in rates and other expenses.

When applying, you must identify which union agreement is applicable, or the equivalent proposed rates if the applicant is not part of UK Theatre, ITC or TNC agreements. The Producing Partner receiving the award will then be bound by, and solely liable for, the applicable rates for the Playwright's delivery payment and (if undertaking production) acceptance/acquisition and attendance payments, and all wider terms and conditions.

JRCCS grant amounts will be made as follows:

- For ITC and UK Theatre MRSL1 Agreements or equivalent: £6,000.
- For TNC Agreements or equivalent: £5,500.
- For UK Theatre MRSL 2 Agreements or equivalent: £5,000.
- For UK Theatre MRSL 3 Agreements or equivalent: £4,000.

Please note we cannot offer a larger grant amount than those stated, whether for future commissioning payments or any other purpose. If you are commissioning a short play (under 60-70 minutes for the relevant agreement), we will discuss this with you and may reduce the grant amount in relation to the relevant rates.

Identifying the right amount and rates for your commission

If you are unsure which rates and agreements apply or are most suitable, please consult with the WGGB, UK Theatre and/or ITC. You can also review current WGGB minimum fees and agreements here: https://writersguild.org.uk/rates-and-rights/.

If you have your own 'house' commissioning agreement or intend another contractual arrangement, please select the rate that most closely aligns. We will ask you to provide more information, as well as for the WGGB to have final approval of any agreed commission before our grant is released. Approval will require, at minimum, terms no less favourable to the playwright than applicable union agreements and in line with industry standard practice, and payments no less than a UK Theatre MRSL 3 WGGB commission.

We also recognise that while these commissioning agreements outline the minimum agreed rates of pay, some organisations may choose to contract at higher discretionary rates. In these circumstances, we will only be able to provide grants as outlined up to a maximum of £6,000, and the Producing Partner will be responsible for making up any additional balance.

How to Apply

Applications must be made through the **online portal on our website only by Monday 11th January 2027 at midday**. We won't be able to accept applications in any other way or after this deadline. Please also ensure you meet the Eligibility guidelines, before planning an application.

It's worth taking some time to prepare the best application possible. That will include ensuring you have a confirmed partnership between a Playwright and Producing Partner, have discussed an artistic proposal and how you'd ideally produce it, if the application is successful and the commission goes well. If you don't have a clear enough plan for a strong application, you can always take more time and apply next year.

Once you have a clear plan, please read the full application guidance and what we're looking for (the Aims of the Scheme), to think about how to make the best case. For further questions, you can also read our FAQs, join an **open webinar** (see website for dates and sign-up details, and a recorded version of the webinar will also be made available subsequently).

Once you start an application on our portal, you won't be able to save and return. However, the form is simple to complete, and you can access all details in advance to download and prepare offline (including character length limits). You'll need to answer a few short questions, and include links or attachments including a CV/bio for the Playwright and Producing Partner, personal and company details, and the Producing Partner's most recent accounts.

Visit our website to download and view full application questions to prepare in advance.

Shortlist & interviews

Our assessors will identify a shortlist based on the written applications. Shortlisted applicants will be invited to interview with our panel in **February 2027**, to be attended by both the Playwright and a representative of the Producing Partner.

At the point of invitation, we will request a previous script or writing sample from shortlisted Playwrights, to support panel discussions and decision-making. We will also ask you to confirm that there have been no material changes to your plans since your application.

Access

Key information for applicants is available in written English, audio, large print and BSL. If you are shortlisted, we can also pay costs for BSL interpreters or other adjustments for interviews. Full details of the Scheme and our terms are available in written English only, and all applications must be made in writing via our online portal.

If you have queries or experience additional barriers to applying, you can contact us via email (CommissioningScheme@royalcourttheatre.com). However, we're not able to provide additional funding for access support, nor accept applications in another format. If more support is required, we would expect the Producing Partner to provide this. The Producing Partner will also have to provide this support on an ongoing basis, in order for your commission and project to be successful.

Eligibility

Applications

Applications must be made by a partnership between a playwright ('The Playwright') and a producing venue or company ('The Producing Partner'), aiming to enter into a Commission Agreement for a planned new work for stage ('The Play') with a shared intention towards future production.

Each Playwright and each Producing Partner can only be lead applicants in one application in each annual funding round. While either party may be involved in a creative or partnership role on another application, they cannot be primary applicants on more than one application.

There are no restrictions on applicants from previous years reapplying in future rounds.

The Producing Partner

The Producing Partner must be a UK-based producing organisation or venue, with a track record of producing new theatre and with sufficient reserves or budgets to guarantee the appropriate delivery fee for The Play under the applicable Commissioning Agreement.

The Producing Partner must be a UK-based registered company or charity in the UK theatre sector, whether subsidised, independent or commercial. The Producing Partner cannot be an individual freelance producer.

The Playwright

The Playwright must be UK-based and aged over 18 at the point of application, and should have some demonstrable track record as a writer, at any scale or context.

The Playwright cannot have previously received a full commission from the Producing Partner, though may have had plays produced or presented by the Producing Partner. (For instance, this could include venues who have hosted touring work by the Playwright, presented work by the Playwright in festival contexts, or companies who have licensed the Playwright's work for productions, but where none of these was based on an original commission between the Playwright and Producing Partner.)

The Play

The Play must be an entirely original work by the Playwright, not an adaptation nor based on any underlying source text/material (whether copyrighted or otherwise); and must be entirely free for commissioning without any other rights agreement or options in place. This may include an original musical, but if successful the award will only cover the fees for the book and lyrics, not the composer.

Proposals for Plays can be based on ideas already discussed, or projects already in initial development in some form. However, at the point of application and when any grant offer is made, The Play cannot already be commissioned or have a formal agreement in place for commissioning with the Producing Partner or any other party.

Co-writing and collaborations

For the purposes of the Scheme, The Playwright could include a co-writing or collaborative partnership of more than one writer/creative, but must be suitable for a standard play commission agreement. For the application form, one writer should be nominated as the 'lead' Playwright applicant, but there will be space to include information on writing collaborators.

The Royal Court and WGGB would advise that, where a co-writing or collaborative partnership applies, writers/creatives and producers should read WGGB's guide to devised and collaborative theatre ahead of application (https://writersguild.org.uk/wggb-launches-new-guide-on-devised-and-collaborative-theatre/). It is also recommended that co-writers or collaborative partners should sign a collaboration agreement ahead of application. WGGB can provide support and advice on collaboration agreements where relevant.

Criteria & Assessment

Each application will be assessed against four criteria. These are:

1. **Artistic Quality** – evidenced through the track record of The Playwright and the artistic information provided under Question 1 'What is your proposal for The Play?'.
2. **Risk & Ambition** – evidenced through information covered in Question 1 'What is your proposal for The Play?' and Question 2 'Why are you applying?'
3. **Likelihood of production** – evidenced through the track record of the Producing Partner and information on planning and timescale in Question 3 'What is your expected route to production?'
4. **Aims of the Scheme** – the overall strength of proposal in relation to the stated Aims of the Scheme, evidenced by answers to all questions.

The assessment against all criteria may also include information from all sections of the application, including the space for additional information.

Following the written application and assessment, a shortlist of applicants will be invited to interview, allowing for further discussion to address these areas in more detail.

Balancing criteria

In addition to the above, the assessors and panellists may account for balancing the range of selected applications based on:

1. **Diversity of the selected Playwrights**, including our stated aim for at least half of all awards to be made to Black and/or Global Majority, Working Class, and/or D/deaf or disabled Playwrights.
2. **Gender parity of the selected Playwrights**, including awareness that female writers are currently under-represented across commissioned and produced plays in the UK.
3. **Geographical spread of Producing Partners**, including an ambition that over half of all awards are made to organisations outside London, including across multiple regions.

Decision-making and feedback

All applicants will hear from us by the end of January 2027, including either an invitation to interview for shortlisted candidates or letting you know we're unable to take your application further. For shortlisted candidates, we will aim to let you know the final outcome within one week of the interview stage, and will confirm this timeline alongside your invitation.

Interviews will take place in 2027.

All decisions made by our assessors and/or panellists will be final and we will not be able to provide feedback for any applicants not invited to interview. For shortlisted applicants to whom we are unable to offer a grant, we will provide feedback following interviews, but will not be able to enter further detailed correspondence.

Successful Applications & Grant Conditions

The intention of the Jerwood Royal Court Commissioning Scheme is to support producers and playwrights initiate new commissions of plays for stages across the UK. It is not designed to replace the Court's own play commissioning, nor to control future productions of supported Plays, nor with an expectation of those Plays being staged at the Royal Court.

Successful applicants will be notified within one week after interview, and will then finalise a signed letter of agreement between the Royal Court, the Producing Partner and Playwright, by 31st March 2027. Grants will be paid upon completion of an appropriate commissioning agreement directly between the successful Producing Partners and Playwrights. All commissions will remain independent agreements between these parties, and the Royal Court will have no position in such agreements, nor take up any options or other rights in the work.

Requirements for successful grant recipients include:

- approval of commissioning agreements by the WGGB;
- future crediting of support from the Scheme;
- input from recipients into future evaluation; and
- regular updates and invitations around key developments, including opportunities to read (and watch) the commissioned work.

Full terms will be set out in the grant offer letter for successful candidates.

Crediting

Crediting should be provided in reasonable prominence proportionate to other funders in the form of *'This commission was supported by the Jerwood Royal Court Commissioning Scheme'* (or agreed equivalent phrasing) in website copy, programmes, invitations, free sheets and other appropriate publicity, including wherever any other funder is credited.

Crediting should apply to any promotion of the commission; relevant sharings, industry readings, works-in-progress or similar; and any public premiere production or performances.

Wherever possible, including on websites, flyers, free sheets and programmes, Royal Court and Jerwood logos shall be included alongside any other funders/supporters (available on request).

If the Producing Partner does not produce the Play, but the Play is subsequently acquired for premiere production by another party, the Playwright should make best endeavours to ensure credit as part of any premiere production.

Invitations & tickets

For any industry readings, sharings or 'work-in-progress' performances during the development of the Play, the Royal Court must be invited with reasonable advance notice, with up to at least 4 complimentary tickets available for representatives of the Scheme.

In the event of a premiere production of the Play, the Producing Partner will ensure that the Royal Court receives an invitation to attend both previews and press night for said production, with an offer of at least 4 complimentary tickets during previews and 4 complimentary tickets for press night, to be used by representatives of the Scheme.

Updates & evaluation

Successful applicants will be expected to provide regular updates to the Royal Court on progress with the commission and any future premiere production of the Play. This will include confirmation of the delivery stage of the commission, a mutually agreed opportunity to read the commissioned script during its development; and reasonable advance notice of and any decision to proceed with production, including details of production plans, partners, venue(s), promotion and timelines, before these are made public.

Successful applicants may also be asked to take part in follow-up research to support the evaluation and future development of the Scheme.

Terms & Conditions

1. Eligibility & applications

To be eligible for the Jerwood Royal Court Commissioning Scheme, both the Playwright and the Producing Partner applying must meet the full Eligibility requirements. Further proof of all Eligibility requirements may be required at the point of offering a grant. The Royal Court's decision on eligibility is final, and no correspondence will be entered into. All eligible applications will be considered by the Royal Court's team of assessors and selection panel.

Proposals must be to commission a new, original theatrical work aiming to be staged in the United Kingdom, including plays for children and young people. Proposals for musicals will be considered, but any award will only cover the fees for the book and lyrics, not the composer.

Proposals for translations or adaptations of any existing works (in any medium) will not be considered, nor will any proposal relying in full or in part on any other source material or copyrighted work. The Royal Court accepts no liability for any breach of copyright made by any applicant, and all applicants agree to fully indemnify the Royal Court against any claims by any third party arising from any breach of these rules or a future production of The Play.

All entrants must follow the application process as stipulated on the Royal Court website, including the submission of a completed application via our online portal by the stated deadline. We will not be able to accept applications in any other format, or after the deadline. Incomplete applications will not be considered.

For any given application round each year, applications are limited to one per Playwright and one per Producing Partner (ie one Playwright cannot be lead applicant for two or more proposals for different plays with different Producing Partners; and one Producing Partner cannot be lead applicant for two or more proposals with different Playwrights).

Throughout the application process, all rights remain with the author. Application to the Scheme does not commit any party to the offer or acceptance of a licence or option to develop or produce the work, except where successful applications are to be supported through a commission funded as part of this Scheme.

The Royal Court anticipates a high number of submissions to the Scheme and recognises that similarities of subject matter often occur. The Royal Court will accept no liability and will not compensate any writer if material similar to their application, received coincidentally from another source, is subsequently commissioned or produced.

The Royal Court reserves the right to cancel or alter the Scheme at any stage, including to amend these terms and conditions or extend/alter the application window. If it does so, it will publish a notice on its website.

Applications will be assessed against the criteria outlined, and all final judgments and assessments on shortlisting and awards to be made by our assessors and panellists. All such decisions are final, and the Royal Court will not be able to enter into correspondence or provide further feedback around decision-making.

From the point of application, applicants must not attempt to contact members of the Royal Court team about their application.

The Royal Court reserves the right to disqualify any entry which breaches any of these terms and conditions, or which may bring the Royal Court into disrepute, including any entries which profit from criminal activity.

2. Grants & Commissions

For successful applicants, grants shall be paid directly to the Producing Partner, who should then enter into a direct commissioning agreement with the Playwright. These should be based on the relevant WGGB commissioning agreements/rates or another appropriate agreement, and subject to the written approval of the WGGB at the point that grant funds are released.

Acceptance of the grant, by entering into the commissioning agreement with the Playwright, will commit the Producing Partner to paying the delivery payment for the commission from their own funds and in line with the relevant WGGB rates as a minimum.

The Producing Partner is not obligated to produce the Play or to pay the acceptance/acquisition payments as part of their commissioning agreement with the Playwright; and selection for the Scheme does not guarantee the Play will be produced.

As part of the formal acceptance of the grant, the Producing Partner and Playwright will agree to ensure the Jerwood Royal Court Commissioning Scheme is credited as supporting the commission at all stages including any sharings, readings or public promotion, through to and including any premiere production produced by any other party.

Successful applicants must provide regular updates to the Royal Court on progress with the commission and future production. This will include confirmation of the delivery stage of the commission, a mutually agreed opportunity to read the commissioned script; and reasonable advance notice of and any decision to proceed with production/acquisition, including details around production plans, partners, venue(s) and timelines.

Successful applicants will also be required to provide invitations (with reasonable advance notice) and an offer of at least four complimentary tickets for representatives of the Scheme to attend any industry or public sharings or readings of the Play, as well as to attend previews and press night for any subsequent premiere production.

Successful applicants may also be requested to take part in follow-up research to support the development and evaluation of the Scheme, for up to either 12 months from the award, or 12 months from the premiere of the Play, whichever is longer.

3. General

All data submitted via the application process or as part of a grant offer will be handled in line with the Royal Court's Privacy Policy.

By applying for the Scheme, entrants warrant that they have legal capacity to enter the Scheme and agree to be bound by these Terms and Conditions.

These Terms and Conditions are governed by the laws of England and Wales.

More information & FAQs

Visit our website to download the full application form and view questions in advance, or browse our FAQs for more information.

If you still have questions after reading this guidance and our FAQs, please email us on CommissioningScheme@royalcourttheatre.com.